



# Shepherd's Voice<sup>®</sup>

Summer 2010  
FREE!

M A G A Z I N E

In this Debut Issue  
The Joy of Overcoming  
Gratitude is an Attitude  
Fitly Joined Together  
Harmony in the Church  
Goodness and Mercy

“...He makes me lie down in  
green pastures:  
He leads me beside the still  
waters.”



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**Shepherd's Voice Magazine** is a production of the Chicagoland Church of God in cooperative effort with other individuals and church organizations in the Sabbath-keeping community in the United States and Canada. This magazine is distributed and made possible by tithes and offerings of the readership and of those who support this work.

**Photos:** iStockphoto.com, freepotos.com

**Our cover:** Heard of sheep dwelling peacefully on a Tuscany farm

**Back Cover:** Bryce Canyon, Jon Aros, Copyright © 2009

**Comic Illustrator:** Bob Patterson

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# Shepherd's Voice<sup>®</sup>

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## Greetings!



You have in your hands the first issue of the *Shepherd's Voice Magazine*. It is so named as we have derived it from our Savior's words in John Chapter 10:

*"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice"* — John 10:3-4

It is my prayer that the readership will hear Him speak through these pages and that it will minister to as many as it reaches.

In the last several years I have become increasingly aware in the Church of God of those who suffer from a degree of uncertainty bewildered by their personal circumstances and are struggling to understand what the Lord's expectations are. We hope that this periodical, and other materials we offer through this publication will be enabling and edifying to feed the Lord's precious flock, and in even the smallest of ways, help provide a sense of balance that can relieve the uncertainty in the walk of many.

I believe the answer to such uncertainties is in the Lord's divine enabling power, the grace of God that is available to all of us. If we can realize just how God's strength is made perfect in our weaknesses as scattered and conflicted people, we can start to see and execute the solution. Therefore, I want to make clear that this ministry is not designed to substitute God's grace with leadership, relying on a man or group of people for a solution, but to

help in breaking down barriers and other misconceptions we have put in our own way that has limited our potential to serve and grow.

The message of Gospel of the Kingdom of God is not comprised of continued speculations regarding world events, economic turmoil, exposure of doctrinal errors and pagan ideas that dominate the general public's understanding of Christianity. Prophetic speculations coupled with analyses of world events, intended to promote biblical viewpoints and to attract interest, are proving less and less effective. These topics are often considered as a means to connect to the general public's receptor points, which are then followed by the introduction of a new and alternative way to look at the world through a biblical perspective. In some cases, it has become obvious they have been designed to sustain a level of sensationalism, which in some case has been useful in sustaining church allegiances and drawing crowds of religious hobbyists, but in the end does nothing to further God's will on earth and with the believer.

The strategy of tapping into the public's interest has been a common approach to provide an evangelical message. Although this strategy has had some merit, this approach will not be reflected in *The Shepherd's Voice*. It is my belief the needs of the saved and the unsaved should not be differentiated in this manner when presenting the Gospel. The same message that sustains and strengthens the believer of forty years can bring any sinner to repentance and accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

After a numbers many years of observing the behaviors of people and in the particular brethren in the Church of





**Personal (Continued from previous page)**

God, I am convinced of this:

*When the Christian first begins to awaken and understands who Christ is, on what basis he is worthwhile, and what life is all about, it is only then he comes to terms that he has the potential and resources necessary for a sustained change in thinking and how to go about life, spurred on by the Holy Spirit.*

Repeatedly, I find this process being frustrated in within the people in the Church of God. God's people are trying to find solutions to problems in their life based on former understanding of how to meet their own personal needs.

The Apostle James has much to say about this situation and part of his writings is the subject of the lead article. Our instruction to *Grow in Knowledge* is to grow in knowledge of who God is and what His thoughts are, what His motivations and desires are about, and this comes about by experiencing God in our lives and nurturing His implanted word. No magazine, including this one, can offer the experience of God and the kind of intimate relationship that God offers. Our purpose behind this outreach is to bring to awareness the truth that is already in us, and at the same time challenge some existing thinking that has blocked development. Our hope in this publication is that it will be aligned with God's will, and this work will be blessed and be a blessing.

This magazine is has been produced by the Chicagoland Church of God as an outreach to all of God's people wherever they may be and as an evangelical message to those who God may be calling. Contributing writers to this magazine are from various parts of North America and in different organizations that share in the mission statement of *Shepherd's Voice Magazine*.

As this is a new endeavor by a small congregation in Chicago, we appreciate your prayers that we will be able to sustain this work, and that resources will become available to grow the work will become available.

In Christ's Service

*Jim Patterson*  
*Managing Editor*



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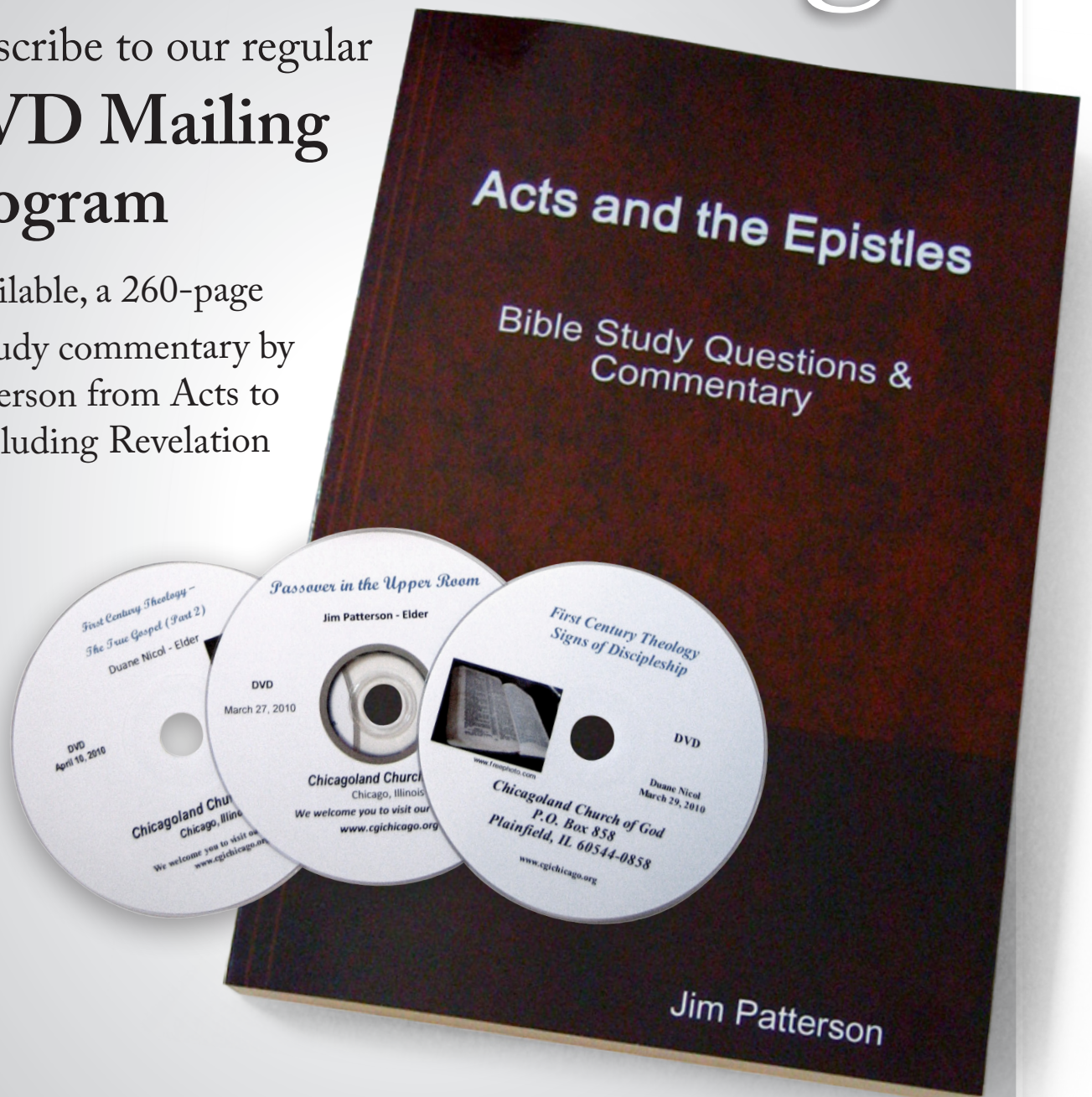




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Jim Patterson

## The Joy in Overcoming

The apostle James has a special message for those who struggle in trials. If we embrace his message, we can live truly effective lives that are pleasing and useful to God, bring clarity to our minds in times of confusion, and have a deeper realization of what our standing in Christ really has to offer, which is a life of fullness.

*“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials (James 1:2).*

James begins his message following a brief greeting with this difficult exhortation. When under a trial, and in a particularly difficult one, the thought of finding a sense of joy is remote. In an attempt to reconcile this scripture with our experiences there is a common belief that once a trial has passed and is successfully overcome, it is then we may show our gratitude for God’s hand of help through it, and for what it may have achieved. Although this retrospective understanding is important, this is not what James has in mind. He calls for his readers to count it all joy when we fall into various trials.

For a trial to be a trial at all, it must be grievous at some level. For without a level of mental or emotional discomfort or even physical distress, can such an experience be a trial? If the trial is grievous, where then do we find “all joy” during the experience?

To develop an appreciation for these words of James, let us first develop a background for why he would make such a request of the brethren, explore the context closely, and touch on a few elements of the human condition for help in understanding.

We must make ourselves open to the possibility that the trials James speaks of may not be all inclusive. The trials are those that try our faith (verse 3). In the human experience there are grievous times that none can escape, and Christians are not immune. Tragedy and loss may not always test our faith. Christians are not promised immunity from what is common to man. James does not say “all trials;” he rather states “various trials.” In James’s view, these various trials are trials of faith.

The nature of these trials is the temptation to compromise



or deviate from the will of God. This would include the temptation to sin, to compromise one’s faith in exchange for comfort, to resist the work of the Holy Spirit, and to reconsider the path that one has taken and deal with life in a way fashioned by the carnal mind.

One temptation is to harden our hearts as a means of protection. This sin is deceitful as a hardened heart feels so justified. Becoming angry with people or organizations that have let us down or do not seem to respond as they should does not excuse wrong behavior and attitudes. This should be of great concern for us in perhaps the latter days where we learn the love of many will grow cold amidst persecution, personal distress (family, work, and health issues), and church pressures (Matt. 24:12). Some begin to focus their attention on other sources to find meaningful inspiration in their lives. Although belief in God may persist in the offended believer, the hardened heart will become fruitless before God.

In following Christ strong earthly ties invoke their will on the believer, and when they are in conflict with the requirements of discipleship then the believer must turn from them to follow God (Luke 14:25-33). This is not





a call for a believer to disregard family relationships; however, the walk that is obedient to Christ at times may be in direct opposition to a believer's connections to life in the world. Our own preservation instinct to conduct life on our own terms is also a common culprit (Luke 17:33). However, the repeated theme throughout the Bible is that God's will is supreme. Conflict will occur when either our will or the will of others is pressed upon us in direct opposition to God's will. Trials test the steadfastness of a believer and expose dependencies on carnal values and ways of thinking that we erroneously and unknowingly believe makes life worthwhile.

The carnal self-will can be very strong. Our own will is often self-serving and self-preserving and is often overlooked during trials, as an underestimated factor in what brings us difficulty. The will of man is so often, in our own assessment, reasonable and worthy, but often has its roots in selfish motivation and in seemingly innocent ways.

*"... knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:3).*

The product of our trials must be patience. When frustration overcomes patience during a trial, there is a temptation to retreat. This retreat often comes in a way that brings temporary relief from a faith that does not seem to be working and seems to have its promises failing. Although often not altogether abandoning the faith in terms of a doctrine or in church attendance, the individual seeks to get resolution from alternative strategies that do not include consulting God and His wisdom. The believer may resolve instead to put on a set of defenses that includes a guarded approach to the faith and the word of God, and perhaps distance himself or herself from other brethren. When we compromise our faith to seek a resolution to problems we are relying on our own carnal instincts, which is succumbing to temptation. James reminds the believer of the reward for those who endure temptation by not deviating from the will of God:

*"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (verse 12).*

Many brethren become confused or bewildered when life takes a turn for the worse, and often are unable to identify a

particular cause. We begin to wonder if God is displeased or there is something wrong with our faith. We should remember that no saint in the Bible was ever immune to trials of this nature. Even these trials are considered beneficial by James. The reader should take to heart the lesson of Psalm 44.

The Psalmist begins by acknowledging all the former experiences of God's power and goodness to the fathers, the victories they have and will have in God's name. They have not forgotten or forsaken the Lord: "In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever". (verse 8)

*"... BUT ..."*

*"... You have cast us off and put us to shame, and You do not go out with our armies" (verse 9).*

One should carefully study Psalm 44 and notice there is no indication that God was displeased or handing down punishment. Even for no apparent reason at all, the believer must have times of temptation and discouragement.

*"Yet for your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (verse 22).*

Despite affliction, the Psalmist remains patient, and does not forsake the commandment:

*"All this has come upon us; but we have not forgotten You, nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant" (verse 17).*

We should take special consideration in the knowledge that the testing of our faith produces patience. This is the "knowing" James writes of in chapter 1, verse 3. Knowing is the key. Knowing comes from experience and sound teaching that focus on the tools of overcoming and what Christian overcoming achieves. We need to know the purpose of trials as James would have us understand.

*"But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:4).*

Patience has a perfect work that unravels misconceptions and wrong assumptions about the life God wants us to have and how abundant life truly is. The perfect work of patience seeks to disconnect us with what we erroneously seek and this believe provides us with security and significance.

Both security and significance are required by human





## *The Joy in Overcoming*

beings to live life as whole and real persons. When we speak of significance we are talking about purpose, relevance, and adequacy. When we speak of security, we are talking about unconditional and consistently expressed love or permanent acceptance.

These needs are not too difficult to understand when we consider the needs of children. The child that is hurt or upset runs to a parent for safety. Children also seek parental approval. As children grow older, they seek security and significance to find purpose in life by other means.

The need to feel wanted and desired, significant and purposeful is the psychological target of many of the feel good marketers and is often used for exploitation. The feel-good or health and wealth marketing industries, conducted in the name of Christ or the name of the Dream, have in the basis of their promotional plans a promise for fulfillment of humankind's need to find acceptance and adequacy.

These strategies are never truly successful. The chronic need to fill the bottomless pit causes psychological problems when barriers are encountered.

### *Security and Significance in Christ*

Adam and Eve were both significant and secure from the time they were created. The fulfillment of these needs was likely not given a second thought as they had a relationship with God that was unhindered. When sin entered, the relationship was broken and they hid themselves from God. They feared rejection, rationalized their behavior through blame of another, and were sent out from the garden. Adam had dominion over the world, now he must toil in it. He now had threatened security and significance which he must labor to fulfill.

Humankind has since sought out various means and strategies in finding purpose, meaning, and sustenance. Although various strategies, too numerous to mention, have been invoked and refined, having followings generation after generation, all ultimately fail to truly satisfy these needs in the capacity experienced by Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve, before they transgressed the

Lord's commandment, were in need of nothing.

The Christian also has experienced and believed many of these same strategies to fulfill the same needs, but must come to terms that even the most noble of alternative strategies have limited value when compared to God's means and wishes to fulfill them. Letting go of earthly securities often comes through trials of faith in the way James asks us to understand by experience: that true, everlasting significance and security only come by Jesus Christ.

This defines the perfect work of patience. It breaks down barriers we unknowingly hold onto to make us feel worthwhile, adequate, and accepted. Holding onto other securities outside of Christ limits our intimate relationship with Him and our potential in being a more effective instrument for doing His will.

So awesome is the perfect work of patience that the joy of Christian living starts to come into focus. The end result is that we are perfect and entire, in want of nothing. This pictures a person who fully has realized the security and significance he or she has in God. The person has come to the full knowledge that Jesus Christ has freed him or her from living life in a deficit condition, a condition of which the person was unaware.

To be in a continual state of want is a miserable place to be. Those outside Christ will continually seek security, significance, and meaning in what the world offers, i.e., temporary fulfillment of needs. The cycle of need begins again when the means by which needs are being met are threatened. This is operating from a deficit condition or a situation in which liabilities always exceed assets.

Therefore the experience of trials shows a way for the believer to adopt God's view of life. When God's perspective comes into view of the believer, the challenges we face, no matter how difficult, come into proper perspective. The believer has a foundation to overcome the trials before him or her. Despite everything the world wants us to believe, our security and significance comes from us continually abiding in Jesus Christ.

Most often discussions regarding these early verses of James focus on building Christian character. Character







is defined as the makeup of mental and ethical traits that prevail in the mind of an individual. The perfect work of patience through trial indeed will bring about a transformation in the believer's character. This process, however, should be best understood in the larger context that has been presented thus far in James when he says "perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

Development of Christian character begin as believers understand their security and significance in Jesus Christ. Once Christians believe they are worthwhile, and operating from fullness, and that nothing can rob them of these things as they believe in Christ, a right way of thinking emerges. Knowing their needs are met in Christ, the selfish motivation to fulfill these needs will diminish.

In terms of building Christ-like character, the experiences of this world in isolation do nothing to teach us how. Character is not a direct product of suffering a trial, but rather by experiencing Christ through trial. It is a process that nurtures the implanted Word (The Seed, all the genetics of God) within us. Without seeking the wisdom of God in trial and seeing the situation from God's perspective and watching His hand at work, trials will only amount to drudgery, a hardened heart, and bitterness. Frustration dominates the Christian's experience and a falling away may occur. A Christ-like character will not develop from wrong responses to trial.

As we develop a new way of thinking, a new behavior emerges. It means coming to terms with a new motivation on how to go about life, supported by the knowledge that our needs are continually met by Jesus Christ. It demonstrates to the believer a way of life that is fulfilling and rewarding through the way of "give" and not "get." The selfish way begins to diminish. The transformation of the mind spurred on and set on course by the Holy Spirit begins to be recognizable in the character makeup of the believer, and an amazing selfless transformation in the heart and mind occurs -- he begins to love his brother.

### Old Testament Testimony

*"The lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." - Psalm 23:1*

This line of Psalm 23 illustrates the state of mind attainable only by a believer. David writes of the same condition of the Christian following Christ, the perfect work of patience, in want of nothing, freed from living in a deficit condition and living life from fullness. David expresses this in his opening line of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Sheep are very nervous by nature, and rarely lie down unless they feel safe. Secure in the Lord, they can lie down in green pastures, walk in the righteous path, and bravely walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The sheep's needs are totally fulfilled.

*"... but now my eye sees you" - Job 42:5*

Look at Job. James reminds us of the patience of Job (James 5:11). At the end of all the soul searching and long discourses, the Lord finally reveals Himself and Job exclaims, "... now my eye sees you." It was Job's patience through trial that brought him to realize and let go of wrong perceptions of God and of himself. Although vastly different in a dramatic sense, the experience of Christians under trial should be the same as Job's in the real sense. Christians under trial and in bewildering situations undergo stressful soul searching like Job did and usually seek understanding by having discussions with others, but the same patience must endure and have its perfect work as it did with Job. Sound familiar?

### A Life of Fullness

The joy is in knowing that the experience of a trial enlarges the realization of how Christ has freed us from living in a burdened deficit condition and that we can live a life of fullness regardless of our circumstances.

Christians are tempted to develop alternative strategies in an effort to feel worthwhile and accepted. This has been a tragic mistake for some and is the subject of disdain in most of the apostolic writings. Paul wrote to the Colossians who were entertaining various forms of gnostic and ascetic beliefs in the hope of finding further acceptance in Christ. Paul had this to tell them:

*"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" - Colossians 2:9,10*





## The Joy in Overcoming

This is the theology that James wants us to realize. There is nothing in Christ we lack; we are complete in our standing in Christ. Our needs can be met fully and the resources of God fully are available. You have His unconditional love which is consistent and forever available. We are given the tremendous opportunity to grow in grace and knowledge, free from the burden of a deficit condition, free from unpaid debt, and free from the law pertaining to sin and death. Talk about opportunity! This is what James wants us to realize: what the perfect work of patience in trial will bring us to embrace!

### Help in Trial

Are you having difficulty in a trial? Are you frustrated that there is no end or solution in sight? Are you having trouble understanding the joy in overcoming and the value of what trials of faith have? James is not new to these questions, and he provides us with answers and encouragement:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).

Wisdom from heaven, especially during a trial of faith, is the basis of the answer to these questions. Worldly wisdom is not consistent with heavenly wisdom. James tells us the wisdom from above “...is first pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (3:17). This wisdom is not self-seeking but aligns the mind to the will of God. When we seek wisdom from above we will receive it, and it is a tremendous reassurance of our complete sufficiency in Christ.

James adds:

*“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).*

One who doubts and is double-minded has not accepted the promise of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and the wisdom that God offers. The double-minded seeks the

best of both worlds. Such believers are not confident in the security God offers and still holds onto worldly securities and belief structures. Verse 6 illustrates the condition of a doubtful believer. It is as though the sea is driven by something else. The sea is driven by the wind; the Christian is driven by external (worldly) influences.

The wisdom from above is aligned with God’s view on life. It reaffirms our significance in Christ, overcomes confusion, and brings clarity into the life of the believer. This experience compounds for the believer and eventually compels us to exclaim as Paul did:

*“... to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).*

Christians with transformed minds who have released what security they knew outside of Christ and have now found in Christ can relate to what Paul wrote to the Philippians.

By ridding ourselves of double-mindedness, the trials of faith can be overcome successfully as we let go of the security of the world and lay hold of our security in God.

“Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flowers fall, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits” – (James 1: 9-11).

These verses continue to speak to the point of our security in Christ. The lowly person rejoices in his or her humility. For in his or her lowly state with respect to the world’s standards, he or she is more secure than the richest of men. Despite difficulties the person knows where true security lies, and he is complete and satisfied in Christ, which James sees as reason to glory about. The rich are to glory in being made low. For despite riches, they know if it were all lost suddenly their difficulties will be small compared to the knowledge that they lack nothing in Christ.

### The Savior’s Call to Salvation

*“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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.*





*For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” - Matt 11:28-30*

The burden of life that Christ refers to is humankind’s constant concern to find adequacy and purpose while at the same time trying to sustain life in a world that always threatens to take it all away. Life is trying to fill a bottomless pit that, if only filled, would ease all burdens. Only in Christ can a human’s needs truly be fulfilled.

*“I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger, and he that believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).*

Jesus Christ has promised to be sufficient in meeting believers’ needs. Food and water are true needs that must be met (significance and security). Christ says those who hunger and thirst live in a deficit condition. Once an unsaved individual finds his or her needs met, the means by which they are being met will again be threatened. It is only temporal security and significance. When threatened the individual will again hunger and thirst to defend or find new means to find purpose and adequacy, and the cycle continues - often leading to frustration and despair. A Christian is not to hunger or thirst for security and significance beyond Jesus Christ. James is advocating that true security and significance only can be found in Christ, giving us an everlasting uninterrupted relationship with the Father. Then the fulfillment of our needs being met cannot be threatened:

*“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one” (John 10:28-30).*

*“Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).*

Again we see that Christ promises to meet our every need continually by the analogy of the well where we will never thirst again.

It should be obvious that the wrong way of thinking to fulfill needs can be corrected by trials of faith. If we properly interpret trials as James desires that we do, then the experience will transform a Christian’s thinking into

realizing what he now has in Jesus Christ and at the same time recognizing the futility of seeking meaning for life outside the promises He has given.

*“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:9, 10).*

An abundant life can only be found by knowing through the perfect work of patience that all one’s needs are met and cannot be taken away while he or she abides in Christ. All living extends outward of a believer’s acceptance. It has been said that a man’s life consists of the abundance of his thoughts. Perhaps Paul can help us on the truth of an abundant life:

*“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Phil 4:11,12).*

Notice it was a learning experience for Paul as it will be for all Christians who are steadfast.

### *Rivers of Living Water*

God’s call to salvation includes security and significance, a life fulfilling and everlasting, in Him. Only God offers true security, significance and meaning that cannot be threatened or taken away by others.

*“If anyone thirsts, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37, 38).*

James wants us to realize all the promises that God’s offers His children, and how God wishes to sustain us in life, now and forever. For this reason, it is to be counted as all joy when we fall into various trials, for they are instruments used in bringing us to terms with the fact that we have been set free by Jesus Christ.

*“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).*

The choice is for us to believe it.





Amy Nass

## Gratitude is an Attitude

*“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:15-17).*

Do you practice gratitude? Are you grateful for the things in your life? If you were asked to make a list of things you were grateful for how long would your list be... 5, 25, 500 items?



Gratitude is defined as a positive emotion or attitude in acknowledgement of a benefit that one has received or will receive. It is a simple concept that can get us through stressful and sometimes painful times. Sometimes things in life happen too fast. We just barely get through one problem when new problems come about. Every day we face new challenges, personality conflicts, and disappointments. At times it is hard to see the lessons in these situations. By practicing gratitude, we can learn to say thank you for the way things are. We may not like the place we are in, but we can be thankful for a God that loves us and never tests us beyond our strength (I Corinthians 10:13).

Gratitude allows us to turn our negative energy into positive energy as it grounds us and helps shift our perspective of the world. Gratitude also creates connection with people around us. In First Thessalonians 5, verses 16-18, Paul writes, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

Researchers have found that practicing gratitude also has positive benefits on our health. Stephan Post, Ph.D., the author of *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*, completed a study on the effects of gratitude. Here are the five discoveries from his work.

### *Gratitude*

**Defends:** Focusing on things that make us grateful for 15 minutes per day significantly increases our body’s natural antibodies.

**Sharpens:** Naturally grateful people are more focused mentally and measurably less vulnerable to clinical depression.

**Calms:** A grateful state of mind induces a physiological state called resonance that is associated with healthier blood pressure and heart rate.

**Strengthens:** Caring for others can be draining. But grateful caregivers are more capable than less grateful ones.



Heals: Recipients of donated organs who have the most grateful attitudes heal faster.

It is important to practice gratitude until it becomes a habit. How does one do this? Stay close to God; start and end each day with a prayer that includes a gratitude statement. Remember to notice things in your day to be grateful for. Remember to say thank you for those things that are pleasant as well as those situations that present challenges and opportunities to learn more about yourself. Thank someone that has provided a service or said a kind word.

### *Start a gratitude journal*

Write down events and/or people that you are thankful for. When times are hard, this journal can serve as a reminder that good things have happened in your life. Finally, always give thanks to God for the journey of life you are on. *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).*

We all have suffered through hard times. Some of us may have lost a parent, spouse, or child. Others may have suffered financial loss or hardships. Yet others may be sick and/or have suffered a serious illness. When we are deep in grief or feeling overwhelmed with negative emotions, it is hard to feel grateful.

### *Means to Acceptance*

Gratitude, however, is a means to acceptance. Acceptance allows us to deal with our problems and begin to move forward. It reminds us we may have plans, but that God has different ones. In order to get to the next place, we have to accept our current situation and thus walk the hard journey. Gratitude and acceptance help us to get there. Helen Keller once said, “When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.”

I personally have learned the effects of gratitude in my own life. A few years ago my father passed away suddenly.

It was a very difficult time in my life. Shortly after his death my husband was told that his cancer had returned. I was a stay-at-home mom with a two-and-a-half year old son. The doctors informed me that my husband was going to need to be hospitalized so that they could monitor him through his chemotherapy. He would spend one week in the hospital and one week home. He would do that for six weeks. I had no idea how I was going to be there for my husband, take care of my son, and do it through the heavy grief I was feeling. I prayed to God for the strength to somehow get through what I was facing. My mom flew up from Florida, my brother and sister-in-law watched my son, and my husband’s family was all there to help. I thanked God every day for the help and support that I had. I thanked Him daily for the wonderful nurses that took care of my husband when I could not be there. I thanked Him for the times my son rode up and down the hallways on my husband’s chemo pole laughing. Gratitude moved me to accept what was happening in my life, and I was able to walk the journey that was required of me. I have never stopped practicing gratitude. I am thankful every day for the blessings that I have.

Many people that I know practice gratitude. But what sets the members of the household of God apart from other Christian people? The answer is the knowledge that we have.

### *Answer in Knowledge*

We know that billions of people have come and gone without ever knowing or understanding the meaning of life. We hold the knowledge of God’s great and awesome plan as demonstrated each year by His Holy Days. We have the hope and the promise of the resurrection because of Christ’s sacrifice. We hold the knowledge that God is sovereign and Jesus is returning to establish His Kingdom. We need to hold fast to that promise and keep our attitudes and ultimate perspective in line with God’s loving ways. Commit to becoming thankful for the knowledge you hold and the blessings in your life. Gratitude is an attitude; let us all be sure that we are practicing it in our lives.



## Fitly Joined Together

Do you partake of the body of Christ at the Passover Service every year? What does that mean in your daily life? Do you repent and fast and cry out to God the week before because of your sins? Do you walk out that door after the last hymn, take a deep breath of air, and think you are justified and good-to-go for another year? Do you think you now have God's seal of approval? If that is so, what on earth was Paul preaching about when he talked of brethren taking the Passover unworthily?

*"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:27 NIV).*

Read verses 29-30 in the Contemporary English Version:

*"If you fail to understand that you are the body of the Lord, you will condemn yourselves by the way you eat and drink (bread and wine). That's why many of you are sick and weak and why a lot of others have died."*

And again in the Living Version:

*"For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself."*

So what does it mean when we take the bread and wine

unworthily that we are sinning against the body and blood of the Lord? What does it mean "drinking the cup without honoring the body of Christ"?

Are we not symbolically eating Christ's body and drinking His blood when taking the bread and wine? Does that not mean we have become one with Jesus Christ, (1 Corinthians 6:15-17)? What about the brother sitting with you in the same room—are they not also partakers of that same body (1 Corinthians 10:15-17)?

We know Paul talks of one body of which Christ is the head (Colossians 1:18). Where do you fit into that body? Maybe you are a foot or an eye. The brother or sister next to you may be a foot or a hand or your other eye in that same body.

We need to ask ourselves how can we be the Body of Christ. Are we in harmony one with another? That is not what we see in the churches of God. I've heard horror stories of how brethren treat brethren. I've witnessed it. Many won't talk to others, avoiding them like the plague; some spread toxic rumors; some even hate other members. Some are not content where God has placed them. Sometimes the hand wants to be the mouth, or the knee, or the foot. This should not be. Isn't it God who has positioned us in





the best place we can be? Do we not want to be the best we can be? Of course we do. And we want to be counted worthy. I cannot imagine anyone taking the Passover not wanting God to find him or her worthy.

According to scripture God takes our treatment of our brethren seriously (1 Corinthians: 8:11,12). How then should we treat the other parts of our own body? Do we treat our body with disrespect; do we injure parts of our body intentionally— maybe poke ourselves in the eye or box our ears or carelessly cut off a finger with no regard for the rest of our body? Would we fight and struggle with our own members without thought for our body? Yet we do not always act as we ought. If the body fights against itself, it becomes a cancer. *“After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of His body” (Ephesians 5:29, 30).*

*“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:4-5). (Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31).*

If part of our body were wounded, what would be our response...indifference, anger, resistance, impatience? I don't think we realize how important our response is. The brethren are actually made one flesh with one another at the Passover service when they partake of Christ's body, like it or not. Remember Christ's analogy of the married man and woman...they become one flesh. I recently had surgery and treated the wounded part of my body with great gentleness and care. I was very sympathetic, the other parts of my body responding with extra thought and attention for the wounded part, being careful not to put it in jeopardy—anything to help stop the pain and suffering. *“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself...” (Romans 15:1-3).*

Likewise, we need to take great care for the Body of Christ. We need to walk out of that room after taking Passover and open our eyes to what really happened in that room. Buy eye salve so you can see clearly. We need to recognize that we are part of our brother or sister's body as he or she is part of ours and all part of Christ and Christ

in God (John 17:21-23). We wouldn't do harm to our own body. Likewise, we should treat our brethren (members all of the same body) with love and concern throughout the whole year (Read Matthew 25:34-46).

Appreciate their gifts; celebrate their differences and the contributions they make to the smooth running of the body. We need to be fitly joined together: “we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:15-17 ESV). That's why we need to gather together on the Sabbath each week (Hebrews 10:24, 25). We can only take the Passover worthily if we understand (or discern) the body of Christ. It's a very serious matter... some in the body are sick and some are dead because we don't understand.

How can we be worthy? One of the last things Christ says to His disciples is to give them a new commandment: “that you love one another as I have loved you that you also love one another by this shall all men know that you're my disciples” (John 13:34-35).

We become one with Christ and one with each other and with the universe in that ceremony. What an awesome future! So let's prove we are worthy and treat our body (the body of Christ) like we ought.

Paul tells us very succinctly what our future is if we do it right and with God's Spirit we can soar: “In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit” (Ephesians 2:21,22).

If you have not considered your behavior in this regard during the last year, it's not too late. We have an amazing merciful God who has great patience with His children. So when you walk out of that Passover service this year, start truly loving your brother...see him through fresh, discerning eyes. Recognize it's that one body, the bride, that will rise together to meet Christ in the air and one bride who will marry Jesus Christ and that we all will become one for all eternity. So love your brother... your eternal life depends on it!



## The Scribe's Square: *Was Jesus Ceremonially Unclean?*

One day as a large crowd pressed and followed Jesus, a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years touched the hem of Jesus' garment reasoning that she would be healed of her condition if she could but touch His garment. Upon touching Jesus' garment, the woman's issue of blood stopped. She was healed. But Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had proceeded from him, immediately inquired as to who touched him. After a few words between Jesus and his disciples, the woman, in fear and trembling, finally confessed what she had done. Jesus replied, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

Aside from the obvious demonstration of Jesus' healing powers, this occurrence begs a few important questions of law. Was the woman with the issue of blood ceremonially unclean when she came among the crowd and made her way toward Jesus? And if so, did she, in touching Jesus' garment, make Jesus ceremonially unclean?

According to the law of Moses as written in Leviticus 15, a woman with a discharge of blood is considered unclean. She must be quarantined for as long as the discharge flows from her body; and even upon being healed of the discharge, she must remain isolated for another seven days. Any person who comes into contact with such a woman in the state of her uncleanness is immediately rendered unclean.

Under a strict interpretation of these laws of uncleanness, often called the Holiness Code, it would appear that this woman with a discharge of blood was breaking the law by coming among a large group of people. After all, she was ceremonially



*The ceremonial laws of cleanliness and the case of a woman with desperate faith*

*(Matt 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-47)*

unclean. How then was she allowed to work her way through a large crowd and touch Jesus' garment without making Jesus unclean and being called out on her own uncleanness?

The answer lies in determining the purpose of and premise behind the ceremonial laws. Galatians 3:19 states that the law was added because of transgression. The law was given under the premise that the people were sinners. I Timothy 1:19 states that the law was given not for the just but for the ungodly and sinful.

A person's ceremonial uncleanness was therefore really a function of that person's spiritual uncleanness. They were unclean because they had sinned against God. The physical uncleanness was really just an analogy to teach the people about spiritual uncleanness.

Jesus Christ, in contrast to sinful people, never sinned. Because he was morally flawless and filled with the Holy Spirit, no amount of physical filth could render Jesus unclean. Because he was just, these ceremonial hygiene laws, given for the ungodly and sinful, had no affect upon him.

But what about the woman? This unclean woman's desperate negotiation through a large crowd and grasp at Jesus' garment was not only contrary to





*The Scribe's Square: Was Jesus Ceremonially Unclean?*

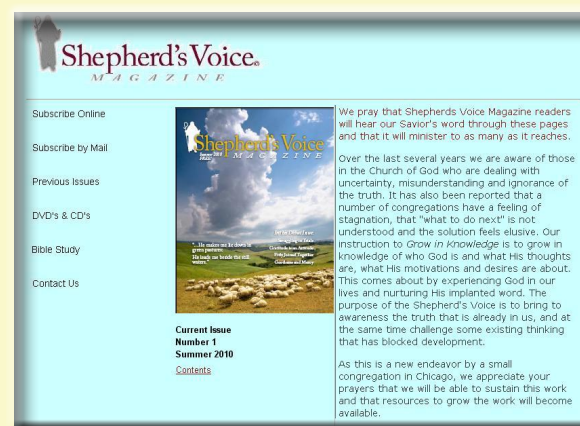
the letter of ceremonial holiness laws, but it could arguably be regarded as selfish. This woman – like most followers, supporters, and curious watchers of Jesus at that time – probably regarded Jesus as a mere prophet and not yet as the Son of God. Therefore, she either knowingly touched Jesus believing that she could defile him by doing so, or she was so desperate that she temporarily forgot about this law of Moses and the consequences of touching another person. When Jesus demanded to know who had touched him, this woman was probably fully reminded of what she had done, causing her to tremble in fear because of what she had done. Why then was she not rebuked by Jesus and sent back into isolation?

The answer lies in the fact that Jesus had power to forgive sins and to present her faultless before God. (Mark 2:10; Exodus 20:20-22; Jude 1:24) The same Jesus of Nazareth who could heal and do good works on the Sabbath because he was “Lord of the Sabbath” also could forgive and heal this woman because he was Lord over matters of ceremonial cleanliness. Jesus saw faith in the woman’s desperation. To Jesus, this faith – however imperfect or however desperate – overrode the proscriptions of the ceremonial law on this occasion. This faith not only protected her from condemnation, but it moved Christ to permanently heal her of her disease. Indeed, her faith had healed her and she could confidently go in peace.

Thanks be to God that Jesus Christ is able to forgive our sins upon repentance and confession of our faith in Him and to present us faultless before God the Father, regardless of what formerly might have rendered us ceremonially unclean and sentenced us to a life of isolation.



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## “Goodness and Mercy”

David was a man after God’s own heart. David continuously saw the goodness of God. He was a musician, a poet, a king, and a leader of men. The high regard that David’s men had for him is an inspiration. David in turn loved God and had high regard for him. However, David’s life was filled with war, strife, anarchy and betrayal. In spite of all the trauma and battles he fought, he had only good things to say about God. The “nickname” he bore tells volumes about his character: “A man after God’s heart!” Perhaps David’s continual trials taught him that only God was true, was merciful, and was always looking after his welfare. David went to God on countless occasions for advice and permission to carry out a battle. We will look into one of David’s most famous Psalms. This Psalm says much about God and David as well because of his utter love and regard for his Creator. Certainly it is appropriate to have the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm discussed in our first issue of *The Shepherds Voice!*

### *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

Twenty-first century America, entrenched with iPods, cell phones, laptops, and electronic paraphernalia, cannot easily relate to a shepherd’s daily life. We love independence and freedom and our ability to do as we want. A shepherd looks after his sheep. He guards them from wild animals. A good shepherd ensures his sheep have pastures to graze in and do not want for anything. In like manner, God looks after us and willingly provides in our time of need. A shepherd is intrusive in that he cannot allow his sheep to wander because they are animals that can get into more trouble than a two-year-old child who is learning to walk. Not wanting means we have jobs, health, recreation, companionship, and a place to worship God. Not wanting is all-inclusive! In John 10: 3-5, Jesus relays a shepherd’s relationship: “To him the porter opens and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. And when he puts forth his own sheep,

he goes before them, and his sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.” Jesus understood the role of shepherd very well. The sheep become accustomed to the master’s voice. David was a shepherd and led sheep around his area for pastures and protected them from wild animals. Our lesson is to let God lead us into green pastures so we will not want. Paul said on an occasion that he learned to be content. We too must be content! So many are still searching for the prize of theological superiority and are looking for the finite criteria of spiritual correctness. They are always in a state of want. If I have a shepherd, I will not want!

### *He makes me lie down in green pastures: He leads me beside the still waters.*

How many mothers have had to lay their children down to take a nap? The green pastures convey peace, plenty, a worry free environment, and a caring, loving shepherd. The still waters allow a sheep to drink. Roiling waters are frightening to sheep and they cannot drink. We have again the intrusive shepherd who knows best for the sheep and the called ones. There is a very close correlation to sheep and the tender young called ones who need guidance and gentle correction. A mother no more desires hurt for a child than a shepherd for a sheep. He “makes” me take a nap! He “makes” me to lie down! He “makes” me to listen to his words of life! In Hebrews 12: 6 we read, “For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.” Our freedom and independence will at times bring us a chastening. Have mothers or fathers had to spank their child to get him or her to just take a nap? Of course! It is not cruel and unusual punishment, it is for the child’s welfare. I am sure there were times when David had to use his shepherd’s crook. Using the “c” shape to

pull back a sheep or the long rod to prod or whack the sheep into correctness. It always was done to save or protect the sheep. In some extreme cases the long rod would be used to beat off a wolf or other wild animal. The green pastures and still waters are the idyllic scene for a shepherd and his sheep, be they the four-legged woolly kind or the two legged walking kind. God, in his infinite wisdom, wants us to read his word in quietness. We will have plenty so we are not distracted by the worry of making a living (having food and shelter). Jesus emphatically states this in Matt. 6: 27-33 paraphrased: He tells us we cannot add to our height or change who we are. We should not worry about raiment, considering the flowers who do not work, but are presented in beauty to equate to Solomon and his glory. If God can take care of nature, can He indeed take care of us? What are we going to eat or drink? What are we going to wear? God knows we have need of all things pertaining to life. Verse 33 is the key: "But seek you first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you." We will have clothing, food, work, housing, and more if we seek God first and allow him to "make" us lie down in green pastures beside the still waters of life! We often make the job harder than it needs to be by our resistance and determination for self-satisfaction. Seeking first, as in searching the scriptures for validation is key to enjoying the green pastures, beside the still waters.

***He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.***

In modern day society we truly need a weekly restoration. Our frame becomes wearied by work, pressures to constantly increase sales, highway construction, airline delays, governmental excesses to the point of bankrupting our society, and a constant barrage of doctrinal divergences that keep us in a state of uncertainty. For example we are plagued with Passover and Pentecost disagreements. Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> arguments continue to this day. In 1970 we were asked the question, "Brethren why are we here today?" This was on a Monday Pentecost and it was celebrated for some time that way until we learned it was on a Sunday.

God still blessed us for the Monday Pentecost and was patient until we learned the truth. I have on my shelf a copy of the, "Systematic Theology Project," which outlines our current "statement of beliefs." This project was conducted by a large number of ministers and was talked about and discussed until a common agreement was made and then formally published. Paul emphatically states in Ephesians that we are to come to a unity of the faith—that we are no more children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine and by peoples' trickery. This is one of the many reasons we need our souls restored weekly! We also need to be led into the paths of righteousness.

From a purely doctrinal point of view, I trust the Biblical admonition, "In a multitude of counselors there is safety!" I believe we have all the doctrines safely in check. There may be some needs for change, but we will need another multitude to take on the task of determining the outcome, not just one or two who determine a doctrine for all to follow. Lying down in peace and quiet and being taught Biblical rightness is pleasing to God. It is also encouraging for the sheep to hear the voice of God and be calmed for another week of hectic activity. My soul is frustrated and disturbed by "children" being tossed about by every wind of doctrine. We each have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. David had wild animals and wild men to fight continually. We have a perverse world filled with lust, greed, lawlessness, and threats of wars and calamities in our end time society. So we need to have our souls restored and assured constantly or we will fall into error ourselves. We also have an adversary who is always lurking in the shadows to tempt us beyond our capacity. Soul restoration is a much-needed weekly experience.

***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.***

It is interesting that a rod and a staff comfort David when evil and death are facing him on all sides. Walking through a cemetery at night can be disturbing. There are shadows from the moon, while



## Goodness and Mercy

the wind blowing leaves, distortions from trees, and large headstones all make for a potential frightening experience. Walking in a large valley with many shadows also would be disturbing, especially if there were wild animals or armed enemies about. David is assured because he knows how to use a shepherd's crook in defense of his sheep. If God is equipped in like manner, David feels safe. Evil and shadows are not daunting to him. David uses common shepherd's terms to convey a message of hope and inspiration.

We need to use our implements to correspond to how God protects us. In our cars we have GPS systems so we do not get lost. In our homes we have electronic devices that sound alarms when an intruder breaks into our homes. We have an armed military force to protect us from foreign invasion. In our churches we have shepherds who watch out for us by using the "Sword of the Spirit, The Shield of Faith, and The Breastplate of Righteousness!"

We each have to carry our own armament. Satan will attack us, or we will be attacked subtly during the week and become wounded. Our teaching is to ensure our entrance into God's Kingdom. The shepherds all strive to educate, encourage, and speak the truth in love. The shepherd's objective is to promote the growth of the body through its building itself up in love. David's fights were with real animals and real men. Our fight is often with the psychology of theology and with the evil spirit world. Many times our enemies are not seen. They use trickery and deceit to implant doubt and fear to sway the called ones to their ungodly ways. We should not fear either. God has our best interests at heart. We must pray often. We must search the scriptures daily as the Bereans did long ago. Our comfort is in our Savior, Jesus Christ, who will defend us if we ask and seek true understanding. His rod of truth and staff of righteousness will fend off any enemy we have. In II Chronicles 16: 9 we read, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him."

In olden times, there were "knights" who fought for landowners and damsels in distress. They were

champions of the people. They were held in high regard for their work and protection. That is what David saw in God, His loving protection against all evil. We should not be remiss in asking God to deliver us out of trouble and fight for us. Remind God of what you read in His word and remind Him of His promises. He will listen to your plea and supplication. Take comfort in God's rod and staff for protection.

***Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.***

David plainly states that after the prepared table and the anointing, his cup was not only full, but also running over. God was letting David's enemies see the favor given to David because of his faithfulness. God prepared a table with a bounty of food and drinks. He anointed his head with oil, which was customary for an honored guest in that time. Do our cups run over with goodness and bounty? Do we get the moral equivalent of an anointing and a prepared table? Do we remember the time Mary came to anoint Jesus' feet? Simon was thinking that Jesus did not know the woman was a sinner. Jesus told him a story about two debtors and asked Simon who would love the debtor more. Simon said the one who owed the most. Jesus went on to tell Simon about how the woman kissed his feet and anointed his feet with oil and dried with





her hair. Jesus compared that with Simon's lack of any attention to Jesus when he arrived. Jesus plainly told Simon that this woman whose sins were many was forgiven. Jesus should have been given royal treatment as David depicts in his praise of God. God, too, respects our sovereignty and our individuality. God in this Psalm is setting an example for us to follow. We are to treat others as we have been treated. Keep in mind our treatment from God and not from man. We often retaliate in fiery indignation against our brother and do not realize that is the equivalent of our treatment to God. If God is to chasten us he does it in love so we will respond to His loving kindness. Remember that we will have our feet under the table when we eat in the kingdom. We all will be one in mind and spirit. We all will celebrate the Passover on the same night! Pentecost on the same day! This will go on through eternity. We are told we will do in the kingdom as we do here on Earth. Maybe some thought would be in order so we make sure we please our God who shows us love in so many ways we cannot count.

***Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life: And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.***

David is saying that he will have a good life on Earth and live forever in God's Kingdom. That is the essence of what God wants for all of humankind. Jesus says, I came that they might



have life and they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10). David understood God's bountiful goodness. He himself had been privy to God's mercy. When David was chastened for numbering Israel, he chose punishment from God because he knew that God would cease the punishment in loving kindness. Men are not as merciful as God when those same men punish or chasten others for wrongdoing. Do you want to know that goodness and mercy will follow you all your life? We should all know our propensity for wrongdoing and hope there is a way out of our predicament. God will indeed show us mercy, but he may chasten us, as we need it to perfect us by trial and difficulty. Paul relates a concept for our learning in Rom. 2:4, "Or do you despise the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering: not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

Think about it! Man always desires to punish for wrong. God does us "good" to help us see His patience and goodness to help us repent! What a God we serve! Does it work? It should because Paul continues in verse 5, "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds." In verse 11, "For there is no respect of persons with God." We reap what we sow! What goes around comes around! God is not going to let anyone "in" "who are contentious, and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath" (verse 8).

David understood God very well. We need to experience His "goodness and mercy" on us as well. Jesus said, "Be you therefore perfect even as I am perfect." We too can become women and men after God's own heart. Remember, He is no respecter of persons! He treats everyone the same. Goodness and mercy, or indignation and wrath! Our choice!

***Please choose the former and live forever in the house of the Lord.***



## Harmony in the Church

On the day in Caesarea Philippi that Jesus Christ of Nazareth said He would build His church, He must have anticipated the many obstacles His Ekklesia—His cadre of called out ones—would face between the formal birth of the church on the day of Pentecost in the early A.D. 30s and Jesus' eventual return to earth to establish the Kingdom of God. Not the least of the obstacles has been a tendency toward disharmony in the Body of Christ, a condition that has manifested itself from the apostolic period to the present with little if any interruption.

The literature of the primitive church contains specific examples of conditions leading to disharmony among brethren and even among church leaders. In his farewell discourse to the elders at Ephesus, recounted in Acts 20:28-30, the Apostle Paul admonished his colleagues to monitor closely their own spiritual lives and shepherd the flock over which the Holy Spirit had given them guardianship. Paul said plainly that following his departure predatory individuals he described as wolves would come among the brethren and not spare the flock. Paul further warned that from within the church itself individuals would emerge and twist the truth of the gospel to draw away personal followings. He writes in II Timothy 4 of "... men ... [who do] not put up with sound doctrine," preferring instead to "... gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (verse 3). Paul further notes how they "... turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (verse 4). One finds this same general category of apostates mentioned in many passages in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of Paul, Peter, John, and in the epistle of Jude.



A man who promoted disharmony in the early church whose name was deemed worthy of remembrance for his deeds is Diotrephes. In III John the author tells of Diotrephes who "... [loved] to be first" (verse 9), spurned John and his traveling companions, refused to show brotherly love toward members of the church, opposed those who wished to do so, and expelled them from the assembly (verses 9-10). Truly what is past is prologue!

Of course not all instances of disharmony in the church involve serious doctrinal or administrative issues. What about the many mundane disagreements and wrongs, both real and imagined, with which most of us deal as

part and parcel of our church experience? Jesus said that love for one another would be the central characteristic of His followers. Indeed, it was and is the distinguishing factor that identifies true Christians to the world (John 13:34).

Unfortunately Christians do not always show forth that love. We offend each other. We transgress against each other. How are such infractions to be handled within a scriptural paradigm? Matthew 18:15-17 provides a methodology for resolving issues of various kinds between and among brethren at the personal level. The overall context for this scriptural process of conflict resolution is given in verses 11-14 and shows that Jesus' ultimate goal is to save what is lost to sin.

In that light if a brother or sister "sins" against another member of the church, the one wronged must go to the offender in private and point out his or her fault. If the transgressor hears the one offended and agrees to a redress of whatever the grievance might be, the Christian bond between them can be restored. If he or she does



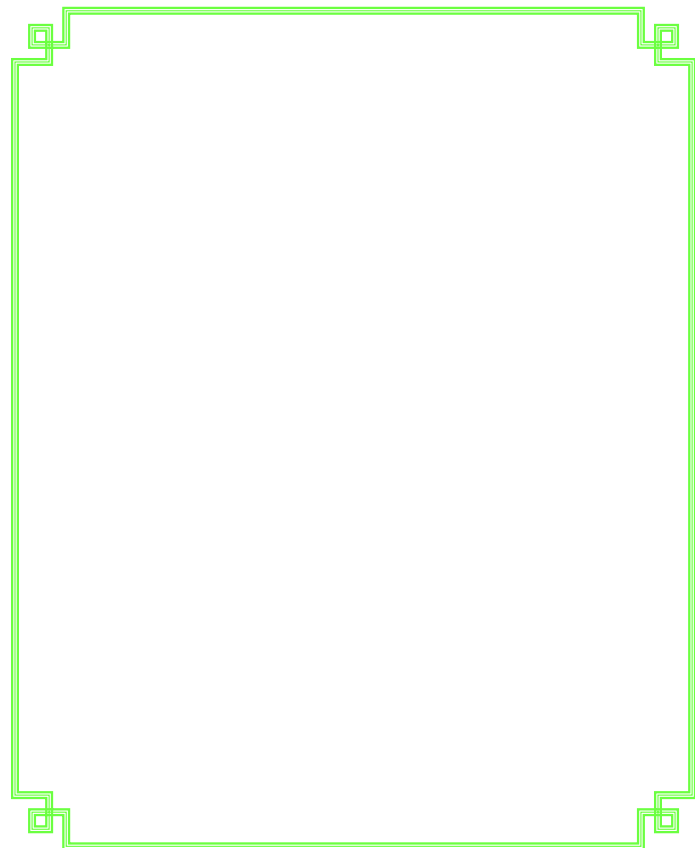
not hear the injured party's plea, however, the aggrieved brother or sister is to go back to the offender with one or two other brethren, ". . . so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (verse 16). If at this juncture the one who has sinned or has given offense refuses to hear the one wronged and his or her witnesses, the matter must be brought before the church. This step is one typically taken only in extreme circumstances. If the offender—now literally on trial before the entire assembly—still refuses to listen, he or she is to be treated as ". . . a pagan or a tax collector" (verse 17). To be thus anathematized would effectively preclude one's future fellowship within the assembly unless or until fruits meet for repentance were presented as evidence of a regenerate state.

While personal issues of offense among brethren should not be allowed to languish lest bitterness and further discord result, cases of sin or division affecting the assembly as a whole are more serious and must be dealt with swiftly and decisively. Sometimes a person or persons must be separated from the fellowship of believers because they remain in an unrepentant state after receiving less punitive degrees of correction.

The rebellion of Korah related in Numbers 16 provides a strong example for understanding how sin can affect the collective. One recalls how Korah, a Levite, launched a mini-rebellion and recruited a kind of grievance committee to present Moses and Aaron with a list of complaints. The complaints were (1) that Moses was no better than anyone else among the people; (2) that everyone in Israel had been chosen by the Lord for service; and (3) that the people—particularly Korah and his fellow rebels—did not need to obey Moses and Aaron. It is interesting to observe from the standpoint of logic how Korah skewed the first two elements of his argument, both of which essentially were true, to reach a wrong and ultimately disastrous conclusion. Numerous lessons are found in the story of Korah. One of the more salient is that wrong desire for what someone else in the church has, whether perceived authority, esteem, or position, often fuels one's discontent with his or her own status or role to an incendiary point. The next steps one takes, which can include attacks on local leadership or attempts to wrest scripture into conformity with one's personal goals and ends, conceivably could lead to a negative outcome analogous to that of Korah. Said outcome may or may not be as dramatic as the one Korah experienced, but why would one wish to test God in such manner? In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul elaborates to his audience the blessings, manifold and

wonderful, that believers in the Way have received from and through Jesus Christ. Paul metaphorically refers to the church as a body, temple, bride, and soldier, thus illustrating in his soaring, Spirit-inspired rhetoric how each member of the church is an interconnected and interdependent part of the house the Lord is building, a part that ultimately must work in harmony with all the other parts. Implicit in Paul's language is the admonition that believers should strive to eliminate all gossip, criticism, vanity, jealousy, lust, greed, anger, bitterness, competition, and backbiting from their individual and collective lives as these are hindrances to unity among brethren and invariably promote a spirit of disharmony in the Body of Christ.

Praise be to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that He foresaw the obstacles His church would have to surmount and provided, in the pages of the Bible, a blueprint for harmony in the church. That blueprint is the sure Word of God playing out in the lives of brethren in whom dwells the Holy Spirit, which in its elemental function is a Spirit of peace leading to harmony in all things.





## Suffer the Sermon

When there are itching ears about, the cure is to ...

***Preach the Word!*** *Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching (doctrine).— 2 Tim. 4:2*

Paul wrote to Timothy with a strong sense of urgency to preach the Word whenever possible and at all possible. That is his solution for a growing problem:

***For the time will come when they will no longer endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (myths).***

— 2 Tim. 4:3,4

Indeed such times did come for Timothy, and in these latter times we can attest to this occurring in the church today. It will help for us to heed this same warning and consider what we need to do to protect ourselves and others from turning aside to fables.

From the context given, those who turn aside to fables are true believers. We have no reason to believe that they are not, and should not get confused in thinking that this applies to false Christianity. It is a message to the Church of God today. Therefore, “they” are “us.” Any individual in the Church of God is in potential view here, including you. A sobering thought.





Fables are not to be mistaken to be stories of Medusa, Hercules or other obvious myths. The myths about which he speaks are very believable by the converted.

In Timothy 1:4, the suggestion is that myths surround speculations about the Old Testament accounts, misuse of the law, and fanciful ideas about not well understood scriptures or prophecies. They can be described as originating from the spirit realm (1 Tim. 4:1), the doctrines of demons, which because of their source are powerfully deceptive. Those who are proud in their scriptural knowledge are the least likely to admit having been drawn away by believing myths. In fact, itching ears are the ones that look for re-affirmation that they are “in the know.”

The word *endure* is important. It means to hold oneself up against, put up with, forbear or suffer. The Greek word occurs in at least 13 other cases in the New Testament. It is often translated as *suffer*. In one case it is in reference to persecution and tribulation (II Thess. 1:4). In Hebrews 13:22 it is written “... *suffer the word of exhortation.*”

This word *endure* (used in respect to sound doctrine) suggests its teaching requires a significant effort to hear, incorporate or measure up to. We are to face sound doctrine, even as it exposes the discomfiting truth about ourselves and our shortcomings. Sound doctrine tears down before it builds up; it won't build upon what is wrong. It calls for submission and obedience, yet our carnal nature resists these very things. It is hard to admit we are wrong, and it is especially hard for converted Christians to admit wrong thinking after many years in the faith, after we thought we had it all figured out.

To compensate, instead of standing up to sound teaching and its requirements, and especially when it becomes grating, Paul is aware of what humans do, i.e., replace

the teacher by directing our hearing elsewhere. The gospel calls for us to be honest, but men don't want to be honest. They want the right to live the way they want and do their own thing. They want to be secure in themselves, and will appreciate teachers who “tickle their ears” and assure them that they are just fine and well deserving and should not have to put up with meddling preachers.

Why would they no longer endure sound doctrine and turn aside to fables? First of all, Paul is not saying that they no longer decide to “believe” in God, but wish to have a substitute god. The Israelites created the golden calf of a god more familiar to them, believing it was the same God that delivered them. In the same way, many remain within the church culture but listen to a more acceptable message. It is our desire to look for re-affirmation that says

“I am okay; I am acceptable this way,” or “I have come this far and have not apostatized. That should amount to something.”

We are inclined to want to hear novelties such as fascination about the end times. Many in the church have been persuaded that the seven churches of Revelation are church eras, which is one of many novel inventions that are out there. Some are fascinated by cultural observances of ancient Israel, even visiting synagogues on the Sabbath.

What is healthy doesn't often go down easy. All of us have different buttons to push. For some it is tithing, for others elements that relate to the Sabbath, marriage, or anything that undermines our pride. For whatever reason, the human carnal mind resists God. In the end God is looking for perfection, and it will be on His terms.



*There he goes again, preaching about faith, love and obedience... It's getting on my nerves! I think it's time to split off!*



## Suffer the Sermon

### A Reality Check

Timothy was orthodox in his own views, and we have no reason to believe Paul wrote with concern for him having itching ears. For us however, we have reason to believe that we are in the very times where ears will get itchier and itchier. We need to do some self examination; otherwise, this article is just simple commentary.

We are interested in reaching those who are wavering, or have wavered from enduring sound doctrine and are attracted to those teachers and teaching that are more acceptable to their current thinking or relieves them from the kind of commitment that is necessary in following Jesus Christ. What can we do to ensure that we ourselves and others continue in sound doctrine?

Perhaps in the way self help books are written for assistance in self diagnosis, we can consider looking at possible symptoms of wavering minds and itching ears. Let's take a quick self test we have put together below, and as the self books advise, be honest with ourselves.

1. The preachers you listen to the most spend little or no time on the application of the content of their sermons or in their writings. Application is making the connection with your need to change and the scriptures.
2. You have left or are considering leaving a church because you are not learning anything. You feel you should be onto the "meat," which you believe are deep Biblical truths.
3. You feel that your vast knowledge of the Bible differentiates you somehow from your less learned brethren.
4. You have made yourself the judge of who should teach you and what teaching is acceptable.
5. Instead of embracing a given sermon message as a whole with gratitude, you take issue with any nuances in a message compared with your own understanding, and pick apart details you feel you understand

better than the preacher.

6. You prefer to stay at home when Sabbath fellowship is available, watching DVDs, keeping the instructors at a distance. After all, you've thoroughly disqualified local teachers being able to teach you anything.
7. You believe "... dissecting the word of truth" (1 Tim. 2:15) means getting into the Greek before one truly understands the scripture.
8. Speculative end time scenarios are of continued interest to you.
9. You have learned some nuggets of information or "Biblical truth" that you often share, and become contentious if others don't agree.
10. This article offends you in some way, or sounds judgmental or unfair.

### How Did You Do?

We need to put on the whole armor of God to defend ourselves against believing myths and the purveyors of these myths. The Internet is full of information that is deceptive because it is designed to appear true, and the best way to make it look true is if the teacher wholly believes it for himself.

If there is any advice to give beyond this in the brief space we have, try to work with a ministry that cares. This may be best characterized in the context of these scriptures by those who present their ministries as willing to suffer long (i.e., try to work with you and your stubborn objections to change) and that minister in season and out of season (when convenient or inconvenient, when they are paid or unpaid, and travel short or far). Also, multiple elders help bring a balance. Remember we are to examine ourselves and seek the wisdom from above as we will have to make many decisions during our sojourn, and whom we look to as our teachers is one of the most important ones we make.

Enduring sound doctrine will bring great personal reward in this present life and beyond our capacity to imagine in the Kingdom of God. Let's make it happen. Let's listen and submit to sound doctrine, because our lives depend on His voice.





# Questions & Answers

Send your questions to: [QandA@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org](mailto:QandA@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org)

## What is the way of Cain Jude speaks of?

We are familiar with the story of Cain who murdered his brother Abel. In the case of Jude's perspective, he probably has in mind the words spoken by the Lord to Cain in Genesis 4:6-7 prior to Abel's murder.

Cain became angry and his countenance fell (turned his face away from the Lord) because the Lord did not respect Cain and his offering. This may have had something to do with Cain's lack of sacrifice in his offering. Abel sacrificed the firstborn of his flock, which must have been a costly sum to give up. Nevertheless, it would appear that Cain had expectations from the Lord that not only did not come about but the Lord rejected his very attempt, which Cain took offense to.

We are to be as living sacrifices to God. In the context that is given by Jude, perhaps his concern is when our expectations of God do not come to fruition because of our sometimes lack of personal sacrifice, we too would become rebellious, and turn our malcontent onto elders and other leaders who appear, like Abel, more at peace with the Lord, and are offering instruction to them to do better.

For certain, however, Cain was instructed by God in the matter and was taught what was and was not acceptable behavior. In the end, Cain rejected God's word, apparently feeling no concern for judgment, as do those whom Jude has in mind here, who responded in brutish fashion when they do not get their way (verse 10).

## In 1 Timothy chapter 1, what does Paul mean when he writes the law is good if it is used lawfully, and that the law is not made for a righteous person?

It is unlawful to use the law as a hammer to control people. In the context that Paul is using, it is the motivation in applying the law that is important (verse 5). If the motivation comes from a pure heart, it looks to help people, and is expressed appropriately through verbal and non-verbal means. It requires wisdom in timing and having an understanding of the pressures that are on other people.

Paul's point to Timothy in applying the law to begin with this: The law is not made for stumbling, trying Christians who are making a sincere effort. If we stick to the New Testament definition, a righteous person is one who has been buried with Christ and raised with Him, and God therefore considers justified in the life of Christ. By having faith in Christ we are justified in this manner.

In the church, it happens that some do become dogmatic and hypercritical with the law, causing others making an effort to stumble and resent the church. We must consider and meditate on our motivations so that we use the law wisely.

**Editor's Note:** Questions and Answers for this first issue derived from the Acts and the Epistles Bible Study volume (see advertisement on page 3).





## First Century Theology

The followers of Jesus Christ of Nazareth in the first century church were zealous and engaged after having learned of the Messiah's wonderful and saving ways. Through our study of first century church history, we will learn how close we can be to the same fervor and commonality of purpose despite being plagued by many distractions, frustrations, and cares in the tumult of the twenty-first century. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:13, we are to grow "*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*" Paul understood unity to be problematic in the church and provides guidance, hope, and direction in his words.

With the exception of the Worldwide Church of God, until the early 1970s there were very few Sabbath keeping churches other than the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the various incarnations of the seventh-day keeping Churches of God. Forty to fifty years later there literally are hundreds of Sabbath keeping churches, organizations, and ministries with many variations of doctrine. Where among them is unity of and in the faith?

At this juncture in the history of the Church of God, unity unfortunately seems to be elusive. In I Peter 1: 1 we read, "Peter an Apostle of Jesus Christ, *to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.*" Peter notes separation of the early church by geography, not by doctrinal issues. Was the situation in Peter's time in any sense the same as what we experience in the church today? What is certain is that Peter emphasized a basic principle of the faith in I Peter 3: 8: "Finally, be you all of one mind."

Through the writings of Peter and of Paul, we

are encouraged to seek "oneness of spirit." Achieving this sort of unity is something that requires self-control and a sense of community.

Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers* tells of a hardy group of people from the Roseto Valfortore in the Apennine foothills of the Italian province of Foggia who migrated to America from 1882 to 1894 and settled in the rolling hills of Pennsylvania in an area they named Roseto. Among their more notable characteristics was a strong propensity toward unity, and over time the Rosetans became a tightly knit community.

In the late 1950s a physician named Stewart Wolf, a teacher at the medical school at the University of Oklahoma, came to a farm close to Roseto. He was invited by the local medical society to give a talk. After the talk one of the local doctors told Wolf about the anomaly of the Rosetans and how he never found anyone from Roseto under the age of 65 with heart disease.

In 1961 Dr.Wolf decided to investigate this unusual phenomenon. With the help of students and the assistance of John Bruhn, a sociologist from Oklahoma, residents were interviewed concerning their dietary habits and social activities, and information was gathered from their medical records. Local business activities were observed to find any additional information that might shed light





on the Rosetans' unique cardiovascular health and longevity. The study concluded the typical death of a Rosetan resulted from old age. Interestingly the community experienced no suicide, alcoholism, or drug addiction as a rule and had very little crime.

Apparent in the study was the singular cohesiveness of Roseto's social structure. Many homes had three generations of a family living under one roof. Families attended weekly mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and enjoyed feelings of belonging and the peace that church life brought to them. Over twenty-two separate civic organizations had formed in this town of just under 2,000 people. Also noted was an egalitarian ethos within the community that discouraged the wealthy from flaunting their success and helped the unsuccessful obscure their failures.



agony and hardship by their host. A molecule of sand or pebble enters the oyster and forms an irritant and activates the oyster's immune system. The oyster's immune system releases crystalline nutrients of conchiolin, calcite, and aragonite to cover the irritant in several layers known as nacre. The process continues until the pearl is removed or the oyster dies.

Edification is achieved through development and work. The Bible tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Edification can be achieved. We are called to teach others. This work is not limited solely

to ordained apostles, prophets, and pastors but to all believers called to do His work. We called to be kings and priests with Christ. We have a duty to grow in grace and knowledge as we experience pain and agony in our individual lives.

What made this community so successful overall? The study concluded it was because the Rosetans were a comm-unity. What a wonderful example for us to emulate!

Paul writes that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are given to us for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12). Why do we fail to properly edify—and unify—the body today? Is it Christ's will that we have the proper conditions extant at this time to achieve edification? We are warned in I Corinthians 11:19: "For there must be also heresies (factions/divisions) among you that they which are approved may be made manifest among you . . . ."

The ones manifested must remain steadfast and hold to the truth. Proved through trial they must not flinch under pressure. The apostles who wrote these actual words were persecuted during their lives and eventually martyred for their faith. In spite of all hardship, they continued in helping the called ones to hold fast in truth. Do we remember what Jesus said of the pearl of great price? Consider how pearls are developed through

Paul reminded Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not *endure* sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables". (II Tim 4: 3-4)

We know, for example, that many in the early church fought against circumcision and that it was a bone of contention that had to be broken. The Jerusalem Council headed by James decided the matter, and the apostles went their way preaching that circumcision was not required for salvation. A meeting of the ministry made a sound decision that became the new doctrine of their day. There was to be no more dissention over a divisive doctrine of the church.

From the Systematic Theology Project that was created many years ago in the Church of God, we have developed our manifold statements of belief which most understand and accept as doctrine. Yet in our time we must heed with diligence Paul's plea in Ephesians 4: 14, i.e., "*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men,*



and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive,” for today strong winds of doctrinal division abound. From church eras to God’s government on earth with an hierarchical premise, to the place of safety, to naming the two witnesses, to prophecy or headline theology, to the beast and false prophet and the 666 scenario, to sacred names, to calendar issues, to Israelites and the U.S. and British Commonwealth, to the day and date controversy over Passover & Pentecost, to watching Germany, to obsessing with the Bible being one-third prophecy, to naming your group Philadelphians and others Laodiceans, and finally to attempting to predict the date of the return of Christ, these winds of doctrine have not edified but have created doubt, misunderstanding, and division.

A sobering admonition from the writer of Hebrews also is worthy of our earnest consideration: “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we must give an account” (Hebrews 4:13). All followers, all teachers, all preachers, and all parents will give an account to Jesus Christ upon His return. All doctrinal winds are open unto the eyes of Him to whom we will give this account. There is

no need for undue worry or consternation, however, if we are diligent to remain close to the trunk of the tree of biblical faith and understanding and walk faithfully in the footsteps of our Lord.

A final word of encouragement from Paul bears examination. Our mission, if we decide to accept it, is stated in Ephesians 4:15: “*But speaking the truth in love, may [you] grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.*”

We all must speak the truth. As Pilate asked long ago, “What is truth?” The real gospel message is truth, and it is good news. And what is the good news? A partial answer is found in John 10:10, “...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” True believers are assured of an abundant life. Many who struggle through divorce, sickness, job losses, and a plethora of other conflicts may not believe that they really can have an abundant life.

But we all can have such a life in Christ! We are assured of a prosperous life when we are obedient. We are promised eternal life if we continue in the



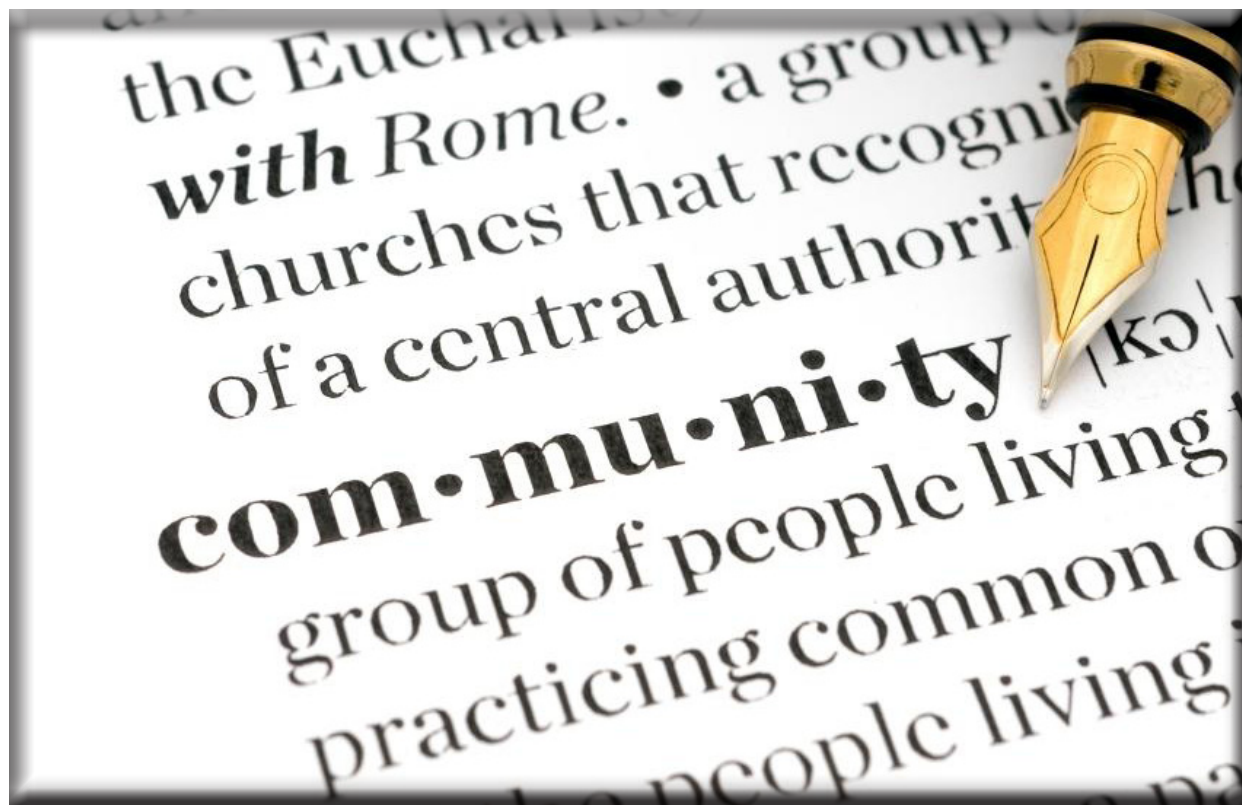
faith and continue in truth until our death. The real gospel message gives hope. There is no room for any doctrinal winds when we are busy living a full life, growing in grace and knowledge, and overcoming as Jesus instructs in Revelation chapters 2 & 3.

As we read Ephesians 4:11-16, we can imagine the mosaic of a man created by the depiction of hundreds of images of a head, an arm, a leg, and all other body parts. *“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part”* (verse 16).

Paul is describing a human body. He is relating to us that this body works together in unison and for the good of the whole like our human bodies do. When the lungs dispel carbon dioxide the heart

does not say, “What are you doing that for?” Or when the nose gets clogged and has to expel mucus the heart does not say, “Would you hold down the noise, please?” A pictorial mosaic is an art form that is often used to show a figure with multiple pictures that give it shading, texture, and form for the viewer. When looked at from a distance we can see the form. When we look up close, we can see the individual faces of real people. So it is with the mosaic Paul has created for us in his admonition to the brethren at Ephesus.

Let us look at the mosaic that is the Church of God from a distance and then up close. Let us examine it from a first century perspective on theology and from a contemporary one. If we do we will see each of our faces and those of our brethren throughout the ages in the glorious, unified picture of His family the Eternal is preparing.



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*The heavens declare  
the glory of God;  
and the firmament shows  
His handiwork,  
Psalm 19:1*



**Shepherd's Voice®**