

Eternal Responsibilities

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Next year some of us will not be here, at the Feast of Tabernacles or the Last Great Day. I do not only mean at this specific Feast site, but I mean anywhere. The reason that I can say this with confidence is that from experience, we can look back and know that there are people who are not here with us, or who have died in the past year. Some may be too ill to travel to the Feast. But, the saddest of all will be those who make the decision, themselves, not to attend God's Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Each and every one of us has an eternal responsibility to make sure that we are in sync with God's will. We must not delay in diligently seeking God.

The plan of God for the salvation of mankind, and its orchestration, is a breathtaking thing to behold! We have to scratch our heads, and wonder why somebody would not come back.

- Before the Tribulation and Day of the Lord are over, humanity will have caused a great deal of destruction to the earth. Despite the enmity and rebellion against God by the human race, God's purpose will continue to be fulfilled.
- After the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, the first resurrection, and the Millennium; and following the time of the Great White Throne Judgment period beginning and ending with the second and third resurrections, God will completely destroy the existing physical universe.
- Following that, He will create a new heaven and a new earth, and move His capital city to the New Jerusalem, here on Earth. This will be the permanent headquarters of the Kingdom of God—and everything to follow will fit perfectly into God's great purpose, and there will be tremendous peace.

And so, the will of God will be done.

I John 2:17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

We realize that this is the case. We have read this scripture many times, and you might call that our eternal responsibility.

The Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day together form an eight-day festival that dates back to Moses and ancient Israel, as we see in Leviticus 23: 33-44. It was a time of rejoicing and festivity, brotherhood and good will, thanksgiving and reflection, very similar to the way that we are keeping it today. But, we have God's Holy Spirit, so that raises it to the spiritual plane

The Feast of Tabernacles is a model of society the way it will be in the future, and that future is as sure as the rising of tomorrow's sun. The Feast is meant to be an eight-day living picture of the attitudes and atmosphere that will prevail when Jesus Christ sets His hand to the physical and spiritual salvation of the rest of the human race.

The seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles celebrates that sure hope in advance. Without the vision and uplift this eight-day festival gives us, we could lose sight of our main purpose as a church—to grow and overcome, and proclaim the good news of Christ's coming and the sovereignty of God, and our responsibility to seek Him.

With this summary of God's plan in mind, I would like to ask you a question. Do you look at your responsibilities (as a member of God's church) in carrying out God's will, as temporary or eternal? Are they something that you can set aside whenever you want? Or, is it something that is consistent, something that we are always reminded of?

When Adam and Eve sinned, turning their backs on God and His way, their Creator consigned them, and their children, to Satan's deceptive sway. God decided to let man go his own way: sin, suffer, and die.

Then eventually, God would resurrect these deceived billions to a time of judgment, and He would reveal His truth to them. Once they had learned the lesson that sin does not pay, He would then grant them eternal life.

This resurrection to judgment is described in Revelation 20.

Revelation 20:11-12 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

In other words, all of this earth's deceived billions will be raised to mortal life, and will live for a certain period of time, during which they will be judged by God, who will use the Bible as the standard of judgment. Their time of judgment will probably be about one hundred years.

These people will then have their first opportunity for salvation—their first opportunity to understand God's truth, accept God's way of life and be saved spiritually. But, they will have a choice. God will not force anyone to accept His truth. We realize that under the government of God, most people will turn to God eventually. God will make it so, with the use of His power.

Any and all who do not freely choose God's way of life, but who choose the way of death, will be sentenced to death in the lake of fire, in the Greek *Gehenna*. Any and all who do not freely choose this, will be burned up completely.

God will mercifully blot out their lives, rather than allow them to live on in the way that causes suffering, sorrow, and every evil this world has known. Because to live for eternity in such suffering and misery, would be beyond belief in the way of cruelty.

This sheds light on why Jesus Christ stood up on the last day, that great day of the feast and spoke of the "living water" a salvation-thirsty humanity can, and will, receive during the Great White Throne Judgment.

John 7:37-39 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

We see here, that the symbolism of the flowing rivers of living water out of His heart is the Holy Spirit.

If mankind kept God's commanded holy days, they would understand His great master plan of salvation. The Bible clearly reveals three distinct judgment periods, during which God will offer salvation to every single human being who has ever, or will ever, live.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

This is what those people, being resurrected and given their first opportunity to understand God's way, will be facing. There will be riches they never imagined, and wisdom and understanding of God's way of life that even we, with God's Holy Spirit, are yet to have revealed to us.

What a wonderful understanding that God has given us, to know that our all-wise, loving God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9) and receive their opportunity for salvation.

The justice of God is clearly seen in His plan of salvation for all mankind. In that justice is a great deal of patience to give people the time to change and to turn around as He calls and reveals to them His truth. The first time of judgment involves God's church, since Jesus Christ established it in A.D. 31, and it will end at the time of Christ's return.

The second time of judgment is during the Millennium, the thousand years immediately after Christ's return, to set up His Kingdom. One clear theme, running throughout the Bible, is that during the Millennium, all then alive will know the truth of God.

This millennial period of judgment differs from the world now in that all people then alive will have an opportunity for salvation. This period is a time of abundance and happiness under the rule of Jesus Christ and the saints, as spirit beings. This is what we have just celebrated in our keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Prior to this, those who lived and died never having been called by God, from Adam until Jesus Christ's return and the first resurrection, will not yet have had an opportunity. Their opportunity

is spoken of in Revelation 20:11, which describes the one hundred years of the Great White Throne Judgment.

This is the time of the second resurrection, when the dead from all time, small and great, will be raised to another physical existence, except this time with a difference. This time, God's truth is opened to their understanding, and they live out a full life span with the opportunity to know God and the truth of salvation.

Revelation 20:11-12 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works. . .

Notice that, "the dead are judged according to their works," just as we are being judged according to our works right now.

Revelation 20:12-13. . . by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

In the Bible, God never repeats Himself unless it is something that is extremely important. Here is not only a message to us that we will be judged by the same standard, but those who are resurrected and live during the White Throne Judgment period will be judged by that standard, according to their works. Once again, during that period of time, they will not be earning salvation. We all have our responsibility to play in this.

Revelation 20:14-15 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Jesus Christ reveals here that the final judgment is based a great deal on works, deeds, actions, and how one lives his life, and how well one learns to be a responsible human being.

God's justice and righteousness is founded in His essential nature. But, just as with human beings, it is not something abstract, but is seen in His relationship to the world. It is His kingship establishing and maintaining right. It appears as vengeful justice—the reaction of His holy will, as firmly grounded in His eternal being, against evil wherever He finds it. He cannot be indifferent to good and evil. If a person is committing evil, if they are committing sin, then the judgment of God seems harsh and it is final. But if a person is living a righteous life and producing good works, then it is a wonderful blessing to receive the judgment of God.

But this is not the main aspect of God's justice. The Scriptures most often conceive God's

justice, or righteousness, as the action of His mercy. Just as with human beings, justice means the relief of the oppressed and needy, so God's justice is His kingly power engaged on behalf of human beings, and justice and mercy are constantly joined together.

God's justice is far more than the Son of Man rendering to everyone according to his deeds.

The idea of merit and reward is really superseded by a higher factor in the teaching of Jesus. He does speak of recompense, but it is the Father, and not the judge, that gives this.

Matthew 6:1, 4, 6, 18 Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. . . "That your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. . . But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. . . "So that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

We see there a direct contrast between the way that the world does their good deeds, and the way that we are told to do ours. I might remind you, at this point, that producing good fruit and good deeds are not to be done for show, God sees all, and He will know that that is happening.

A charitable deed done on behalf of another for the purpose of outward show has an inherent temporary reward. It was done to be seen, it was seen, therefore its reward has been received—the reward of being seen and praised by other humans. That is all there is. There is no more reward than that.

A person who serves others so he may be seen and praised has received the only reward he will get. There is no additional reward from the Father. Again, we are talking about the attitude behind what is done. Of course, it does not mean that everything we do that is good we cannot do in front of someone else.

Jesus is not talking about mere earthly justice, in Matthew 6, because the reward exceeds all merit.

Matthew 24:46-47 "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods."

So, we see there again, the concept of eternal responsibility, that it is ongoing.

God's justice is not merely gracious, but redemptive. It does not simply allocate rights, but it establishes righteousness in a very merciful way.

We know that we are not justified, or saved, by our works. But we definitely are going to be

rewarded in the next life, after receiving eternal life, according to our works in this life. Eternal life is a gift, it is not the reward. The reward is given by God according to the good fruit produced during our physical existence on earth.

Matthew 16:27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

That is the time, for those of us who are baptized members of Gods' church and are resurrected just before Christ returns, when we will receive our rewards. I am sure, that those rewards will continually be given from that point on. If God were to give us all of our rewards, all at one time, I think it would be so overwhelming we would just be stunned.

Now imagine, for a moment, that the rewards are being distributed. Will it make a real difference the amount of the hours spent in Bible study, prayer, fulfilling Jesus' commission, and producing good fruit and works on behalf of others? As we stand before the Father and Jesus Christ, we receive whatever reward we have qualified for. Will we, at that point, realize that our reward could have been greater? That we had wasted an immense amount of time during our lives, and not made the best of it and sought God for the entirety of our converted lives? What is it that captures so much attention now that will then seem so pitifully unimportant?

Of course, our driving motivation should not be to get as large a reward as possible for ourselves. Rather, the greater the reward we receive the greater the opportunity for us to serve and contribute to the increase of God's Family, government, and Kingdom throughout eternity.

This is the same attitude required of those who desire church leadership positions. It is the same attitude teachers must have, if they are going to be effective.

The basic principle regarding the judgment of responsibility is stated in Ezekiel 18:

Ezekiel 18:20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."

So when we stand before God and receive our reward, we will be standing there on our own merits. God will be giving us a gift, a huge, wonderful, unbelievably great gift of salvation.

Responsibility equals accountability for our own attitudes and actions!

Romans 14:12 "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."

Revelation 2:23 "I will give to each one of you according to his works."

During the Great White Throne Judgment, it will be the same type of judgment to those

individuals that live the hundred years. The major difference will be that we will be judging those people under the supervision and guidance and under the supremacy of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

We do suffer from the effects of the sins of our ancestors. Look at the poor health and degenerative diseases around us. Look at what our ancestors, and this present generation, have done to the earth. We can easily see the effects of sin. In that way, we actually suffer along with the individuals of the world, so that we can better understand what they have gone through, and better understand how to teach and help them to arrive at an attitude of wanting to seek God, serve Him and to obey Him.

This principle of responsibility is expressed as a command by Ezra:

Ezra 10:4 Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it.

Eternal responsibility is not limited by this temporary world in which we live. Our responsibility in fulfilling God's plan never ceases, it never slackens, and it never ends.

God has taught us to shoot for a much greater life than the one that we have now, as physical human beings, and He has shown us the way to get there!

I John 5:9-11 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

We realize that Jesus Christ is in us, His Holy Spirit is in us, and we have already begun our eternal responsibility.

The purpose of the testimony that God has given of Jesus Christ is to stir up faith in Christ. Receiving the testimony leads naturally to believing in, and following the One, of whom the testimony is about. To 'accept the testimony of God' and to 'believe in the Son of God,' are virtually synonymous expressions. We receive our personal confidence, faith, or trust, in God's testimony of His Son.

We are given a deeper assurance, by the inward testimony, through the Spirit, that we are right to trust in Christ. An outstanding example of this spiritual principle is that everyone who has will be given more.

Matthew 25:29 For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

Luke 19:26 'For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given;

and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

So, testimony is both the cause and the consequence of belief, and belief is a stepping-stone between God's first and further testimony. The unbeliever, on the other hand, who has not believed, forfeits the possibility of receiving any further testimony from God because he has rejected the first testimony, and in so doing, has accused God of being a liar. That is, the unbeliever has rejected Jesus Christ, and in rejecting Jesus Christ, he has said, "You are a liar, God, He is not our Savior."

Unbelief is not a hardship to be pitied; it is a sin to be deplored. Its sinfulness lies in the fact that it contradicts the word of the one true God, and in this way, attributes falsehood to Him. That is not to say, that we should not have mercy on those who just do not understand, but we should never condone sin and wickedness.

I John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

With eternal life, comes eternal responsibility. We were promised eternal life at our baptism, and receipt of the Holy Spirit if we obey God, seek Him, and live according to His will. But with such a wonderful potential gift for us also comes an immense and incredible amount of responsibility on our part. That is why we, as the firstfruits, will receive the greater gift.

John's statement, about the testimony, emphasizes that receiving God's testimony of Christ is a matter of faith. Therefore, our eternal responsibility must be based on the faith of Jesus Christ.

In verses 11 and 12, John summarizes the blessing granted to the believer, who receives and responds to the testimony of God. "This is the testimony," is the same expression as that in the middle of verse 9, which most translations, other than the King James and New King James, translate 'it is the testimony' of God.

This testimony looks back to the three things that testify: the spirit, the water, and the blood. Here, it seems to include the testimony that, according to verse 10, we receive in our hearts and minds.

This becomes clear when we consider how the testimony is described here, mainly that God has offered us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. So, if a person rejects the first testimony of God, of His Son, then there is no longer a sacrifice for them until they accept that first testimony that Jesus Christ is our Savior and that He is the Son of God.

God's testimony, concerning Jesus, is not only that He is the divine-human Christ, but that He is also the life-giver, the Savior of the world. Not only that He is the Son, but that in Him is life. In Christ, not only is there eternal life, not only longevity, but also a quality of life beyond anything

that we know of. We are just seeing an inkling here in our human lives, with God's Holy Spirit.

Eternal life is God's final testimony to His Son. It is the knowledge of, and fellowship with, God and His Son.

We turned to this scripture this morning but I would like to go there again because it is such an important scripture. It ties in perfectly with what was said earlier, of course, and what I am speaking about here, on eternal life and our eternal responsibility.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

As John Ritenbaugh said in his sermon earlier, we have to know the one true God, and we have to seek Him in order to know Him. The more that we seek Him, the more that we will know Him, and it is not just to be like Him, as far as following Him, but walking in His shoes with Him.

The apostle John previously wrote: 'anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart.' In I John 5:12, as we already read, he puts the same truth in these words: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

Eternal life is in God's Son, and can be found nowhere else. It is as impossible to have life without having Christ, as it is to have Christ without thereby having life also. This is because the Son is the life. That is, He is the way of life, the way to that eternal life, and it is only through Him that we may receive that.

Three important truths are taught about eternal life in I John 5:9-13:

1. It is not a prize that we have earned or could earn, but it is an undeserved gift.
2. It is found in Christ so that in order to give us life, God both gave and gives us His Son.
3. This gift of life in Christ is a present possession because eternal life is not so much length of time as it is quality and character of life. We have already been given a revelation of that quality and character of life through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. With God's Spirit dwelling in us, we have the very mind of God, and we are getting an inkling now of eternal life.

The Greek word that '*eternal*' is translated from is '*aionios*' [eoneos] in John 17:3. It is sometimes used in the futurist tense, but often it is concerned with the quality, rather than with the quantity or duration, of life. John sums this up, briefly, in one verse.

John 20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

There, it is talking about a quality and character of life, because we know that we will not have that longevity of life until we are raised as spirit beings.

I John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

The way to life is faith, and the way to faith is testimony. The sequence of thought is the same here. God has borne witness to His Son, in order that we may believe in Him and so have Him dwelling in us and having Him may have life.

We have eternal life in the way of quality and character, upon our baptism and receiving of God's Holy Spirit, and we also, at that time, receive our eternal responsibility. Once we are baptized, we cannot allow ourselves to fall back, although we do. We have to work hard, to keep pushing ahead, as hard as we can, because our responsibility starts at that point.

Some have a cruising attitude, and they tend to wait until they see things happening in the world that are indicating that the Great Tribulation or the Day of the Lord are on the horizon. The people who are waiting for that are missing out on their eternal responsibility already, and they are letting it slide by. Anyone who is waiting for those indicators to come, they are already here, and it is for us to see them and act upon them.

The gospel, recording the words and works of Jesus, was John's testimony to Him as the Christ, the Son of God. The purpose of this testimony was that you may believe, and the result of faith is that by believing, you may have life in His name.

John's letter was written so 'that you may know that you have eternal life'. The gospel was written so that we could read the testimony of God of His Son, believe in Him to whom the testimony pointed, and in this way, receive life through faith as the gift of God.

This letter was written so that we, having believed, may know that we have received and therefore continue to have eternal life abiding in us in the presence of Jesus Christ, Who abides in us. So, we have quality of life dwelling in us, in Jesus Christ.

The phrase, 'that you may know' means both in word and tense, not that we may gradually grow in assurance, but that we may hold, here and now, a present certainty of life that we have received in Christ.

Along with eternal life dwelling in us by Christ abiding in us, we have an eternal responsibility that is inherent with eternal life. That eternal responsibility is connected with the quality, and character, of the life of God the Father and Jesus Christ. If we accept eternal life, we must also accept the eternal responsibility that goes with it. The two cannot be separated.

John wrote to God's church at a time of unsettlement by false teachers, and insecurity of their spiritual state. Throughout his letter, John had been giving the church criteria (doctrinal, moral, and social) by which to test themselves and others. We have here a test book, by which we can tell how our progress is going, and to see if we truly are fulfilling our eternal responsibility.

His purpose was to establish their assurance. In a sense, John told the church, 'This letter is to

assure you that you are guaranteed of eternal life, and even now you have eternal life abiding in you in Christ.' This means, that if we are baptized members of God's church, that we have the responsibility of living God's way of life with no less than excellence and purity. Mediocrity just does not cut it, because God is the God of excellence, and we are to be like Him.

Putting together the purposes of John's gospel and letter, John's purpose is in four stages, mainly that we may hear, in hearing that we may believe, in believing that we may live, and in living that we may know. That is the process that God has designed for us to follow.

John's emphasis is important, because there are those who dismiss any claim to assurance of salvation as presumptuous. The certainty of such a promise of salvation, and the humility to believe that it is God who will accomplish it, go hand in hand with one another.

If God's revealed purpose is not only that we should hear, believe, and live, but also that we should know, presumptuousness lies in doubting His Word, not in trusting it.

What follows I John 5: 11-13, is, in a sense, John's postscript to his epistle. The end is a statement that the essence of the Christian life is eternal life, both in quality, in character, and longevity.

There is only one person to whom '*eternal*' can be applied in its fullest sense, and that is God. In the real sense of the term, it is God alone who possesses and inhabits eternity. Eternal life is, therefore, nothing other than the life of God Himself. What we are promised is that, here and now, we can receive a share in the very life of God.

In God there is peace and, therefore, eternal life means serenity. It means a life liberated from the fears that haunt us.

In God there is power and, therefore, eternal life means the defeat of frustration. It means a life filled with the power of God and, therefore, victory over all circumstances.

In God there is holiness and, therefore, eternal life means the defeat of sin. It means a life clad with the transcendent purity of God, and armed against the soiling infections of the world.

In God there is love and, therefore, eternal life means the end of bitterness and hatred. It means life that has the love of God at its inner being—at its heart.

In God there is life and, therefore, eternal life means the defeat of death. It means a life that is indestructible, because it has in it the indestructibility of God Himself.

When we realize the power, and the wonderful gift, that God is giving us, we are just in awe of what He is doing in each and every one of us. We have been promised not just a longer life, but a superior quality of life—eternal life!

Satan, and his human agents, have made the reward of the saved appear so uninspiring, so unattractive, so absolutely boring, that it is no wonder even professing Christians would rather remain alive in corruptible human flesh than go to their reward!

God Almighty has promised an extraordinary future for those who qualify to be born into His Family. No human has fully conceived of the tremendous reward that awaits true Christians.

I Corinthians 2:7-9 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Only God's Holy Spirit can open the human mind to the deep spiritual truths of the Bible.

All who repent, accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, and overcome, will inherit the Kingdom of God. In the Last Great Day, the Great White Throne Judgment, those people will receive God's Holy Spirit.

In the Kingdom of God, there will be individuals with differing degrees of responsibility. Those responsibilities will include such duties as judges, kings, and priests. For each individual there will be a responsibility, a job to do. Not the same job. We are not all called to the same office. But, every office is needed, and is important in the Kingdom.

Your job will be what you will find the most pleasure and fulfillment in doing. We do not all get the same pleasure out of the same thing. That is why God has not called us all to the same office.

What each one does as a part of God's Family will partly depend on what we are doing now. And each will have a part in making all things new. We will be able to fall back on the experience that God is giving us at this time.

When all God's children are born into His spiritual Family, God's new plan begins with awe-inspiring results.

Isaiah 65:17 For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.

This is an ongoing process, and God is creating the new heaven and the new earth beginning with us as His church.

Isaiah 65:18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, And her people a joy.

With the immersion of the earth, in the cleansing Lake of Fire as a type of baptism, the cycle of creation is complete. Rising from the Lake of Fire, a spiritual new heavens and a new earth will appear. This is the site of God's new project. Verse 17 should read, "For, behold, I am creating new heavens and a new earth" This same new project is described in Revelation 21. This is the time when the New Jerusalem will descend out of heaven to the earth, and become the capital of the universe.

Revelation 21:1-2, 7-8 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for

the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Following the second death will be the first time in history, that God the Father will join Jesus Christ on earth, with His newly-born spiritual children. Prior to the cleansing of the world, in the Lake of Fire, God the Father would not come to the earth because it was polluted by the sins of mankind. When it is purified, He will establish His personal headquarters and throne in this holy city, Jerusalem.

Revelation 22: 14 says that those who do His commandments are specially blessed in that we have the right to the Tree of Life, and may enter through the gates into the holy city. We will have a part, with God and Jesus Christ, in building a new universe. Part of that reconstruction will be to design and build whole new worlds where the righteousness of the God Family motivates everything.

II Peter 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Since there will be perfect righteousness in the new heaven and the new earth, we must now work to be righteous in our own lives.

II Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

Peter tells us that long before these things, we have an eternal responsibility to be pure.

The word "therefore" makes the transition to our conduct. We are to make intense efforts to be morally pure—that is, without spot and blameless, like Christ. We should aim to live so as to be found at peace with Him. We must produce the peace that results from our efforts to please Christ and God the Father. Those who are found at peace with Him have to put out of their lives the things that He hates.

Solomon gives us a list of six things, plus one, that the Lord hates:

Proverbs 6:16-18 These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil.

The seventh thing, that God hates, is so bad that He emphasizes that it is an abomination. We know that an abomination is something that is filthy, unclean, and disgusting to God. That seventh thing is sowing discord among brethren, and God judges that to be every bit as bad as idolatry. No one, who does the things that God hates, will have the opportunity to work for Him in a judicial capacity, neither will they be in His Kingdom. We should, every once in a while, read that and make sure that we are not guilty of any of those things. Especially the lying part, I think that is probably the easiest of those things to commit.

Will you be there at the Great White Throne Judgment as a human being or as a firstfruit spirit being and long-time member of the God Family?

Will you have been waiting and anticipating throughout the millennial rule of Christ, while helping renew the earth for those billions to be resurrected at the beginning of the White Throne Judgment?

In Ezekiel 37 we read of the "valley of dry bones". Ask yourself, "Do I want to be there when this happens?" I know that the answer will be, absolutely, yes! It is going to be such an exciting time. If we have fulfilled our eternal responsibility, all the way along, we will be there, and we will have been spirit beings for more than a thousand years by that time. What a wonderful thing to see, those people that we knew, who have lived in the past, and who are living now, who did not have their chance yet, to be able to see them resurrected. A thousand years seems like a long time, but as spirit beings it will go very quickly, I am sure.

Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions, to emphasize how important it is that we learn to judge righteously between ourselves right here and now!

I Corinthians 6:2-3 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

At Christ's second coming, humanity will be saved from extinction because of a tiny group of "elect" people. This small group of firstfruits, of God's Kingdom, will be there at the raising of multiple billions of people at the beginning of the Great White Throne Judgment.

Will you be there to help righteously judge those people? Will you have been a spirit member of the Family of God for more than a thousand years by that time?

By comparison, the number of those who will already have been born into God's Family will be small. But those children of God, God willing us among them, will have the tremendous opportunity to help the rest of humanity fulfill its tremendous potential, and also be born into God's Family.

In the words of Herbert Armstrong, "Never will so many owe so much to so few. And they, even now, are waiting for you!"

God has not revealed what His plans are after He begins to make all things new. He only gives us the briefest glimpse of what lies ahead. We do know that there will be no end to God's

Kingdom. It will continue to grow greater and greater. Each one who qualifies for a reward in the Kingdom will grow with it.

With such a wonderful future ahead, and the knowledge that God will help us achieve it by the power of the Holy Spirit, each one of us cannot help but be stirred to greater enthusiasm, greater effort, and greater accomplishment with what God has given us in the way of this eternal responsibility that has already begun.

Remember Ezra's words, "Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it".

May we all put forth diligent effort to give a true witness of righteousness and encouragement to others, so that they may have an indication of the wonderful opportunity God has prepared for them at their appropriate time.

And remember, with eternal life comes eternal responsibility. Our eternal responsibility has already begun, it began with our baptism. So use the power that belongs to God, and seek Him!

Jesus said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God".

May we all take our eternal responsibility seriously, and plow ahead to the Kingdom of God.