



Shepherd's Voice[®]

Magazine

Winter 2023

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A Parable

Warning



Managing Editor: Jim Patterson

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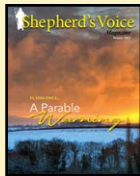
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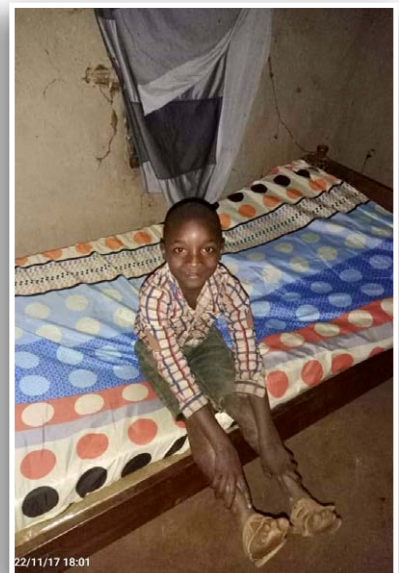
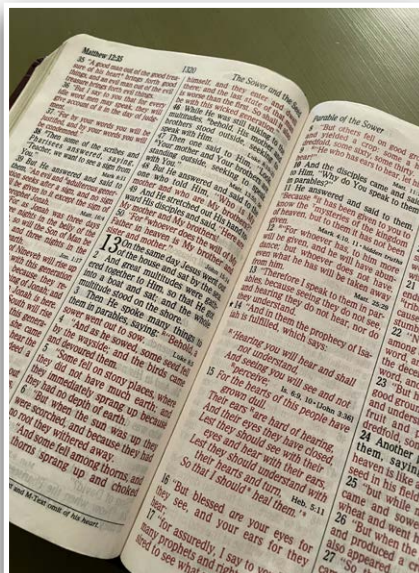
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Greetings!

It has not been since the early part of 2020 that we released our last physical issue of Shepherd's Voice Magazine and we are pleased to be able to produce this issue in early 2023. There have been a number of people asking when we would again provide a print issue and so here it is!

During the last three years *SVM* has been active on the internet with almost weekly sermon messages on our YouTube Channel. The channel was created in the beginning of 2020 and now has close to 150 videos that are accessible to anyone. Since its inception, there has been close to 13000 views. The message topics vary substantially and are designed to challenge some current thinking in the Sabbatarian community. We encourage readers to subscribe. The link can be found by searching Shepherd's Voice Magazine on the YouTube search bar.

The lead article of this issue, *A Parable Warning*, examines in some detail the parables of Matthew 13 in a manner that may confront some of our readers and indeed challenge common interpretations of them. If we can look at the greater depth these parables teach believers, we can better understand the environment of the kingdom community that we are citizens of – and the warning they give us. For example, have we considered that Christ interprets the field in which both the Master's seeds and the seeds of the enemy have been planted as the world (Matthew 13:38) and not the church as commonly thought? This can substantially start to change our thinking of the meaning of the parable and this article further explores that reality. The tares are agents of influence in the

whole world that we must consider ourselves in the midst of.

Additionally this article also examines the parables of the mustard seed that grows into a tree and that of the leaven that a woman hid in three measures of meal. These parables do not predict God's intentions of growth for His kingdom, but instead reveal unintended and nefarious activity in the kingdom community, which some may find hard to accept. Even so, at the end of the age Christ will gather out of His kingdom all things offensive (Matthew 13:41). We hope that this article proves to be insightful.

In the article *The Love of God and Enduring Till the End*, Tommy Willis offers up his very personal experience in overcoming. In his article, the emphasis is not to become offended by influences in the world and in the church community. The pressures of life can run us down but we are called to find strength in Christ. Tommy's personal testimony should encourage us in our own walk to know we are not alone in experiencing failures in faith and we encourage you to read the article.

Finally, please consider helping an independent ministry serving Kenyan brethren we feature in this issue. *Kenya Hands of Hope* is a trustworthy independent group based in the United States that corporate churches have refused to help.

May this issue be a blessing to you.

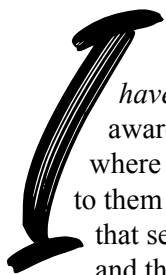
In Christ's service
Jim Patterson

A Parable Warning

An investigation into the warnings of the parables of Matthew 13 and the realities of God's kingdom in this age.

See, today ***I have set before*** you life and prosperity, death and adversity. ... I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live ... (Deuteronomy 30:15.19).

By Jim Patterson

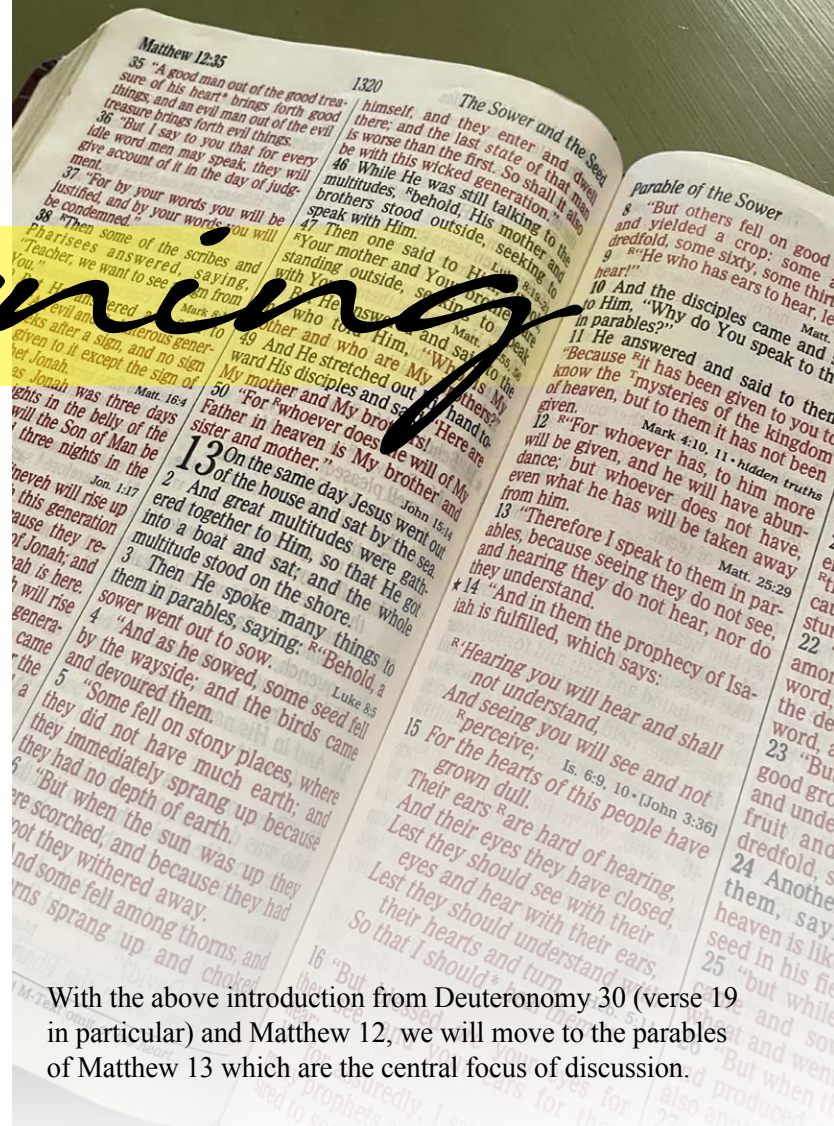


I have set before you stresses God's keen awareness of the world that awaits the Israelites, where He also enacts heaven and earth as a witness to them for the reality they face. It was God Himself that set the stage for what they would experience and the choices they would make. He does not say, in this context, that either one will trump the other in that particular time period, rather, the focus is on the response and reaction of Israel.

Jesus Christ came with the same message for His believers yet in a greater scope and totality. His same message is in full view and awareness of not only what will happen in the world, but more importantly in His body of belief, and even in the entire kingdom community.

"Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30 CSB).

Jesus spoke with regard to the growing resistance to His message and the pushback He received over the casting out of demons and His authority to do so. More significant is that His words directly confront those who get in the way of or resist the will of God and the work He came to fulfill. Ultimately what Jesus Christ lays before all is that we are either for or against Him. This reality will further define itself as this article proceeds in our examination of the scriptures.



With the above introduction from Deuteronomy 30 (verse 19 in particular) and Matthew 12, we will move to the parables of Matthew 13 which are the central focus of discussion.

Things not Always as They Appear

Matthew 13 contains insightful passages, which are important to grasp to have a broader understanding of the believer's experience as it puts the believer in step with how Jesus thinks. It also spans from an ancient knowledge of the kingdom to the end of the age, even after all enemies are destroyed, including the last enemy – death.

Before continuing we want to point out a key element, that He uses imagery to convey and also to veil a subject in a marvelous manner. In these parables, Jesus sometimes uses similar settings and similar imagery however these similar images do not always possess the same meaning. Sometimes they do align in meaning, but in a few of the parables in Matthew 13 we can suspect similarities will cloud their meaning.

Parable of the Sower

Then he told them many things in parables, saying, "Consider the sower who went out to sow. As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and



“So listen to the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and doesn’t understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path. And the one sown on rocky ground—this is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root and is short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away. Now the one sown among the thorns—this is one who hears the word, but the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown” (Matthew 13:18-23 CSB).

We have the farmer who sows, who we can assume is Jesus Christ. We have seed, and with a high degree of confidence, we can say that the seed is the Word of God (See Luke 8:11) and that the type of ground or soil (based on the response of that soil) determines the type of people or agency which is or is not gathered to Christ.

We also see that the increase, if we have indeed the good, fertile, responsive ground, is furnished at a tremendous rate when compared to how much was sown. We can safely say that the soil, or lack of soil, and what type of soil is the focus. It is the ‘Parable of the Sower’ because it is revealing the will of Christ as that of any good farmer - to utilize and transform good ground into profitable yield. It tells of what is required to grow His seeds.

Keeping these images in mind, we continue to the parable of the wheat and weeds.

Parable of the Wheat and Weeds

He presented another parable to them: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while people were sleeping, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and left. When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared. The landowner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Master, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the weeds come from?’

“‘An enemy did this,’ he told them.

“‘So, do you want us to go and pull them up?’ the servants asked him.

“‘No,’ he said. ‘When you pull up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At harvest time I’ll tell the reapers: Gather the weeds first and tie them in bundles to burn them, but collect the wheat in my barn.’” (Matthew 13:24-30 CSB)

devoured them. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn’t have much soil, and it grew up quickly since the soil wasn’t deep. But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it. Still other seed fell on good ground and produced fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times what was sown. Let anyone who has ears listen.” (Matthew 13:3-9 CSB).

The emphasis of this agrarian example is on the ground where the seeds landed. We have:

- **The wayside**, where nothing could grow because the ground was too hard.
- **Stony places** where the soil was thin and the seed would spring up quickly, but was unable to take root.
- **Good ground** describes soil that is fertile and a good, productive crop grows.
- **Among thorns** describes soil that is fertile but thorns and weeds grow there as well as grain. This will be the larger part of our focus.

Matthew records an explanation for this parable to Jesus’ disciples which He gave exclusively to them apart from the larger crowd. Matthew does not record an interpretation for the other parables, which does not mean they were not given.¹

¹ Mark 4:34 records that Jesus explained all (Greek:panta – the whole) to His disciples privately.



The parable of the wheat and weeds changes the images slightly from the parable of the sower. In the parable of the sower the seed represents the Word of God as we noted. Here on the other hand, what is planted (in this case wheat) represents the body of responsive believers, and they are growing.

With Christ's decision to provide another parable there is a high probability that the point therefore is now different; the parable of the sower and the types of ground shows how we potentially receive and respond to Jesus Christ, and the parable of the wheat and weeds is in reference to how God will divide the crops at the time of harvest, and at the time of the end. Although, in both cases we have a similar Landowner, Master, Farmer or Sower as a figure

The translation of the Greek term *zizanon* (a kind of darnel resembling wheat – Strong's 2215) is often translated tare. A tare or darnel is an injurious weed resembling wheat when young and is almost indistinguishable from wheat as it grows until the ears sprout, ahead of the harvest. Tares also develop fungus that is sickening to grazing animals.

These first two parables are in keeping with an agrarian theme, but there are some differences, including what the two parables are about.

In the parable of the sower the seed represents the Word of God as we noted. Here, on the other hand, what is planted (in this case wheat) represents the body of responsive believers, and they are growing.

The parable of the sower and the types of ground shows how we potentially receive and respond to Jesus Christ, and the parable of the wheat and weeds is in reference to how God will divide the crops at the time of harvest. Although in both cases we have a similar Landowner, Master, Farmer or Sower as a figure of Christ, the other images or figures say something else.

Something Else

As we have noted, the wheat is the body of faith. With the weeds we see the representation of Satan's agency and influence.

Notice how the enemy – Satan – sneaks in while people are asleep or are unaware, plants his weeds or counterfeits amongst Christ's wheat and leaves.

of Christ, the other images or figures are present to say something else.

In verse 28 the landowner's servants ask if they are to dig up the weeds. In response the landowner, Jesus Christ, says absolutely not. Three things He makes clear:

- Doing so might uproot, or destabilize, destroy or impede the growth of His valued crop to come.
- The weeds are to be allowed to grow alongside the wheat.
- That He will do the separating, in His time, at the time of harvest.

Commonly the weeds of the parable are interpreted as false brethren planted in the church. Although this can be true to some extent, this is not the main illustration of the parable as otherwise Jesus would have interpreted the field as the church, the ekklesia. Instead, He specifically interpreted the field as the world, which is significantly different than the church (Matthew 13:38).

These weeds represent or include all types of agents of evil, of spirit and of flesh, knowingly and unknowingly, animate or inanimate in the world where God has planted His wheat.

...The weeds are the children of the evil one (Matthew 13:38).

Thus, those who are vehicles of these agents, spiritual or flesh, are those who are cast out and burned.

The parable of the sower spoke of the individual types of ground being affected by different means of Satan's tampering, including rocky shallow ground, the wayside where birds carry the seed away and consume it, and weeds or thorns that choke the seed thus showing the potential that good ground, where there is growth of the seed, can be robbed. As long as God's people are in the world, there will be intrusive elements in teaching, experience and unbelievers that have been intended by the enemy to negatively affect them.

This is a crucial element for our consideration given the tone and content of many messages coming from ministries across the Christian spectrum, particularly in the developed west. Consistently emanating from lecterns and media programs is the angst regarding the welfare, status, economic stability, personal rights, and strength of the nation state. In particular is the persistent message in widespread teachings that would have believers concern themselves that, as the body of Christ they are to engage and be engulfed in matters regarding the welfare of their nation – expending energy and resources to influence public policy and societal morality.

If the servants (not to be confused with the reapers who are the angels) and other participants in the welfare of the field make an emphasis on 'digging up' the surrounding weeds of the world in disobedience to the Landowner, then they will inevitably undermine the faith of the crop they believe they are caring for. This has already occurred, as evidenced in the confusion and desperation in the body of believers. Dominating the conversation are the prayers offered to God on the matters of abortion and concerns over moral decay. Even border security, national and economic securities and military influence abroad are prevalent in prophetic messages offered out as warnings to the church and the world. Many ministries call on the nations to repent and turn back to God as they look to dig up the weeds that surround them in their world.

Jesus Christ shared this parable for a purpose as God's people are participants in the kingdom of heaven. The parable is more than merely informative as there are potentially real consequences if we fail to integrate the warning.

The instruction to the servants is to not interfere where God has a plan. That plan, already in place, puts believers in this world as a sojourners, not a citizens of it where they need to additionally direct their faith towards persistence



In the Christian west, the domestication of the Christian faith has been underway for so long that many fail to recognize and manage the distinctions between their citizenship in heaven and their temporal presence on earth.



and welfare of the nation. The apostles declared the citizenship and identity of the believer is of heaven:

*For I have **often told you**, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame; and **they are focused on earthly things. Our citizenship is in heaven**, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:18-20).*

A focus on earthly things are all things the enemy can offer that appear as good to concern the wheat with, including the moral and economic health of the nation-state.

In the Christian west, the domestication of the Christian faith has been underway for so long that many fail to recognize and manage the distinctions between their citizenship in heaven and their temporal presence on earth. The tares (elements of domestication) have been integrated into the harvest to such a degree that only a few of the servants today can sense the apostle Paul's angst. Even so, the studious servants are to maintain the directive of preparing the harvest irrespective of the weeds, which are now maturing in the world with noxious inedible fruit that is bitter and choking. Only Christ, in the reckoning of those who are "against" Him at the final harvest itself, will make the full distinction (Matthew 13:41), and the patience of the saints is needed in not allowing the distractions of the world to choke their growth as they "gather with" Him.

As a mental exercise we can imagine if the apostles Peter and Paul were to visit the modern congregational setting, they may encounter messaging quite foreign coming from its respected leaders. Instead of an emphasis on what is clearly laid out in their teachings to focus on the things above (Colossians 3:1-2) and setting their minds towards a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:11-13), they would hear an emphasis on preservation of the nation state, renouncements and denouncements of institutions and society, while espousing a moral high ground for doing so. Such messaging churns up hate for everything around us, dismay and fear.

We are to take Paul's words more seriously now than ever as he wraps up his epistle to the Romans to *not conform to this world* (Romans 12:2) by allowing the distractions and destruction to grow without our interference.

The choice is clear – choose life or death (Deuteronomy 30:15), choose between the furnace of fire (Matthew

13:30,40) or to be gathered in the barn (Matthew 13:30) and shine forth as the sun (Matthew 13:43) on the other.

The next two parables provide another example of Jesus Christ having a keen awareness of the state of the kingdom, in terms of the 'present kingdom' being made up at this time by the body of believers past and present, His servants in the heavenly realm and also what they are up against.

The Ambitious Mustard Seed

He presented another parable to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It's the smallest of all the seeds, but when grown, it's taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches" (Matthew 13:31-32).

Matthew does not provide a specific interpretation of the elements of this parable as He had done with the previous two.² The majority of Christian interpreters use this parable as a description of the growth of the church or the community of believers to espouse the success of the church and ultimately the kingdom of God. However, when examined along with the context of the parables before and after it, and Christ's general interpretation in verse 41, the parable demands to be approached differently.

We see again a man with a field who has planted this mustard seed. The Master has planted a seed, not a tare, but it is the growth of the seed that comes into question. Jesus is not highlighting the glory of His kingdom at this juncture which is the common interpretation. He instead is describing an abnormal growth to be avoided, or perhaps put in better terms, an unpleasant and uncomfortable but temporal reality to be understood in regards to the kingdom. It ought to be read as a description of corruption in and around the body of believers, in similar fashion to the wheat and the weeds.

We are accustomed to the mustard seed being likened to an image of faith (Matthew 17:20, Luke 17:6). Yet as we have alluded to earlier, these similar images do not always possess the same meaning. This mustard seed, though having humble beginnings, has grown to an unnaturally large state. It is the largest (Greek *meizon* (Strong's 3173 – large, great in the wildest sense) compared to the rest of the produce of the soil. Mustard plants are more like a bush and do not grow into an enormous size or tree (Greek: *dendron*) in which birds can rest in its branches. It

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God

Unique to the Gospel account of Matthew is the expression "the kingdom of Heaven" mentioned thirty-two times. The parallel expression "the kingdom of God" (for example Matthew 13: 31-32 and Luke 13:18-19 and elsewhere) is found in the other gospel accounts.

Christ spoke in Aramaic, which was the common language of the people he interacted with. Heaven is frequently used for God Himself as a figure of speech (e.g., Luke 15:21 "I have sinned against heaven"). It has been suggested Christ spoke the same expression and did not interchange the words, but Matthew was inspired to translate the Aramaic to Greek, so he retained the figure of speech.¹

It has also been suggested that Matthew, a Jew writing to Jews, did not want to offend his audience who were sensitive regarding the use of the name of God. However, Matthew uses "kingdom of God" five times, and in Matthew 19:23-24 he uses both in quoting Christ.

For this author, there is no clear resolution in terms of any significant difference between the two expressions. For the purpose of this paper, they are considered to mean the same thing and are interchangeable.

1 Bullinger, E. W., *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 114, (Michigan, Kregel Publications, 1990), 155

2 Neither does Luke in his account in Chapter 13.

is an annual that dies every year. It is impossible for it to grow into a tree.

Instead of the humble plant, it has obtained a large, abnormal and ungainly growth.

When trees are symbolically used in the Bible, they have been used to represent authority, power and dominion – someone in authority, for example Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4.10-12) and Pharaoh (Ezekiel 31). Therefore this seed had ambition, and in its growth and self-perceived service to God, became lofty with pride and concern for self-sought domination. Have we witnessed and experienced such attributes in the world of Christianity before?

Ambition and validation can be powerful elements of human nature both in individuals and in a collective – where they become particularly manifested. The first instincts of some might suppose this to be a fully counterfeit church such as the Roman church that has grown into a worldwide institutional power with influence having many protestant offshoots, or branches. This may be so, but the context of the parable is still the kingdom of God – the seed was authentic – there is ambition being exercised amongst and against those entering the kingdom and its inhabitants. There is an unauthorized, but permitted, influence.

The interpretation of the Great Commission, as instituted by Jesus Christ that, for the process of the gospel to go to the ends of the earth, has caused some to assert that such a commission must primarily be done through organizational structures that must be well-funded. Corporations in the secular world operate with the same goals however, those goals being growth and revenue. That naturally leads to classical corporate structures in churches where the ambition becomes growth of the church and growth of revenue, and not the glory of God.

There is also a natural tendency in people to gravitate to groups and organizations that emanate prestige and status with big programs and dynamic leaders. Ambition is contagious in this way.

Christ indeed instructed us to take the gospel to everyone, but it must be done His way. His way is to not put any under a heavy yoke:

“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” (Matthew 11:29-30).

To not develop hierarchies:

“But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren” (Matthew 23:8).

To not self-promote:

For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake (2 Corinthians 4:5).

and not be motivated by money. When any one of these develop sufficiently, they become an element that resists Jesus Christ and act against Him.

We also see birds arriving and finding a place in the branches. The birds of the air are not songbirds, but birds of prey – buzzards and vultures. We see

in history, even after humble beginnings, how sustained organizational growth is quickly mandated in the culture of most endeavors in both secular and religious arenas. These types of environments attract and cultivate evil mindsets and evil men – the birds of prey – who see opportunity and reason to establish authority and control for themselves.

Thus we see something in the kingdom community being produced entirely different than the effective, pungent, but low-profile approach to engaging humanity that the Lord desired. We see this expressed of Christ Himself:

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;



Mustard seeds do not grow into large dominating trees but are annuals that die every year. Instead, this seed has large abnormal growth and gives home to birds of prey

*I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out”*
(Isaiah 42:1-3 CSB, (see also Matthew 12:16-20)).



Christ did not come to serve and witness ostentatiously or brazenly, nor would He advertise Himself (as in the fashion of larger ministries do today). His ministry would be quiet, non-aggressive, and unthreatening. We are called to walk and conduct ourselves as He did.

This is how He intended His church to be, a family community going forth conveying the message of Christ with sincerity and truth – having a community example to the world. It is important to remember it was still an authentic seed that was sown to the best of our knowledge. Yet Christ had no illusions as to the potential of what the growth of that seed could become. He already knew of the corruption that would always try to overtake it. By some nefarious influence in the kingdom, it can be corrupted with ambition to get ahead of the Head of the church.

Anyone who runs on ahead and does not remain in the doctrine of Christ [that is, one who is not content with what He taught], does not have God; but the one who

Corruption from the Onset

An examination of the 1948 Constitution and bylaws of the Radio Church of God which became the Worldwide Church of God will provide some further insight.

With a cursory review of this document we see indications that the primary objective was to preach the gospel to all nations which was generally accepted in Christian circles. There is however a bias towards western democracies. The second objective states the following:

Article II – OBJECT

2) to effectively warn the people of the United States, the British Commonwealth of Nations, and the Democracies of Northwestern Europe whom we understand to be the descendants of the House of Israel, of the divine judgments from Almighty God prophesied soon to fall on our peoples in punishment unless we repent of and turn from our increasing sins and violations of God’s laws, and return to national and individual total reliance upon the God of our fathers;

Comment: Embedded here is the teaching of Anglo-Israelism which predated the existence of that organization. Article II includes a call to action to warn certain nations of calamity and encourage a return to a theocracy (that has never existed in these nations). Though this cannot be scripturally supported, it was and is very influential in membership behaviors and world views.

The United States and the British Commonwealth in Prophecy in its various forms since its first version (1942) issued by Herbert Armstrong was arguably the most heavily advertised, and certainly the most requested piece of literature in the organization’s history.¹ The teaching was almost ubiquitous in other booklets and magazine articles on prophecy produced by the church.

Due to its influence and capture of new converts to the organization that brought on its growth, subsequent offshoots of the organization are compelled to maintain an Anglo-Israelism teaching and publish literature in support of it. This author is aware of ministers in these organizations that reject the teaching, but fear to publicly oppose it for the sake of appearances and possible retribution by influential church executives. Here again the prevailing underlying doctrine of growth trumps scriptural obedience.

¹ Barrett, D. V., (2013), *The Fragmentation of a Sect: Schism in the Worldwide Church of God*, Oxford University Press, p. 34

continues to remain in the teaching of Christ does have God, he has both the Father and the Son (2 John 9, Amplified Bible).

This publication is being produced to serve the Sabbatarian community and it is therefore targeted and empathetic to that spectrum of experience. The parables in Matthew 13 may be troubling for some as this article unfolds as it may begin to resonate with experience in the church of God. The Sabbatarian believers are not immune.

A core teaching of the Sabbatarian community is doctrine of the Sabbath itself, and for those who observe the Holy Days and what they depict in the way of God's plan of salvation are also central tenets of doctrinal belief. What is not as obvious to many believers or even detected is what we will call the *prevailing doctrine*. It is an unauthorized doctrine, and it has more than a subtle influence on the behaviors of individuals and collectives in the Sabbatarian church of God community.

The prevailing doctrine is not a statement in a set of doctrinal beliefs or precepts, but forms a background in all that is taught as truth – *it is the doctrine of growth*.

Kingdom and Church Conflation?

The question should be asked by those reading this paper whether we are conflating the church of God and the kingdom of heaven. This would be a mistake; why would He liken the kingdom of Heaven with nefarious matters of the world and the environment in which the church exists?

The church is a body of believers on earth and is not the kingdom of heaven. Kingdom is the English translation of the Greek term *basileia*, which means dominion, royal power, kingship, or rule.¹ Christ is speaking in broader terms of God's sovereignty. The church is under the dominion of God, but the church itself is not the kingdom. The church has no dominion. Unlike the kingdom, it cannot be inherited, and it cannot be received. The church in this world is temporal and will not always exist, but those who are in it are citizens of heaven already (Ephesians 2:6) – all who are in the church are under His dominion.

So long as there has been a King of heaven, there has been a dominion under Him. There was an ancient state of the kingdom, a present and a future. Christ spoke in terms of all times in these parables.

We see the past:

All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables;

¹ Refer to Thayer's Greek Lexicon for further explanation.

It was still His seed that He had sown so there may be elements that are still authentic. Yet, in all that growth there is so much of it that is more than originally intended.

Many readers of this publication are familiar with the Worldwide Church of God and its corporate and independent offshoots. This was a Sabbatarian corporate organization that formerly began by incorporating itself in the mid 1940s as the Radio Church of God. This organization grew to a substantial size and produced much literature and TV programs that influenced the lives of many globally to come to the realization of the Sabbath and Holy Days, including exposing the many false teachings that prevail in mainstream Christianity today.

Yet as the parables of Mathew 13 warn us, though this organization had humble beginnings with a number of authentic teachings its founders were passionate about, what quickly emerged were certain teachings and systems that were embraced that led to ambitious growth (see "Corruption from the Onset" this article). The tare seeds of influence for apostasy were planted very near the onset, and grew together with the seeds the Master had planted. The unleavened bread of fellowship was quickly corrupted with hierarchal

and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

*"I will open My mouth in parables;
I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 13:34).*

And we see the future:

The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:41-42).

At these times and the time in between, even under His dominion, nefarious activities of the enemies of God, including death, exist somewhere (See 1 Corinthians 15:26). He still reigns over it. Christ the King, once all enemies of the kingdom are cast out, will hand the kingdom over to the Father.

These parables therefore teach us the realities of the kingdom in this age as it pertains to the church of God experience. Perhaps it may be helpful to interpret "*The kingdom of heaven is like*" more specifically as "*The kingdom of heaven is presently like*". We can say this confidently given Christ's interpretation of the present reality in Matthew 13:41.



control, sectarianism, and false doctrines marketed as new truth. This continues with many of the offshoots of that organization today in both worse and milder forms.

We must not to dismiss the Worldwide Church of God and its corporate and independent offshoots as altogether apostate as the seed that was sown from God. There are many that may identify or have identified with these groups who are authentic believers – the wheat – and have contributed to the commission Christ has set for out His church and have born fruits of the Spirit. The complication in dealing with the intrusive foreign elements ultimately rests with Christ’s judgement.

The Permeating Leaven

Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened” (13:33 NKJ).

Here again we are confronted with a strange difficulty in that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, and leaven in the New Testament is never elsewhere associated with anything good. It is always expressed as a type of evil. It is identified with hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), rationalism (Matthew 6:6-12), and materialism of king Herod (Mark 8:15). Paul spoke of leaven in a most negative way in Corinthians Chapter 5. How do we navigate through this

and what further insight does the parable offer us that would be consistent with the parables we have discussed?

If the parable ended on the mention of leaven, we would be trapped to think that the kingdom of heaven was like sin, and that would not be acceptable. It is how that leaven got in, the certain specified amount of meal of three measures, and how much it permeated that provides us the resolution.

The phrase “*three measures of meal*” appears before in scripture as a meal offering, and the disciples likely recognized its significance. In Genesis 18 Abraham is visited by three unexpected men as he and Sarah resided by the terebinth trees of Mamre. We see that it was the Lord Himself visiting Abraham along with two angels. In a manner of hospitality, Abraham had Sarah hurriedly help in preparing the meal:

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes” (Genesis 18:6).

This is unleavened bread hurriedly prepared in cakes. The three measures of meal became the symbol of fellowship with God and one another in the tradition of Abraham’s descendants. This wonderful picture of fellowship the disciples would have quickly recognized. Three measures of meal (an ephah) also appears when the angel confronted Gideon (Judges 6:19), and when Hannah dedicated her son Samuel at the temple she took with her an offering of three measures of meal, again unleavened (1 Samuel 1:24).

“Breaking bread” together has always been a special community element in sharing in the needs of life. Even Paul considered it as the unleavened bread of sincerity, honesty, and truth (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). In the community of believers it represents an opening of understanding of one another, humility without hiding behind artificial facades. I think we can agree that it is special to God that we be as open and honest as we can and regard each other appropriately (Philippians 2:1-4). Eating together is a channel for this to occur, and is also symbolic of the whole of fellowship.

So the disciples heard something very familiar, and yet very foreign within a short parable that is one sentence long. They were immediately challenged with three measures of meal, unleavened – authentic and sincere, yet with a woman having her own interests, hides leaven until all is leavened. The conflict is evident, and it must have provoked within the disciples, as it should with us now, that there is something about this parable that requires serious consideration.

Leaven is something which disintegrates, breaks down, and corrupts. Leaven Biblically is disruptive and corrupting. It causes a puffed-up swollen condition. With these properties, it symbolizes the destruction of honesty and an obfuscating of reality. That is what yeast does when you put it into bread. At a certain point the baker arrests the action of the yeast by baking the bread in the oven. But leavened bread will always spoil far more quickly than unleavened bread.

So now with this picture of the parable, we see this unauthorized influence of leaven and how it has worked itself in the kingdom of God through recorded history, before the foundation of the world, from the time of the beginning of the church of God with Abel and Seth to our present day. During all this time it was often the very ones who were to encourage the fellowship of God to be free from the corruption of the leaven who, allowed God's house to be permeated by it. In our more contemporary experience, these are the leaders – the pastors, teachers and elders, but those who enabled them are also culpable.

Yet perhaps we should not be too critical as there appears to have been a protracted influence of the leaven before the foundation of the world, and a cycle of unleavened and leavened occurrences in local fellowships of people as they arise and fall. Each time the leaven begins to permeate, fellowship is disrupted and often destroyed. The process of scattering, reassembling possibly, then begins again.

A Lesson

The astonishing lesson of these parables takes us again to a teaching of Christ Himself about entering the kingdom of God – to follow the narrow path of entrance despite the influence of worldly external cares, tares, ambitions, and all the types of leaven. Many, unfortunately, will take the path of destruction – to succumb to worldly cares, be distracted by the weeds, become overly ambitious in their service, and be disconnected from the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

God is faithful – He does not call people to fail, He calls them to succeed, and will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are capable of resisting (1 Corinthians 10:13). Yet, it must be that we are hewn in the roughness of the quarry to fit perfectly together in the kingdom (Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:1-5, 1 Kings 6:7).³

³ See "Stones for an Unseen Building", Shepherd's Voice Magazine, Fall 2011

We return to our opening words that introduce these parables – to gather with him or scatter to oblivion or, at best, frustration, angst and confusion.

The General Interpretation

Christ gives us the final words on these series of parables:

Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels,

and they will gather out of His kingdom

all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matthew 13:40-43).

Clearly there are offensive elements in the kingdom now that are to be disposed of, including death. The end of the age is at the end of the 1000-year reign of Christ on earth, and not at Christ's return. The apostle Paul reflects on this future event:

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

Conclusion?

After the triplet of parables in verses 47 to 50 Jesus concludes perhaps with a final parable to the disciples:

Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?"

They said to Him, "Yes, Lord."

Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Matthew 13:51-52).

Matthew helps us a little in interpreting this parable in earlier verses of this chapter:

All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that

it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

*“I will open My mouth in parables;
I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 13:34).*

Here Matthew quotes Psalm 78 recorded by Asaph. In brief, Asaph reflected on the history of his people – their record of forgetfulness, faithlessness, foolishness and failure and he sought to understand what it all meant. Asaph helped his readers understand the enigma (mystery) of their history. He explained aspects of their history that were previously unknown, because it is not just the history of Israel, it is also a history of God.

He used parables; by comparing various things he gave them a broader understanding of history. Matthew relates this to Christ’s purposes in the use of parables.

The good scribe therefore also considers what it all means and further understands the kingdom of God throughout history and finds the answers that are appropriate. He has the insight of the psalmist – there is treasure in these insights, and these insights come from a place that is new and old.

The scribe can look at the new and the old and the broader context of the history and dispense the wisdom of God appropriately.

*Final Thoughts - Is Unity
in the Body Possible
Today?*

Though differences may and do exist, along with flare ups in contention given we are all imperfect – the answer to this question is that disunity or a division has never really existed. It is not possible that Christ be divided (1 Corinthians 1:13). We either are in the process of gathering with Him or we are interfering with the kingdom and against Him. We are either growing in grace and knowledge or contributing to disunity and corruption.

From these parables we see it to be unwise to uproot the weeds, to cut down trees or attempt to de-leaven the kingdom ourselves. This ultimately is in the hands of the Son of Man and His angels. Instead, it is the calling of the wise stewards of the kingdom of God to know and navigate the corruption that exists in its present state. We must remember that Jesus taught these parables

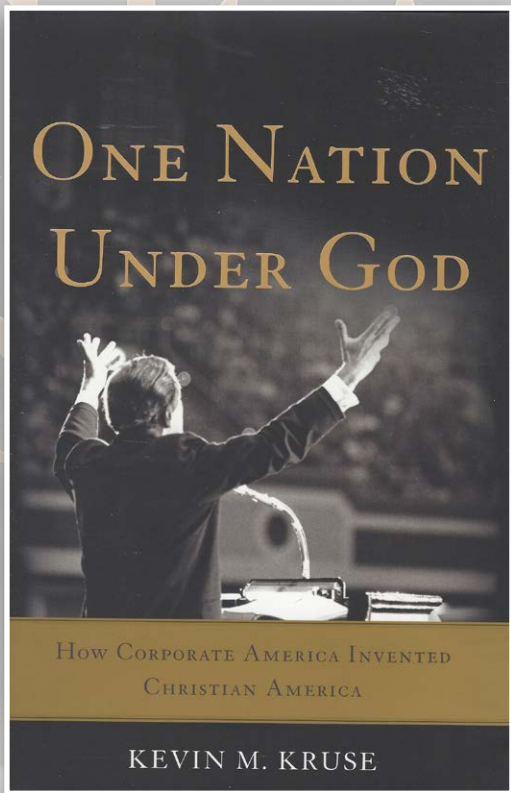
privately to His disciples and in that context it is not paramount that they be understood by all believers in all times. For unbelievers and those who are misguided in their intentions they are riddles not understood, but are highly illuminating illustrations for those accepting their meaning. Even so, for those gathering with Him the corruption in the kingdom in this age may not be of any particular influence on them – this too is a blessing.

Many look to the early progress of the church as described in the book of Acts as an ideal and desired model of growth – yet we are not particularly instructed that this is the model for us to imitate, nor use as a metric to measure ourselves against. The ripening of the tares as we near the time of the harvest, unauthorized ambitious growth of the mustard seed coming to fruition as a grotesque tree, and the fully permeated lump that the kingdom has become are offensive– but that is the reality. For God to be pleased with us it is not necessary for a restoration of the church of God to what can be described by the early church broadly speaking, or from any other desirable time in the past – because that is not the goal. We are working and living in our present – not the conditions of others. Jesus Christ as the Head of His church is not interested in being an arbitrator and peace maker between those who gather with Him and those who scatter, and He also prohibits His own servants from doing so as we can see.

Some have taken up a sincere cause to create bridges amongst various factions in the Sabbatarian churches of God – but such endeavors, no matter the sincerity, can instead fuel the scattering instead of the gathering. In the broader sense we do not want to unwittingly bring together those who are scattering, having agendas for growth and other attributes that these parables reveal and their negative influences, with those who are gathering with Him.

Perhaps we can say, considering the state of the kingdom now, we must endeavor to gather with Him first before we can truly gather together with each other.

If we instead adhere to the wisdom and grace of God, we will find greater opportunities in local congregations that are familial in nature and adhere to the apostolic teachings that nurture the growth of individuals and encourage the gifts of the spirit. If there is to be a revival it will be in local fellowships with openness, oneness and transparency between the brethren. This is the environment that the Spirit of God will move and we are still free to do this. It is still the three measures of meal we can share where God Himself feels invited. ■



Review by Jim Patterson

For this reader, this book will antagonize virtually all of the Christian Right and much of the Sabbatarian community who may be entrenched in the idea that America was founded on Christian principles. Regardless of persuasion and potential disagreement with the book’s thesis, the historical narrative and commentary will be insightful to any professing Christian in America and elsewhere.

In this provocative book *One Nation Under God*, author Kevin M. Kruse, professor of history at Princeton University, argues that the idea of the United States as a Christian nation does not find its origins with the founding of the United States or the writing of the Constitution. Kruse does not frame his argument around the common platform that includes the endless parsing of the intent and quotations of the founding fathers. This he avoids simply by stating the wall of separation between Church and state as coined by Thomas Jefferson and reveals the preference of the founding fathers and is therefore a settled issue.

Instead Kruse presents a strong case that the contemporary notion of America, as specifically consecrated by God to be a beacon for liberty, was the work of corporate and religious figures opposed to Roosevelt’s New Deal designs for centralized control over social and economic affairs in America with its interference with free enterprise. Though there is an historical record of rhetoric that may support earlier claims that America claimed a Godly anointing, Kruse sees, as this reader does, that it was not until the mid-20th century political and corporate landscape that such beliefs began to truly take shape.

While the insecurities of the nation evolving out of the onset of the Cold War contributed to the growth of post WWII religious fervor, Kruse argues that this was not the major contributor. Kruse insists that it was in this fertile ground that combatting the New Deal along with the influence of the Methodist minister Abraham Vereide in Washington D. C. and his prayer breakfasts, along with the evangelical crusades of Billy Graham and others that led to an increase from stagnant 49% national church attendance to close to 70% church attendance by the end of the 1950s.

For those of us in the body of Christ in the Western World, understanding the influences of our contemporary environment in which we worship can be a valuable education. Regardless of any biased resistance, or biased assistance, to Kruse’s historical thesis, his work should be seen as having valuable insights.

In this issue of *SVM* in the article *A Parable Warning*, we discuss in detail how Christians must be aware of certain nefarious environmental influences in the kingdom community. Christ interprets the field in the parable of the wheat and weeds as the world (not the church) in Matthew 13:38, and the weeds sown by the enemy are worldly influences and the agents of these influences. The covenant Christ established does not prohibit a Christian’s life participation in the world, but limits our loyalties and responsibilities to it – to be in the world and not of it. Through a spiritual set of eyes, the reader of *One Nation Under God* can detect the political and corporate influences that are of the world in America cleverly sown in the community of believers and disguised as noble Christian efforts, but are otherwise deceptive.

For this reader, those who insist that America should return to its Christian roots, or feel that America is abandoning Christian foundations should revisit the premise of such assumptions – and *One Nation Under God* offers insights into the challenge of facing what led to these assumptions in the first place. ■



The LOVE OF GOD & ENDURING TILL THE End

By Tommy Willis

The trials of life have increased with the Coronavirus, with a rise in suicides, domestic violence, drug abuse, and we could make a long list. Some are having frightening, pandemic-induced dreams. That's the reality of the times we are living in—increased tribulation. This plague has made us think more about our mortality. I heard some social psychologist say recently that we in this society were not ready to face our mortality; and the plague is forcing us to; and many are terrified. Too often we live in denial of death and suffering; and the plagues could get worse and even more serious trials could come, as some talk about the rumblings of war in an unstable world.

Things seem to be changing for us. For a long time, we were spared a lot of things that happened in the past; I remember my grandfather telling me about the plague in 1918 called the Spanish Flu; and how many people were dying. It caught your attention when he told what he saw. Our forefathers understood more that life was also a veil of tears, and not just “fun,” as the commercials often try to convince us. And many often looked to God more because of the difficult life they had to live. We will need to do that as the trials and tribulations of life increase—to look to God more, and get our foundation down in Jesus Christ.

We don't know what tomorrow will bring. The Bible reminds us of the brevity of life.

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes (James 4:14 NIV).

Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom (Psalms 90:12 NLT).

What's important to understand is we don't have to have the terror of death as the social psychologist mentions above; if we have faith in God. He has made a way for us to face death unafraid. We are not to fear death. A good example of this is what Paul said:

For to me, living means opportunities for Christ, and dying—well, that's better yet! But if living will give me more opportunities to win people to Christ, then I really don't know which is better, to live or die! Sometimes I want to live, and at other times I don't, for I long to go and be with Christ. How much happier for me than being here! (Philippians 1:21-23 TLB).

This doesn't mean we should seek death, because life is a blessing, and God has a work for us to finish; but we need

to realize even death is a promotion to something better. Paul loved life; but he realized to depart this life would be far better, because he says we go to be with Christ!

Part of the problem is the above scripture is often not real to us because we don't spend enough time with God; and we grasp these doctrines intellectually, but often fail to see the reality. This is why serious trials can bring us closer to God. An encounter with death can increase our faith:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:8-9 NIV).

Paul says the trials were so great they despaired of life. This increased their trust in God. I've heard some brethren talk about how with the increased trials with the coronavirus, it made them realize more their mortality, and it helped them draw closer to God. Some talked about "gold refined in the fire," as trials increased. Trials will come. And therefore, we must seek God to teach us how to suffer and endure through them.

Keep in mind, the pressure of life can run us down, and we may need to get a rest. A good example of this is Elijah (1 Kings 19). Even after being used powerfully as God's prophet, he let fear come in and became depressed and wanted to die! If you will notice in verse 5, he lay down and slept, and then got even more rest after that. If we continue reading we see he needed a fresh awareness of God's presence. He had lost sight of the reality that God was with him. All of us have a breaking point; and it will also help to back off from matters at times, pray, rest, and get a fresh awareness of God's presence. God promises to never leave or forsake us. Sometimes we will need to slow down and get some rest and pray and reevaluate matters.

Another thing to keep in mind in the affairs of everyday life, is we often take ourselves too seriously. The pressures of life can sometimes steamroll over us if we don't learn to lighten up a bit and laugh at ourselves. I learned more of this principle while taking care of my invalid dad; we were both under pressure, for I have health problems also, and I'm up in age too, and he would call us "Two old men." And he and I would often joke around. I would tell him about the saying: "Old age is not for sissies." And we would have a good laugh. Laughing would really lighten things up and help us with the struggle of it all. Try to find the humor in life trials; it will help you deal with it all. We all take ourselves too seriously at times; and will need to lighten up a bit.

"Let US KEEP IN MIND THAT LAW WITHOUT love IS PHARISAICAL."

Yes, it is getting difficult. Jesus said a nation divided cannot stand. Any keen student of history should be seeing that this nation is headed for more and more chaos, and many do. Many Christians are angry at the way the world is going, and some have said they want to throw things at the TV when the news is on; and they are becoming hurt and offended in record numbers; some are so angry they can't think soundly. Keep in mind the world will do what the world does; but we have to stay in focus with it all.

When I see such chaos in the minds of Christians, I think of Paul's admonishment to the Galatians:

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (Galatians 5:14-15 NIV).

Keep in mind that Paul is warning Christians of the danger of their human nature which will destroy them if they are not careful. Having seen division in the churches for almost half a century now, it's no mystery why we would need to be warned as Christians.

Therefore, keep in mind that the world will do what the world does; but I see many Christians already becoming offended and hurt, and taking things in the personal hurt way the world does, and becoming offended. Brethren, we get out of focus when we become offended, and it is dangerous. To have the kind of love that Jesus said we should have, we don't have the right to become offended.

Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them (Psalms 119:165 KJV).

Let us keep in mind that law without love is pharisaical.

Think of Christ's words in Matthew:

"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will

appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:10-13 NIV).

Since the love of many Christians will grow cold, keep in mind the connection here between love and enduring till the end!

I used to be selective in whom I would love; when God showed me my lack of love, I realized I didn't know God like I thought I did:

He who does not love does not know God: for God is love (1 John 4:8 RSV).

If we will be praying and meditating as we should and staying with God, then He will give us His ability to stay with His mercy and love, and not become offended and not take things in the personal way the world does, but instead we will react with His mercy and love. And this will enable us to endure till the end.

I share this with you as one who became offended for many years, and I had an unforgiving heart towards those in and out of the church. It was many years before God got my mind straight. Once God showed me how without the work He did on the cross, I would be lost; then He brought me to repentance, and I have not held anything against anyone for over 25 years now. I know that only by Christ in me can that be done, and I thank God. But I went through many years of failure before God taught me different. Once God gave me the ability to forgive, the big war I had going on inside ended! And I was at peace. Oh the price I paid for an unforgiving heart.

As we study the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about the Golden Rule and the love we should have that Paul mentions to the churches in the above Scripture. And He talks about forgiveness. Jesus says:

"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14- 15).

I see many Christians angry at those "in the world", when they fail to see the danger of our own nature, the same problem and danger I was in many years ago until God brought me to repentance, as He showed me the danger of my human nature. We will be safe brethren if we stay with the love and forgiveness of God, and He will give us His peace not to become offended.

*"The cares of this life
CAN DESTROY US IF
WE LET IT. DON'T
LET THE CHAOS OF
THE WORLD PULL YOU
DOWN."*

Let us keep in mind what Jesus said:

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:32-37 NIV).

Jesus instructed us:

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12 NIV).

We can quibble about picky points of doctrine for the remainder of our lives, but we had better make sure we are seeking God for His love. No, the law was not done away with. Yes, we should obey the Law; but again, let us remember, that law without love is Pharisaical.

Seek God's ability to apply Jesus' words on the Sermon on the Mount, then we won't become offended and hurt as the world does when things don't go our way. But we will learn to react with the love and mercy of Jesus Christ. And we will stay in focus.

Are we not to follow the example of Jesus Christ? When they crucified Him, He prayed for them, and asked God to forgive them. Spend time with God. Don't let the busy rushing schedule of the world take you away from Him. Spend time with the best Friend you will ever have. I used to look at prayer as a duty. Now I look at it as a time of intimacy with the best Friend I will ever have, and I have learned the joy and intimacy in prayer. He has shown me how much He cares for us. Now I want to spend time with Him. I sit in a chair talking with God, and often feel the peace of God all around me.

The cares of this life can destroy us if we let it. Don't let the chaos of the world pull you down. Things could continue to deteriorate. Slow down; and make sure you are not neglecting your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Sit and talk with Him. Spend time getting to know Him personally. As we seek Him diligently, He will have us see what we need to see about prophecy, or anything else we need to stay in focus as we learn to stay with Him in prayer. Let us not pass up this wonderful opportunity to go to Him with all our cares and worries, for He cares for us: *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:7).

As we learn to do this, He will give us His peace amidst a world of chaos.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27 NIV).

Get your foundation down in Jesus Christ:

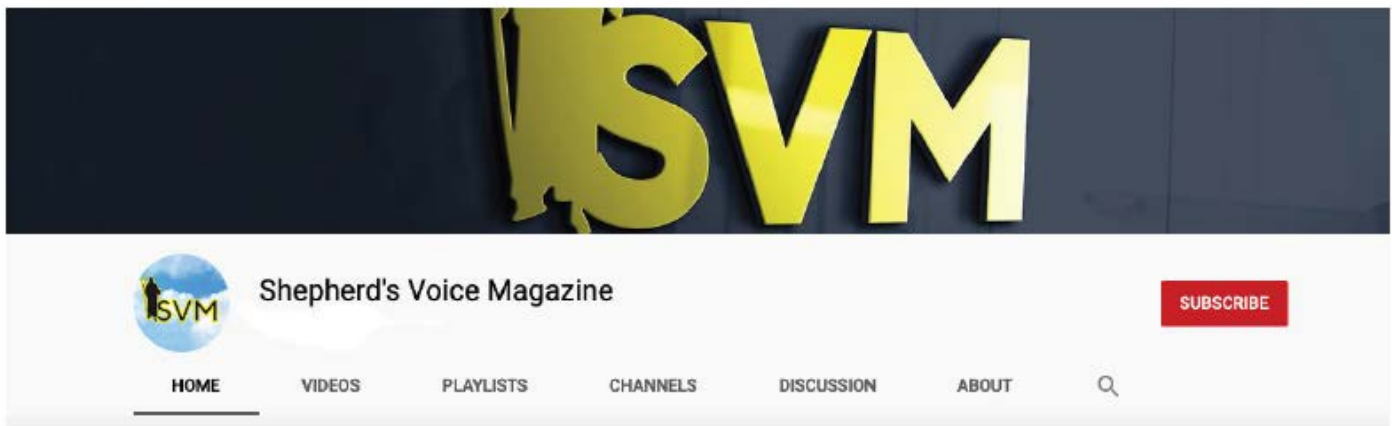
"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock." (Matthew 7:24-27 NIV).

Too often many make the mistake I made with giving lip service to Jesus' words on the Sermon on the Mount about forgiveness. Study the Sermon on the Mount and seek God for his ability to apply what Jesus told us to do.

Get your foundation and trust down in Jesus Christ. And as this old world gets shaken as Scripture says it will, it is the love and peace of God that will enable us to endure till the end. ■



Visit the *Shepherd's Voice Magazine* YouTube page for Sermon messages by Jim Patterson, Darren Connery and others. Be sure to *Subscribe*.



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Kenya Hands of Hope

An American Based "Boots on the Ground" Ministry in Kenya

Shepherd's Voice Magazine has been supporting *Kenya Hands of Hope* which is an independent Sabbatarian ministry unaffiliated with corporate based groups. We are inviting others to join us.

Bill Goff of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina has been there personally a number of times since 2005 (and is there at the time of this writing). Bill shares the beginning of his experience:

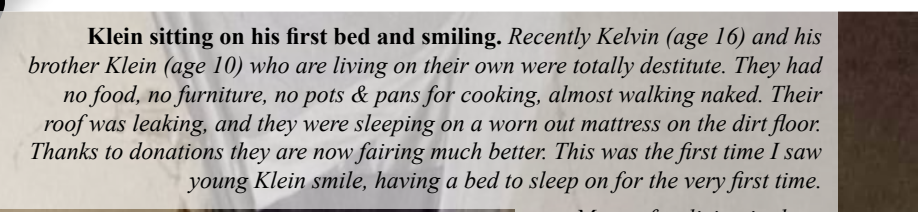
"My acquaintance with our brethren in Kenya and Tanzania started in 2005. I heard rumors that there were members of the church of God who were in dire need of help, and that there was drought, famine and pestilence plaguing the brethren. I purchased a round trip ticket, and went there myself to see first-hand what the conditions were like for our brethren living in that third world Country. Now, it is my obligation to tell you what I know about our brethren in East Africa."

"Upon my first visit, I found the conditions of our brethren to be far worse than what was rumored. I found Brethren who were true members of the household of God and very rich in faith, but quite poor in material wealth – many were struggling for mere existence!"

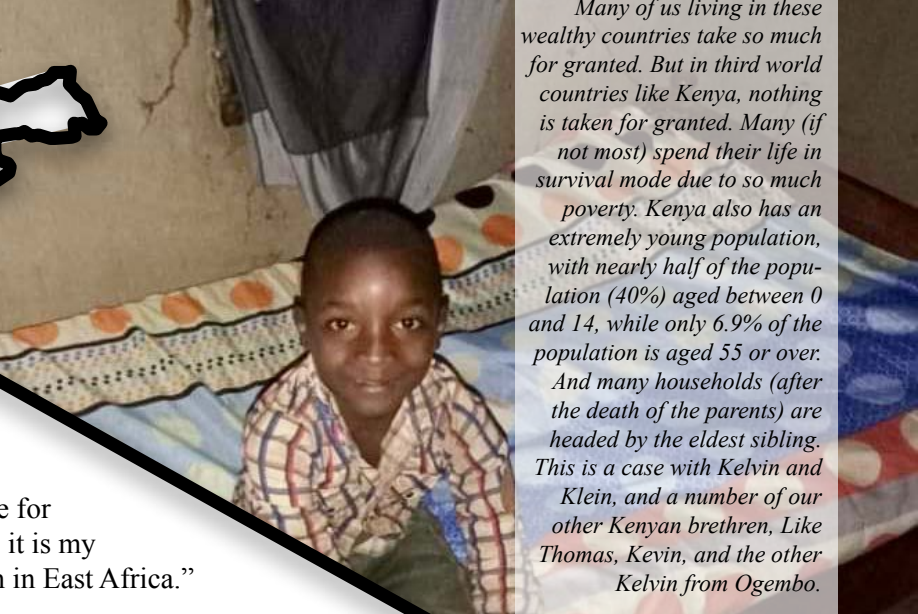
Bill has found that the brethren he serves in the region are a much neglected people. Many are former members of the Worldwide Church of God. Many of the brethren were confused about whom they should associate themselves with. All of the larger corporate churches are there in Kenya and are confusing the brethren by competing for control over them, one even suggesting their salvation depends on it. Bill has worked to alleviate this confusion.



Baptism. It was a struggle to totally submerge those baptized, but was finally accomplished.



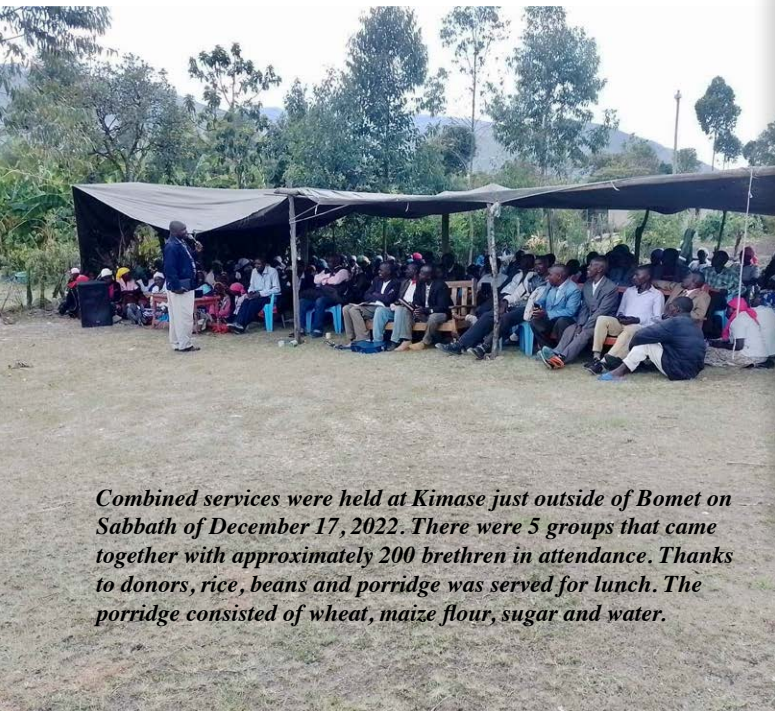
Klein sitting on his first bed and smiling. Recently Kelvin (age 16) and his brother Klein (age 10) who are living on their own were totally destitute. They had no food, no furniture, no pots & pans for cooking, almost walking naked. Their roof was leaking, and they were sleeping on a worn out mattress on the dirt floor. Thanks to donations they are now fairing much better. This was the first time I saw young Klein smile, having a bed to sleep on for the very first time.



Many of us living in these wealthy countries take so much for granted. But in third world countries like Kenya, nothing is taken for granted. Many (if not most) spend their life in survival mode due to so much poverty. Kenya also has an extremely young population, with nearly half of the population (40%) aged between 0 and 14, while only 6.9% of the population is aged 55 or over. And many households (after the death of the parents) are headed by the eldest sibling. This is a case with Kelvin and Klein, and a number of our other Kenyan brethren, Like Thomas, Kevin, and the other Kelvin from Ogembo.



Nyatike Church of God



Combined services were held at Kimase just outside of Bomet on Sabbath of December 17, 2022. There were 5 groups that came together with approximately 200 brethren in attendance. Thanks to donors, rice, beans and porridge was served for lunch. The porridge consisted of wheat, maize flour, sugar and water.



Services were held at the Rigo congregation, followed by nine baptisms. Finding enough water to perform baptism is often a challenge here in Kenya.

“Our Brethren in Kenya were truthfully in need of help, both physically and spiritually. It was time to help them acquire some physical things like food, bibles, and mosquito nets. It was also time to begin putting an end to the confusion that was plaguing them from the many false leaders: by pointing them to God and teaching them that He (God) is the one that we all need to be pledging our allegiance to. There is only one “Head” in the church of God. There is only one body, Spirit, and one “Vine” that we all need to be directly connected to.”

Bill has reached out to corporate group head offices for aid to assist these Sabbatarian brethren, but they refused to help. One group stated they would prefer to help their own brethren here in this country before they would consider brethren abroad. Another leader stated that for them preaching the gospel is a business, and having tried Africa without a return on their investment they have pulled out of there and wish to make no further investment. Additionally, these leaders did not pass on the need for help to their congregations preventing them in making their own decisions regarding aid.

As many of us are aware, there are a number of individuals in Kenya who target American ministries (including SVM) and individuals for money but are not authentic. Typically they use Facebook and church websites. Fortunately with “Boots on the Ground” with Bill Goff we do not have that concern.

The website and updates on brethren can be found here at www.khofh.com. Donations are accepted on the website by PayPal, or their mailing address is 5525 Springs Avenue, Myrtle Beach, SC, 29577. You can also write Bill Goff at Goffb50@aol.com, and his phone number is 843-447-0140.

Kenya Hands of Hope is a 501c3 Tax Exempt organization.

We encourage you to help this ministry to support the impoverished brothers and sisters, as the scriptures teaches us to not to neglect the needs of our brethren (James 2:15-16).■

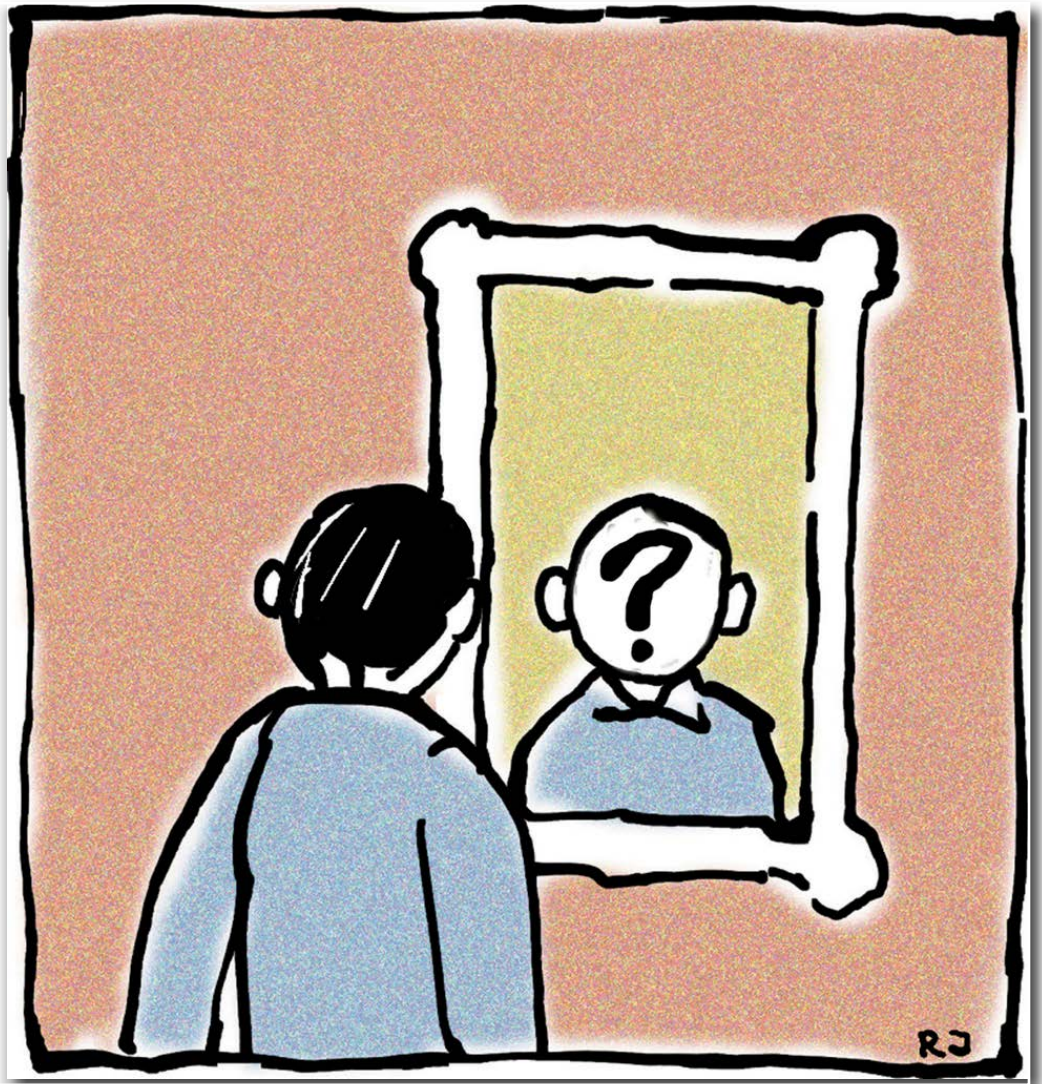
“There is only one “Head” in the church of God. There is only one body, Spirit, and one “Vine” that we all need to be directly connected to.”

Self Examination: A Practical Approach

By Tracy L. French

When was the last time you took a long, hard look at yourself? I don't mean when was the last time you admired yourself in front of your mirror! No, the question is when was the last time you deeply considered who you are in matters of nature, character, behavior, and thought? Unfortunately for many of us, the idea of a self-examination that would focus on our behaviors, habits, motivations, and intents of our hearts is almost as frightening an experience as public speaking!

We are not born with a natural desire to take stock of whom and what we really are, or to make changes in our lives for our betterment. In fact, the opposite is true. We have a natural desire to hold on to who we are and to what we have become and to resist change forcefully. However, through the love and grace of our Heavenly Father and His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, it *IS* possible to experience true repentance (Greek: *metanoia*, a change of thinking and of mind) and a complete change of our life's direction. This complete change is captured by the Greek term *epistrepho* or conversion – a turning from the structure and principles of man's society (spiritual Babylon), and a turning to God the Father through Christ Jesus, and Their principles of life. It is They who will always provide



us with the courage, strength, and faith to examine ourselves, and we are encouraged to do so!

Paul encourages Timothy and all believers with these words:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

A Spiritual Mirror

James teaches us:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:22-25).

We can determine from these Scriptures that God's "perfect law of liberty" is a kind of mirror for us to use, so that we are not forgetful in the things God would have us do. We must understand though, this "perfect law of liberty" is not just the Ten Commandments, but is the entirety of the word of God that instructs us in God's Way of Life, which leads to a real spiritual liberty and deliverance from spiritual bondage.

If we are willing to look intently into God's spiritual mirror, our true natures can be reflected back to us – and we will undoubtedly see many things that need changing. This can be an unnerving experience – especially when we are new disciples of Jesus. We can be thankful that God does not expect us to change everything all at once. He is longsuffering toward us (2 Peter 3:9). However, God does desire that we be willing to allow Him to be our Master Potter, and to mold and shape us into the new creation He wishes us to be (Isaiah 64:8).

An Instruction to Examine Ourselves

We read in 2 Corinthians 13 the following instruction:

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?— unless you indeed are disqualified (2 Corinthians 13:5-6)

We should notice that the purpose of the examination is to see whether we are in the faith. The question is not "Do we have faith?" but rather, whether we are living within the faith. In other words, are we faithfully living God's Way of Life – are we following all His laws and instructions – as revealed to us in the pages of the Bible? Are we manifesting the very faith of Jesus in our daily lives? And, most importantly, is our motivation for changing our behaviors from a right motivation? Can we see evidence of Jesus Christ living His life in us through the Holy Spirit that we received following our baptism and the laying on of hands (Galatians 2:20)?

“God will always provide us with the courage, strength, and faith to examine ourselves, and we are encouraged to do so!”

We are told to test ourselves. One way we do this is by comparing ourselves to the supreme example of Jesus Christ. (It is very helpful to study the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John several times a year.) And, we should look closely at the instructions given to us by God's prophets and apostles and see how we are measuring up. If we fail to test ourselves and then make any and all necessary changes, we are told that we could be considered disqualified or reprobate. In other words, we could be in danger of losing our salvation. Notice that the Apostle Paul said the following about himself:

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27, NKJV).

A Specific Instruction Before Passover Evening

The Apostle Paul gave specific instructions to the church of God in 1 Corinthians 11:20-34 concerning how members of the body of Christ were to examine themselves before the annual Passover season which we see, was to utilize the new symbols of the bread and wine that were instituted by Jesus Christ on the night of His betrayal. Verses 28-30 say:

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment of himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep (1 Corinthians 11:28-30).

This passage of Scripture is often referred to in sermons prior to Passover, and it is vital that Christians understand what is being said here. We do not have the space in this article to study this instruction with any depth. However, we can understand that we are told to examine ourselves.

This is not a suggestion, it is a specific instruction. We are told those who have not examined themselves (and are therefore taking of the bread and wine of the Passover service in an “unworthy manner”) bring judgment upon themselves and are not discerning of “the Lord’s body” (the body of Christ). This refers to the entire body of believers — the *Ekklesia* of God.

If we are careless in our worship, and if we count the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a common thing, our own behavior can weaken the entire body of Christ (the body of called out believers). We can then understand that because of this lack of discernment of the needs of the church and how our actions affect others, many in the body of Christ are weak and sick (physically and spiritually), and many have died. In other words, we can be doing spiritual damage to each other instead of being a blessing.

Then, in verses 31 and 32 Paul says,

But if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world (1 Corinthians 11:31-32).

The understanding is clear. We need to exercise godly judgment on ourselves. But if we don’t, then God will judge us and will then bring correction into our lives for our own benefit (“*that we may not be condemned with the world*”). However, we can clearly see that there is another reason God chastens us. And that is so that the body of Christ (God’s spiritually begotten children) becomes stronger, to no longer be spiritually weak (feeble, impotent, without strength) or sick. It is so that as each individual Christian becomes perfected, so also the entire body becomes perfected (Matthew 5:48, Revelation 3:12).

[Love Toward God and Love Toward Neighbor](#)

We can also see from the above Scriptures that we, as individuals, have very strong motivations for examining ourselves. Do we want to be a blessing to our spiritual brethren and our physical families? Or, is it possible that sometimes we don’t really care whether our actions or attitudes cause harm to those who should be our loved ones? Do we want to be spiritually strong so we can serve and uplift others, or are we content with being served? Are we really thankful for our Savior’s supreme sacrifice, and do we deeply appreciate and recognize the love that our Father in heaven has for us? If so, are we willing to examine ourselves and, with God’s help, to make necessary changes, so our lives can be a blessing to others, and so that we bring praise, glory, and honor to

God’s Holy Name? Are we willing to be *living sacrifices* to God and be *transformed by the renewing of our minds* (Romans 12:1-2)?

We need to approach this idea of self-examination from both a motivation of love for our brethren and families, and love of our Savior and our Heavenly Father!

[The Right Attitude](#)

Have you ever asked yourself *WHY* you want to live a Christian life? As you’ve studied the Bible and have grown in grace and knowledge you’ve undoubtedly made changes in how you live your life from day to day. Or, if you’re one who has recently found yourself drawn to God and are a *spiritual babe*, have you asked yourself *WHY* you may want to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit, and become a begotten child of God? Why would you be willing to be out of step with the rest of the world? Why would you want to start keeping the Ten Commandments (and others of God’s laws and directives) as you learn about them? Certainly, if you are a *babe in Christ* then the idea of self-examination will probably seem quite foreign to you and maybe a bit confusing. Yet, as we have seen, it is a necessary, vital, and commanded facet of a believer’s life.

If you were to ask a handful of people the same questions we have asked in the paragraph above, you would probably receive quite a few different answers. But is that the way it should be? Have you ever asked yourself *WHY* Jesus was willing to suffer horrible things at the hands of men just so He could complete the job that He was sent to do? Consider for a moment that His attitude and his motivation for serving His Heavenly Father and for Him being willing to give up His very life should also be our motivation and our attitude. Jesus is our example. We are to become like the Father and the Son are (John, Chapter 17).

Why then was Jesus obedient to the point of death – even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8)? The simple answer is He was able to love the Father with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:37-38, Deuteronomy 6:5-6). And He loved His neighbor as Himself (Matthew 22:39-40, Leviticus 19:18). Jesus’ heart was right. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and because of His complete love of the Father, nothing, absolutely nothing, was able to take His focus off of the Father and from His mission to be mankind’s Savior and Redeemer. Is it the same with us? The question becomes – do we follow God’s instructions and commands in the Bible, because we want to please God, and because we really *LOVE* the Father and the Son? Or, is our motivation to escape trouble or punishment, or to get something from God?

If we can look honestly at ourselves and say that we are learning to surrender our will to God, and are living God's Way of Life and are worshiping Him in the total integrity of our heart – because we are thankful and really love Him – then we can examine ourselves with the right attitude and from a proper motivation. However, if our attitude and motivation is wrong, then our self-examination will not bear much fruit.

[What Do We Look For?](#)

Do we look at things? In other words, do we carry around a list in our minds and under one column those are the bad things that we used to do when we were of the world, and under the other column these are good things that we now do as Christians? Do we then say “I’m a pretty good Christian” if my list of good things is longer than the list of bad things, and if the good things list is growing longer each year. Is that how God would like us to examine ourselves? What is God looking for?

The prophet Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 17:9, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*” Do WE know our own heart? Is it possible that our heart is deceiving us? It is not enough to look at a list of what we used to do versus what we do now. Rather, we must examine the deepest part of our minds and determine if we are thinking differently. To engage in “*metanoeo*” (usually translated as “repent”) or to experience “*metanoia*” (usually translated as “repentance”) is really to think differently in the mind. It is to experience a change of thinking and a change of mind about many subjects, not just the subject of sin.

It is not just a matter of what we are doing (or not doing), it is more accurately a matter of how we are thinking. If we are thinking differently; are being converted; are having our minds renewed (Romans 12:2); and are allowing the mind of Christ to reside in us (Philippians 2:5), then we will (as a result) also be doing more good things. However, we could be doing more good things and less bad things in our lives even if our motivation and attitude have not changed and are not correct. Yes, God is interested in what we are doing. But He is more interested in why we are doing what we are doing.

The deeper question is: Are we obeying and serving God by the letter of the law or are we fulfilling both the letter and the spirit of the law? Are we worshiping God both in spirit and in truth?

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

Our Process of self-examination must involve not only looking at what we are doing (Are we following God's instructions?), but we must also examine our thinking (Why do we do what we do?), and determine if what we are doing is being done in the right attitude and from a right motivation (such as our love for God and love for our fellow man).

[A Measuring Stick](#)

God's Holy Scriptures are “*a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path*” (Psalm 119:105). We are told in James 1:22, “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*” And the Apostle James tells us in James 2:22-24 “*Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*” We can see then the importance that we be active followers of The Way – we are to be faithfully doing and working in order that we remain justified before God. James drives the point home in verse 26, “*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*” Strong words!

Paul exhorts the church in Titus 3:14, “*And let our people also learn to maintain good works to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.*” When we study God's word we see that the writers were inspired to write down many instructions for us to follow. Certainly, we understand that we have been given God's Ten Commandments that we are to live by. Of course those Ten Commandments provide humanity with greater details of how to be responsive and obedient to the greatest Commandments. They are not an end unto themselves.

Matthew informs us:

And Jesus said to him, ‘You will love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your understanding—this is a first and great command; and the second [is] like to it, You will love your neighbor as yourself; on these—the two commands—all the Law and the Prophets hang.’ (Matthew 24:37-40, LSV).

But the Bible contains literally hundreds of other commands and instructions that our Heavenly Father also expects us to follow for our benefit. God's instructions assist us in maintaining good works, so that we become fruitful disciples of Jesus Christ, as Paul explained above. God also knows how we think – He designed us, after all – and He knows that we are forgetful. Paul tells us in Hebrews 13:16 “*But do not forget to do good and share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*”

These instructions help us to remember what it is God would have us do and to give us a yard stick by which to

measure ourselves. We must remember though that while we examine ourselves and use God's yard stick of Biblical instructions, we must be conscious of the fact that it is our attitude and motivation coupled with our works and actions that determine whether we are being led by the Holy Spirit, and thus are "*sons of God*" (Romans 8:5, 6, 14).

Good works that are done from a wrong motivation or attitude, can be described as dead works in Hebrews 6:1. One of the elementary principles of Christ is actually to be a "*metanoia*" from dead works. And again, "*metanoia*" (unfortunately, usually translated as "repentance") means, "a change of mind, as it appears to one who has undergone a change of mind; of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done." Sadly, history has shown that many people have lived a lifetime of doing dead works because much of their good works were done from a wrong attitude and motivation. Literally, they were doing works (and some of them possibly good, from a human perspective) but without the required change of thinking and of mind.

Paradoxically, this elementary principle of Christ is supposed to be one of the first things that a new Christian is to understand when they receive the Holy Spirit and begin their life long walk with their Savior. The usual teachings (for centuries) in regards to the subjects of repentance and conversion have contributed to this situation, which has created a certain level of spiritual blindness amongst God's people. An explanation of how this misunderstanding in regards to Hebrews 6:1 has occurred within the various assemblies of God is beyond the scope of this presentation.

[Rephrasing Instructions as Questions](#)

This article is going to reference a cross section of instructions given to us in the writings of the Apostles in the New Testament. However, the Process that we're going to use can be utilized any place in the Holy Scriptures (Old and New Testament alike) where we are given instructions. And it is hoped that the reader will find this Process useful in all of their future studies of God's word.

The Process involves looking at a specific Scriptural instruction and then rephrasing it in our minds as a question to ourselves. The reason for this is simple. The human mind processes statements or instructions in a different manner than when it receives a question. Consider for a moment that you want to learn skydiving and so your instructor has told you many things that you need to be aware of. Check your parachute, check this, check that, avoid this, do this, do that. Yes, many, many instructions that could mean the difference between life and death. And so it is the same with the word of God.

But how do we process this information and these instructions so that our skydiving experience is a safe one? We ask ourselves questions, don't we? We make ourselves a check list. "Have I done this?" "Did I check that?" And on it goes. Yes, the Process is that we take the instructions we've been given and then feed the information back to ourselves as questions. This Process helps us to internalize and remember the instructions that we have been given.

It is fervently hoped that the reader will find this Process of rephrasing instructions as questions a help to them as they follow God's command to examine themselves. Because, it is understood that as individuals are perfected, so is the body of Christ; His begotten children perfected! And it is through this Process of self-examination; change of thinking and of mind; confession; turning from the world and turning to God; forgiveness and real spiritual growth, that we will be converted (in heart, mind, and spirit) and able to love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is *THE* process that enables us to live godly lives of (*agape*) love.

[Let Us Now Examine Ourselves](#)

The remainder of this article contains a selection of instructions in the Holy Scriptures that we have rephrased as questions. The reader is encouraged to read the rephrased question first, then, in your own Bible, read the instruction, and then reread the question. This will help you to internalize these Scriptures, and they should speak to your heart with the help and guidance of God's Holy Spirit. Some questions will be from an individual perspective ("Do I," or "Am I"). Others will be worded from a congregational perspective ("Do we," or "Are we"). We will look primarily at Scriptures in the books of Colossians, Philippians, Ephesians, and Galatians.

As you continue your Bible study week after week, we also encourage you to add to these Scriptures with your own compilation of instructional Scriptures in question form. You will find that there are many, many areas of our lives that our Heavenly Father desires that we hold up in front of the spiritual mirror of His word. But please remember dear reader, it is our attitude and motivation behind our good works and obedience to God that is the most important to Him, because that is how He knows whether or not we have truly undergone a change of thinking and of mind, and are subsequently being converted, and whether we are truly being transformed by the renewing of our mind.

May the Almighty, Loving, Merciful, Ever Living God who gives us life and breath, encourage and guide as you examine yourself, and apply His words of life in your walk with Him. ■

Ephesians 4:1-3

Do I walk worthy of the calling with which I was called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with others in love, and am I endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace?

Ephesians 4:22-24

Have I put off, concerning my former conduct, the old man that grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts? Am I renewed in the spirit of my mind? And have I put on the new man that was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness?

Ephesians 4:25-27

Have I put away lying, and do I speak truth with my neighbor?—for we are members of one another. When I am angry do I choose not to sin by not letting the sun go down on my wrath, and by not giving place [in my spirit] to the devil?

Ephesians 4:28

If I have stolen do I steal no longer, but rather do I labor, working with my hands what is good, that I may have something to give him who has need?

Ephesians 4:29-30

Does any corrupt word proceed out of my mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers? And do I avoid grieving the Holy Spirit, by whom I was sealed for the day of redemption?

Ephesians 4:30

Am I putting away from me all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, with all malice?

Ephesians 4:31

Are we kind to one another, tenderhearted, and do we forgive one another, even as God in Christ forgave us?

Ephesians 5: 1-2

Are we imitators of God as dear children? And do we walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma?

Ephesians 5:3-4

As is fitting for saints, do we not let it even be named among us: fornication, and all unrighteousness or covetousness, neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting; but rather giving of thanks?

Ephesians 5:11

Am I careful to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather do I expose them?

Ephesians 5:15-17

Are we making sure that we are walking circumspectly, not as fools, but as those who are wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil? And do we endeavor to not be unwise, but rather to understand what is the will of the Lord?

Ephesians 5:18-20

Are we careful not to be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but to be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God?

Ephesians 6:10-18

Am I striving to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might? Do I daily put on the whole armor of God that I may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil? Do I understand that I do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places? Am I diligent to take up the whole armor of God, that I may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand? Do I gird my waist with truth; put on the breastplate of righteousness; shod my feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; and above all, take the shield of faith with which I will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one? And do I put on the helmet of salvation and take up the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints?

Galatians 6:1-3

Do I, as one who is spiritual, when I see a man who is overtaken in any fault, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering myself lest I also be tempted? Do I bear other's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ? Do I know not to think of myself as something, when I am really nothing, so that I do not deceive myself?

Galatians 6:9-10

Are we striving not to grow weary while doing for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. And, as we have opportunity, are we doing good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith?

Philippians 2:1-4

Are we being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind? Are we careful to let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind, do we esteem others better than ourselves? Do we look out not only for our own interests, but also for the interest of others?

Philippians 2:5-8

Are we letting the mind that was also in Christ Jesus be in us? – who made Himself of no reputation, and took the form of a bondservant, and having come in the likeness of men, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Philippians 2:12-13

Are we working out our own salvation with fear and

trembling? – for it is God who works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Philippians 2:14-16

Do I do all things without complaining and disputing, that I may become blameless and harmless, a child of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom I shine as a light in the world, as I hold fast to the word of life?

Philippians 3:13-15

Am I, as my mind matures, forgetting those things that are behind, but rather reaching forward to those things that are ahead, and pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus?

Philippians 4:4-8

Do I always rejoice in the Lord? Is my gentleness known to all men?—Because the Lord is at hand. Am I anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, do I let my requests be made known to God? – so that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard my heart and mind through Christ Jesus. And, am I diligent to meditate on whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy?

Philippians 4:11-13

Have I learned that in whatever state I am in to be content? Have I learned how to live both humbly and to live in prosperity? Do I believe that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me?

Colossians 2:20-23

Do I subject myself to regulations – the commandments and doctrines of men – which have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh?

Colossians 2:2-3

Have I set my mind on things above, and not on things on the earth?—For I have died, and my life is hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:5-8

Am I putting to death what is earthly in me: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry?—Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience. Am I being diligent to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language out of my mouth?

Colossians 3:12-14

Are we, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, putting on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering? Are we bearing with one another and forgiving one another, even as Christ forgave us? And above all these, have we put on love, which is the bond of perfection?

Colossians 3:15-17

Are we letting the peace of God rule in our hearts, to which we were called in one body; and are we thankful? Are we letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom; and are we teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, while singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord? And whatever we are doing in word or in deed, are we doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him?

Colossians 3:23-24

Whatever I do, am I doing it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men?—knowing that from the Lord I will receive of the inheritance; for I serve the Lord Christ.

Colossians 4:2-3

Am I continuing earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; praying also for the ministry that God would open to the Church a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ?

Colossians 4:5-6

Do I walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time? Is my speech always spoken with grace, seasoned with salt, that I may know how I am to answer each one?