Servants' NEWS

Vol. 14, No. 1 *A newsletter for servants of the Almighty Eternal Creator, wherever they may be* Sept-Oct 2010

Should Christians Help the Poor?

by Norman Edwards

Should Christians help the poor? To some the answer is an obvious, "Yes". Other Christians will cite scriptures about the importance of preaching the gospel to the world, feeding the flock—the church and caring for one's own household. The scripture teaches these things. But where are the priorities? Do we preach the gospel, feed the flock or take care of our household first and only help the poor if we have something left? Of is it the other way around?

The Bible has a lot to say about the subject. This author studied all of the New Testament Scriptures that he could find—most of which are referenced somewhere in this article. By looking them all up, one can know the Bible's teaching. This author was surprised to find that the scripture has numerous commands to help, as we are able (Acts 11:29; Gal 6:9; 2Cor 9:7), both poor believers and unbelievers, and that our entry into God's kingdom is partly based upon that!

Jesus Taught Us to Help the Poor

When Christ began His ministry, there were, of course, no believers yet.

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Our National Problems Need Spiritual Solutions!

by Norman Edwards with Tax Payers Party letter by Gerald Van Sickle

The debate among our politicians rages: What should our military do? What healthcare and retirement should our nation provide? What failing banks and businesses should be bailed out? What should be done about crime? What about disease epidemics? Who is going to pay for all of this? How and when will they pay?

It does not take much reading of history to find nations generally prosper and grow when they are founded on fairness, morality and hard work. And when they turn inward with greed, selfishness and unfairness, they decline and are often destroyed.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible teaches God's judgment of nations for their national sins:

"And also the nation whom they serve I will judge..." (Gen 15:14).

"Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For

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Port Austin Bible Campus Update:

A Home for the Homeless

by Norman Scott Edwards

I apologize for the lateness of this issue, but thank you for reading anyway. Our six years of maintaining these buildings and struggling to fund the ministries here are finally paying off! Our main building is now completely full of people —16 to be exact. Most of them were homeless people.

Since the last update, our four-year resident William Swenson has moved back to his home area where he is enrolled in college. Rick and Karen have moved on as well. Robert and Lynn Crawford responded to our request for help with homeless people and moved here in May. Robert is doing an excellent job of maintaining our facilities.

Adam Miller is planning to move here from Texas about the beginning of March to be a full-time manager for the homeless. He will be greatly appreciated. There are virtually unlimited opportunities to teach biblical principles and preach the gospel. Because we do not directly accept government money, we are able to do this.

Most of the homeless people staying with us have some kind of assistance which they can use to help us pay the expenses of running PABC—but not yet the ability to live on their own.

The first homelessness family came in June: dad, mom and 6-month old baby. They were originally from the Detroit area, but had left to escape the crime and difficult shelter conditions there and to stay with a friend in Huron County (our county). Their friend asked them to leave suddenly—putting them out on the street. The local homeless coalition put them in a hotel for a night, and then called us. If we did not accept them, the nearest shelters that would accept them are in Port Huron, Bay City and Saginaw—each about 90 minutes away. Most of these are separate men's and women's shelters, which would split up their family. If one of the shelter facilities is full (which happens often now), they would have to go to separate cities, leaving them with no regular way to see each other. This is not a good way to preserve a marriage. This family is still at PABC. They have found a variety of work while here and plan to be into their own place early next year.

We have another family of five, with three children ages 1, 2 and 3. The father had lost his job and they were behind on their rent, but would have easily been able to catch up from the good pay provided to him through his National Guard unit, which was scheduled to deploy. Without any warning, four days before deployment, he was given a medical reason why he was not accepted—even though he had been fully able to train with the unit. The situation was further compounded by a large National Guard expense reimbursement due them that was delayed for months due to a bank transfer error. Jobs are hard to find in Huron County, and with no resources, they were evicted. They stayed with family and friends for a couple of weeks, but not everyone knows how to live with three small children in the house. They found the door locked one morning and their friends gone, so they spent a day on the

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The purpose of Church Bible Teaching Ministry is to continue the work of the Church that was started by Jesus Christ (Yashua the Messiah) and His Apostles in the first century. This work involves expounding the truth of the Bible by means of teaching, writing, music and video as well as taking positive action to help and serve other believers and all people of the world. CBTM and those people who work within it are just a few of many parts of the Church, which is the body of Christ. Servants' News is a publication of CBTM.

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street with their children making over 100 phone calls looking for help, and finally came to PABC that night. He has since obtained a full-time job and they also hope to have a place of their own in a month or so.

Two single men, both long-time Sabbath keepers on disability, have come to PABC from a congregation in Chicago that has ties to PABC. Both left living situations that were collapsing (to put it mildly). Many of the people on disability receive only about $600 per month, plus food cards, so they do not have a lot of options to pay for rent, utilities and other essentials. These men regularly participate in our morning Bible studies and enjoy it very much. They are helping out with some PABC chores and making use of the many Christian books and videos in the PABC library or the member's personal collections.

We recently accepted another young man to PABC who came from a difficult home environment and years of prescription anti-depression drugs. He is a skilled man and a good worker, but lost his driver's license wrongfully (too long a story to print here, but there was no accident or any danger to anyone). With thousands of dollars in fees to get it back, and no good way to get to work in a county where most everything is spread out, what do you do? Steve came to PABC not just to find a place to live, but because he wanted to turn to God. He is an avid participant in our Bible studies and reads a lot on his own—including this writer's paper on baptism. He has made great progress in overcoming the habits that troubled him in the past.

In addition to the above people, who are with us as of this writing, we have had another family and a few individuals stay at PABC for a few days to a couple months while they found jobs and made arrangements for new places to live.

We have also provided peace of mind to a few people who were being forced out of one living arrangement and not sure if their new living arrangement would be ready on time or not. To give a realistic example, what do you do if you have to leave your present place this week, and the two nearby places you have found to move to are not supposed to be ready until next week? Do you concentrate your efforts on trying to get a little more time where you are and try to speed up the process of moving into the new place? Or do you simply try to sell everything you have and go to live with an out of state relative, essentially starting your life over? When people know that PABC will be there to bridge the gap if they cannot get their move-out and move-in dates connected, it allows them to focus on making the best arrangements.

The Jan-Feb 2006 Servants' News contained an article entitled More Doing, Less Talking. Often, a lot of time and talking is required to arrive at more doing. Never lose the godly goal!

Some reading this might rightfully say, "If these people planned ahead and had a savings, they would not be in these predicaments." In some cases, that is certainly true. But we are also amazed at how many situations we encounter where people tried to plan ahead, and where homelessness is caused by situations that are difficult to foresee.

One man, who was on a limited fixed income, had a plan to move out of his current dwelling and into another. When it became clear that the new one would not be available in time, he quickly applied to a couple other places ($25 application fee each) and paid $50 to enroll in a subsidized housing program. He later found that he did not qualify for the government program, and the other places could not provide a place as soon as he needed it. He had obtained assistance to pay for his rent, but he had no more money—either for transportation or to apply to other places.

The friend with whom this man was temporarily staying called PABC and asked if we could take him for a few days until one of the a apartments he applied to became available. We told her yes, but asked her to drive him to PABC as our budget was very tight and the 70 mile round-trip to get him would not be considered an insignificant expense. After explaining more about the difficult financial situation of PABC, the friend at first said they would bring him, but then later she called back and said that she and her husband had decided to make some minor modifications to their garage so that the man could stay there with them until his new place was ready.

That is wonderful! The Christian life is not just about doing good to others, it is about inspiring others to do the same. If you think about it, there are plenty of empty homes, empty apartments, vacation homes, empty trailers, spare bedrooms, etc. to house all of the homeless people in this country many times over. The problem is, there are not enough Christians willing to make the effort to analyze what each homeless person can contribute toward his situation, to let them use their empty facilities, and to send them out if they do not contribute what they are able. Maybe this writing will inspire others to do so.

This writer would be remiss to make serving the homeless sound like a bed of roses. Do some of them lie and try to take advantage of us? Yes. Is there a danger of physical violence? Yes, though we have not had any. Is there a danger of demonic spirits among them? Yes. None if this is stronger than the power of God. We have come to realize that the Christian life does have a certain amount of danger. From the faithful in Hebrews 11, to Saul's persecution that scattered the church (Acts 8:1-4), to Paul's numerous dan-

gerous situations (2Cor 11:23-28) to the 144,000 that come out of the great tribulation (Rev 7); Christians have been in dangerous situations. When we suffer, we need to be sure that it is for doing our Father's will, and not simply from our own mistakes:

For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God (1Pet 2:20).

We realize that there are "safer" methods of working with homeless people. Most shelters have a staff of people who work at the shelter but live at home—where they do not have to contend with the problems of the shelter. The shelter guests are held to a tight set of rules and only allowed in certain areas. There may be security staff, video cameras, hidden microphones, etc—more like a minimum-security jail.

Whereas at PABC, the staff actually lives in the same building as the homeless people 24 hours a day and shares some facilities with them (hallways, vacuum cleaners, some laundry rooms, kitchen, etc.). While this can be considered a greater danger in some ways, it is also a greater benefit as the staff has much more opportunity to witness what is really happening in the lives of their guests and encourage them in a Christian manner. Ultimately, we all have to rely on God's protection for everything.

Living on the property greatly reduces costs compared to using a round-the-clock paid staff. For example, a nearby shelter(that only accepts battered women has at least one paid person at their shelter during all 168 hours per week. Sure, the night shifts—and sometimes other shifts—usually have little to do. Nevertheless, the annual budget to run the organization is about $200,000. By contrast, PABC has no paid people, but all volunteers who live here and work as a Christian Community, and has an annual budget of less than $30,000. Even now, PABC typically houses more needy people than the women's shelter, and has much more capacity.

The local government agencies and other organizations that help homeless people now recognize PABC is a helpful part of local community service. We receive referrals directly from the Huron County Homeless Coalition, an organization designed to help homeless people find services available to them. These services are often scattered among many organizations and sometimes difficult to understand. Some groups provide just food, some baby needs, some job placement, some help with existing rent, some housing for just certain types of people (women, battered women, families, men), some help only disabled people, some help only substance abusers, etc. etc. And there are organizations that do these things only on a short-term basis and others on a long-term basis.

The Homeless Coalition also promotes homeless awareness in the community by holding their annual cardboard city on the courthouse lawn. They invited Norman Edwards from PABC to speak to the 70 or so high school students that took part in it this year.

PABC has been invited to send a representative to the bi-monthly Thumb Area Continuum of Care meetings, a group of about 20 people representing various government and private agencies of the three counties of Michigan's "Thumb" (lower Michigan looks like a hand—which has a "thumb"). The first meeting went well with about 10 minutes of it devoted to PABC's operations and facilities. PABC intends to send a representative to every meeting if possible.

Since our main building is now full, our biggest concern is bringing a reliable, economical source of heat to another one of our buildings. In these unoccupied buildings, the original steam heat has been removed and all we have at present is electric space heat—much more expensive, less safe, and more difficult to use. We would like to use wood heat because we would not have utility bills and because it would provide a place for all of us to go in the event of utility failures. Such a system would cost about $10,000 to implement. Installing gas heat would cost about $3500, but leave us with the ongoing cost of gas. A piecemeal approach is also possible: a wood stove here, a propane heater there and electric heat in between. This would be the cheapest to get started, but the most difficult to manage in the long run.

We have had some local people and churches contribute money toward our efforts to help the homeless people. Some specifically stated, though, that they want to contribute only to prevent homelessness and not to the church and other ministries located on our campus. For them, we have set up a special PABC homeless fund, or we have made arrangements for people to contribute directly to our utility bill accounts, thereby removing the possibility we would spend it for anything else. We would be glad to supply details to anyone interested.

What has happened to PABC's goals to teach Sabbatarian young people? We still have them, but they are being pursued slowly at this time. We continue to write articles and maintain contact with a lot of young people, but we do not have anyone here who is dedicated to work with them at this time. The lessons learned from working with homeless people will be helpful for instructing young people and their parents. Many of the struggling people we encounter are suffering from easily identifiable problems that began when they were teens at home, which neither they nor their parents were able to correct.

May God help us to continue serving people in need, to teach them His ways, and to be timelier in our updates to you!.

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

Preach the Word!

by Jim Patterson, Managing Editor of Shepherd's Voice

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

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

For the time will come when they will no longer endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (myths).—2 Tim 4:3,4

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

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

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

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

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

To compensate, instead of standing up to sound teaching and its requirements and especially when it becomes grating, Paul is aware of what humans do, replace the teacher by directing our hearing elsewhere.

The gospel calls for us to be honest, but men don't want to be honest. They want the right to live

Servants' News to merge with Shepherd's Voice!!!

While all the details have not been worked out, Norman Edwards, Jim & Kim Patterson, Duane & Marsha Nicol and Bruce Horne have arrived at a basic agreement to merge their efforts to better serve the brethren. Norman, who has long struggled with trying to do too much, believes this will help deliver inspiring biblical encouragement in a more timely, reliable manner.

The first issue of Shepherd's Voice was published in the Summer of 2010. Its purpose was to preach the Gospel and edify the church in a non-denominational way, but with a biblical understanding of the Sabbath, Feast Days, resurrections, etc. Jim Patterson is the managing editor as well as the author of the article at left.

In a few months, Servants' News readers will either begin receiving Shepherd's Voice or be given the opportunity to receive it. The current issues is available online at:

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the way they want and do their own thing. They want to be secure in themselves, and will appreciate teachers who "tickle their ears" and assure them that they are just fine and well deserving and should not have to put up with meddling preachers.

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

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

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

A Reality Check

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

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

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

1. The preacher(s) you listen to the most spends little or no time on the application of the content of their sermons or in their writings. Application is making the connection with your need to change and the scriptures.
2. You have left or are considering leaving a church because you are not learning anything. You feel you should be on to the "meat", which you believe is deep Biblical truths.
3. You feel that your vast knowledge of the Bible differentiates you somehow from your less learned brethren.
4. You have made yourself the judge of who should teach you and what teaching is acceptable.
5. Instead of embracing a given sermon message as a whole with gratitude, you take issue with any nuances in a message compared with your own understanding, and pick apart details you feel you understand better than the preacher.
6. You prefer to stay at home when Sabbath fellowship is available, watching DVDs, keeping the instructors at a distance. After all, you've thoroughly disqualified local teachers being able to teach you anything.
7. You believe " … dissecting the word of truth" (1Tim 2:15)—means getting into the Greek before one truly understands the scripture.
8. Speculative end time scenarios are of continued interest to you.
9. You have learned some nuggets of information or "Biblical truth" that you often share, and become contentious if others don't agree.
10. This article offends you in some way, or sounds judgmental or unfair.

How did you do?

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

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

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

Of Making Many Books There is No End

by Tommy Willis

There are many books around that can further our learning; but we need to make sure we are getting in our Bible study and not letting it go to read a lot of other books. A good Scripture that relates to this is in Ecclesiastes 12:11-14, "The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings which are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." RSV.

Although I never had much formal education, not having finished the eighth grade, I loved to read, therefore my learning from books continued on from an early age. Many times when I walked through a library, I felt like I was walking through a gold mine. I was like a child loose in a candy store. It meant new minds to pick. God has allowed me to study many books over the years. But those who love to read would do well to seek God to examine themselves in the light of the above Scripture.

We need to also keep in mind that this Scriptural principle can apply to the Internet; we often spend so much time on the Web, that we can get swamped with information that can become a distraction to our prayer lives. I have fell into this trap many times. We talk about balancing our checkbook, and balancing this or that, and there's no place it's more important than in spiritual matters.

In some old journal notes I had (I don't have the author's name), one author commenting on the above Scripture, wrote, "To write many books was not suited to the shortness of human life, and would be weariness to the writer, and to the reader; … All things would be vanity and vexation, except they led to this conclusion that to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole of man".

As the years pass, I feel God teaching me patience in my learning from books. I came across another paragraph in my notes that can really relate. He said: "...read as little as possible, not as much as possible!" Oh, do not doubt that I have wanted to be like those who drowned themselves in books. I, too, would secretly like to wade through all those books I have so long toyed with in my mind. But I know it is not important. I know that I did not need to read even a tenth of what I have read.

I applied the above principle to backing off from the books to spend more time in prayer, and what a blessing this has been. I also realized that I didn't need to read a tenth of what I have read; but I do need to stay in contact with God in prayer. So God has taught me a better balance now. What we need to keep in mind is many of these studies with all the books are not wrong in themselves, but it takes too much of our time. That time could be better spent with God in prayer, meditation, and Bible study—getting to know Him. It is not wise to get into studies that distract us from our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I had allowed the books to let me drift from God. Even some old fears had resurfaced. But if we are walking with God, praying and meditating as we should, we need not fear any of what so many fear at present. I know this is true from experience. It was when I drifted from God that fear and worry filled my mind. Over the years I would be in torment, and God had to keep leading me back to the biblical principle of:

> *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6-7, NLT)*

This doesn't mean trials and struggles won't come. But things can be handled so much better with the peace of God in our lives. Knowing this Scripture intellectually and applying it are two different things. I knew it for years intellectually, and could quote it. But when I apply it is when I'm able to handle the trials better. What can be more of a point of success for us than being at peace, even in the midst of trials and struggle? This means we have Jesus Christ there to instill His peace in us, "For He is our peace..." (Eph 2:14).

We often rush through books, and fail to meditate on what we read. One writer said, "How much better and wiser it would be, how much more instructive and enriching, if we proceeded at a snail's pace! What matter if it took us a year, instead of a few days, to finish the book?"

Why are we in such a rush? Where are we going? I can really relate to what the author is sharing above. I'm learning to slow down. I can sit and think; and be thankful to God that I'm alive. Life can run by us like a runaway train. I'm learning to enjoy the present moment. I often used to rush when reading; now if I want to stop and look out the window to watch the sparrows play for long periods of time—then I do. There's growth

during these times. I think that much of the rushing came about because of my insatiable appetite to learn; the insatiable appetite to learn is still there; but I don't feel the need to rush like I used to. This certainly is a more peaceful way to go about it. I thank God He has given me a better balance now. We should learn to be patient in our studies. All the time you want to spend searching for peace is worth it.

I usually take notes in my journal, in the form of active responses from what I have just read. I've found that I learn as much from this kind of writing as I do from reading. I'm not trying to suggest

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that everyone needs to write for their Bible studies, but some people do find it helpful. It is writing in my journal that led to sharing articles like this one with brethren.

We need to be careful, because we can wind up living in the world of books. Few sit and contemplate life as they should. We should take more time to sit and think. Life can speed by us, and we won't even realize what is going on around us.

One writer said: "...he had left his books and effects boxed and unavailable, so that now he lived each moment fruitfully, in heartfelt conversation with his hosts, in hours of walks in forest and field, happily reviving an interest in botany and flowers, drifting in a boat on the lake or perched on the lake bank in reverie." He seemed to see the need to back off from the books awhile so that he could participate more in life. Those who are studious will need to learn this balance.

One cannot be a hermit and do the works God wants them to do. The above paragraph made me think of this. Even with the Bible, we need to keep in mind that we shouldn't live in the Book, but by the Book. I write this because in the past a mature Christian saw me doing so much studying that I had allowed it to have me withdraw from my contact with people. He saw where I was neglecting my family, and instructed me about it; and I repented and sought God about it. And I thank God that He used this brother to get my attention.

The Christian today usually has to sift through thousands of pages of his or her denomination. This also often becomes a distraction to ones prayer life. With the Internet now we suffer more than ever with information overload; and it will affect our prayer lives if we let it. The first century Christians did not even have books. A few people might have had a scroll or two. But the Bible as we know it now was not even around.

Today, God gave us the blessing of a Book; but too often, we use it to bicker about different picky points of doctrine. Instead we should seek to meet the Lord Jesus in our studies; Jesus said:

> *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life (John 5:39-40, NKJV).*

Here we see a principle where we can study the Scriptures and not come to Jesus in our studies. Ask Jesus Christ to take you by the hand and lead you through the Scriptures so that you will get to know Him. "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Think about the proper balance we need in our studies. And what is most important is our personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Don't let information overload distract you from your contact with God—whether it's too many books, or the Internet; or the TV. It's good to stress again that many of these things are not wrong in themselves, but often take too much of our time. Time that could be better spent with God. Pray. Spend time with God. Seek Him. Get to know Him. Let Him lead you through the Bible. As we draw close to God we will have His peace for all the difficult days ahead. And God can use our vessels to share His peace with others.

The Utica Feast hosted many activities for all ages. Pictures here are one of the five group meals attended by nearly everyone and an ad-hoc hike in the nearby woods. There were also, sports, dances, crafts, and plenty of good old-fashioned fellowship.

Utica Illinois, Feast of Tabernacles 2010 in Pictures

The Feast of Tabernacles in Utica, Illinois, was attended by over 300 people and was a great blessing. It was held at Grizzly Jack's Grand Bear Resort. Most of the people attending stayed right at the resort, so it was always easy for everyone, young or old, to attend the events they wanted. When information is available for next year's Feast, it will be posted at feast2011.org.

The music was excellent with a great variety being presented. Words were always on several big screens, so it was easy to sing along. Most people left services feeling that they had been inspired.

A tabernacle was constructed in the corner of the main meeting room as taught in the Bible (Lev 23:40-42; Neh 8:15). Most of the teaching was done in interactive seminars where everyone could ask questions and participate. There was a variety to choose from—one could spend the whole Feast and never hear the same speaker twice.

About half the people were between the ages of 15 and 25. A lot of friends were made that will be kept for many years. Several engagements and marriages have occurred among people who became acquainted with others at these Feasts and at mid-year retreats hosted by many of the same people. When young people happily marry someone of a certain religious belief, they are much more likely to stay in that belief. May God continue to bless His Feasts! (Lev 23:1-4)

NetNips with Mega-Bites

Some of the best of Facebook, forums and other Internet sources.

On Bible Errors:

Nearly all of the many thousands of manuscript variations have no significant effect on the meaning of the Scriptures-most are spelling differences or different ways of saying the same thing. I have books that show virtually every significant difference in Greek manuscripts-there are books available that do the same thing for the Old Testament Hebrew/Aramaic. I challenge anyone to pick out whatever combination of ancient manuscripts they like, and I can still teach my basic beliefs from those manuscripts.

The Bible teaches we are judged by what we do with what we have--we are not judged by what we don't know (Matt 25:14-30; Luke 12:47-48; 16:10-12; John 15:22). The lessons of these verses are clear in any manuscript or any translation! God allows imperfect men to maintain the scriptures and make minor mistakes, just like He allows us to raise children and run court systems—and make mistakes. Christianity and mankind as a whole are not suffering because of minor Bible errors causing people to make minor mistakes! We are suffering because we are not doing the big and obvious teachings of the Bible.

Those refusing to live by any of the Bible because it might contain errors need to consider the following passage. Christ judges a man not on the Bible, but only on a statement that he believes to be true:

"Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. 'For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' (But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.') For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me' " (Luke 19:10).

This man said it was wrong to take what belonged to another, so the master judged him for taking from himself—for burying the masters money rather than letting it draw interest.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment (Heb 9:27)

Everyone can be judged by the Golden Rule—asked why they didn't treat others the way they wanted to be treated. Those who believe in evolution will certainly be asked: did you believe this because it makes the most sense scientifically, or did you believe it because you didn't want to recognize that you might be responsible to a Higher Power?—NSE

On Origins of the Universe and Life:

A common atheist argument: "It is pointless to say God or an intelligent designer created the universe because we would then immediately have to ask, 'Where did God or the intelligent designer come from?' " This argument misses the simple point that the physical universe—the matter and energy that we can measure—came from a source outside the physical universe that we cannot measure. Hence, we will not be able to scientifically answer the question of where the universe designer came from. While atheists call this a "cop out"—it best fits the facts. The available energy of the universe is decreasing and the disorder (entropy) is increasing. There is no known means of reversing these things—the universe began!

The origin of life is utterly unexplainable by known physics and mathematics. The chance of a protein molecule forming randomly is infinitesimal. The chance of an isolated protein molecule being destroyed by random forces is very high. I listened to an evolutionist admit that a single cell is more complicated than a Saturn 5 rocket. The earth has billions times billions of cells on it. If we look carefully, maybe we can find Saturn 5 rockets that have also evolved—that would save NASA a lot of money. Don't argue that there are so many cells because they reproduce themselves—NASA would be perfectly happy to find a Saturn 5 that reproduces itself!

Even if we, like Charles Darwin, just assume that the first cell appeared about 2 billion years ago, we still have mathematically inconceivable issues to deal with. Scientists estimate there are 20 million unique, reproducing species on earth. That means, on average, a new, successful species must develop every 100 years. Yet, for a similar 100 years, scientists have been trying, with radiation, chemicals, environmental changes, and just about every other conceivable means to make a new species of fruit flies. (Fruit flies breed a new generation every 10 days, so they are good for these experiments.) Why are the best biologists unable to do in their laboratories what evolutionists say has been happening totally randomly at least every 100 years ever since life began?

Since the chance of an unsuccessful species evolving is millions of times greater than a successful one, why don't we see thousands of unsuccessful species evolving every year? But we don't. No other branch of science or industry believes anything this crazy. If auto designers or computer scientists cannot

Church of God (Seventh Day) Shows the Way to Peace Among Brethren

For many decades, brethren of many "Church of God" denomination debated whether or not to observe the Biblical Feast days summarized in Leviticus 23:4-44 and found many other places in Scripture. At times, people on both sides of the argument have called each other "unbelievers" over this difference.

The Church of God (Seven Day), headquartered in Denver, Colo., officially took a stand to help heal this schism by issuing the Resolution at right. They essentially recognized an individual's or a congregation's right to obey the scriptures as they understand them as long as they did not make it a point of division themselves. What a wonderful approach!

Church of God (Seventh Day)
Resolution, October 2010

Whereas, the Church of God (Seventh Day) has historically declined to observe the annual festivals outlined in Leviticus 23:4-44, but has accepted into membership and ministry those who celebrate these festivals in a Christ centered manner, and,

Whereas, the Church of God (Seventh Day) has a heritage of embracing those whose variant beliefs and practices do not challenge the Church's official doctrines,

Be It Resolved that the North American Ministerial Council:

1. *Affirm the Church's historical declination to observe these annual festivals;*
2. *Embrace those ministers and congregations who locally celebrate the annual festivals without insisting on their observance as a test of fellowship and who do not consider their observance as essential to salvation.*

Be It Further Resolved that congregations who promote the annual festivals must include in all promotions a disclaimer stating that their celebration of these festivals does not reflect the historical position of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

When a person is convicted of a certain truth in Scripture, they should be diligent to do it themselves (Jms 4:17). Unfortunately, we humans have a tendency to want a church group to decide what all of the "true doctrines" are so we can point to their doctrinal statement and say, "I believe the truth". In reality, we are each responsible for learning and doing the words of Scripture (2Tim 2:15; Rom 2:12-13; Jms 1:21-22).

Many church groups are divided over their doctrinal statements. Members often do not know the differences in these doctrines and can get along quite well with each other. But they do not work together because the leaders point to differences in their doctrinal statements which keep them apart.

We hope that many other congregations can follow the example of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in many areas: Let their members and ministers practice what they understand from the Bible as long as they don't make it a "test of salvation" or represent it as the organization's teaching. Not only will these church groups be able to act with conviction and accomplish more, to the outside world they will look more like real Christians, rather than spoiled children fighting over doctrine.

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produce a part they need in their labs, do they go out looking in nature just in case the part they need evolved somewhere? No. They realize the parts they need will only come from an intelligent maker, not by change. Why can't evolutionists be as wise?

When confronted with the fact that virtually every structure in living things has a function, the noted atheist Richard Dawkins said he thought it was possible that life on earth was created by superior alien beings—producing these apparently coherent life forms, but that these aliens must have evolved by natural selection. What evidence does he have for that conclusion? None. Is not that a simple admission that he will accept any origin of the universe as long as it is not a God that makes him morally responsible?. Indeed, most atheists will accept natural selection, random chance, aliens, punctuated equilibrium or any other theory that does not leave an individual responsible to God for his actions.

And as long as life is fairly good to them, they will continue in their belief. They are free to ignore any possible purpose for the creation of mankind and any individual purpose for their own lives. They are free to realize that their own injury or death means nothing in the cosmic scheme of things, and that the same is true for every one of the other billions of lives on the planet. As far as they know, we might all be replaced by superior life forms yet to evolve. Or, all life might be destroyed by some natural or man-made disaster, with mindless planetary and geologic processes continuing for trillions of years after us, with nobody to know or care what happens.

I'm glad that I understand the purpose of life, and will gladly teach it to anyone who cares to know. I believe that God will bring all of the atheists up in a later resurrection—and they will see how foolish they were to waste this life. But I think they will then be able to understand it, and able to be a part of God's kingdom—when they finally humble themselves and repent. —NSE

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phl 2:11).

"National Prob. Spiritual Solutions" from p. 1

You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested" (Rev 15:4).

There are many other verses in between. The judgment of God upon nations is not based on some complex set of religious rites and laws everyone has to know and follow. He does not judge nations simply because their churches, temples, creeds and customs differ from Biblical teachings. Indeed, He has judged many nations that never had a Bible. Our Father can judge nations based upon the golden rule alone (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39-40). A most severe penalty came upon all nations in Noah's day. It is explained in just 28 words:

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD (Gen 6:5-8).

Noah, a righteous man, was protected from this judgment. The Bible conveys how God deals individually with those who whole-heartedly seek Him (Jer 29:13). As He protected Noah and his family, He promises to protect His own even in the middle of national disaster all around them (Pslm 91:2-10). For personal help in how to cope with the future, see our article Faith to Face the Future (Sept-Oct 2009).

Even though he protects individually, God does not want His people to be ignorant of their nations sins. He protects people who "sigh and cry"—who are sad about their nation's sins. Christ himself showed the attitude we should have toward an evil nation

That on you [the leaders that killed Him] may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Matt 23:35-37).

God does not want us to go the one extreme of participating in our national sins. Those who do will receive the nation's judgment (Rev 18:4). Nor does He want us to take the other extreme of rejoicing in the destruction of nations for their sins (Ezk 33:11). We should not be as Jonah, who was disappointed that the city of Nineveh repented and was spared a disaster (Jonah 4:1-4). Rather, we should hope that all peoples will repent as Nineveh did:

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it (Jonah 3:8-10).

The Ninevites did not convert to Jonah's religion, begin to worship in Jerusalem or begin to obey the commandments given through Moses. They stopped the violence and the evil that most knew was wrong to begin with. Even to the nation of Judah, who had the detailed law given through Moses, the basic rules to avoid national judgment are simple:

These are the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,' Says the LORD" (Zech 8:16 -17)

Missing the Point

Nearly all the issues being debated by politicians in our federal and state governments are missing the big picture that would save our nation from a national judgment by God. Most Republican and Democratic leaders are arguing relatively fine points of programs that we probably do not need at all. The typical piece of legislation proposed today increases government regulation, control and taxation to solve a problem that was either created by the government or is not the government's responsibility. Governments often ignore serious issues for which our nation is likely to be judged by God.

As just one concrete example, how do governments deal with the present epidemic of STDs (Sexually Transmissible Diseases) among teens? There approach is to provide birth control and disease barriers, education in the use of these things, more medical care and abortions for those who want it. The Bible, and nearly every other major religion would teach teens to wait until marriage for sex. But the Bible and religious instruction has long been banned from schools, and the present STD epidemic has been one result.

Is our nation a secular nation, with separation of church and state? Not really. Our constitution simply states "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". Our government is forbidden to set one religious denomination (establishment) above another; it does not require the removing of all religion from public life. Indeed the letters and laws of our founding fathers were full of references to God and the Bible. Schools should be free to teach a variety of religion chosen by the parents of the

children in the school—just as an English class will compare and criticize the writings of many secular authors. All but a few modern religions would teach that teens should wait till marriage for sex, thereby avoiding the present plague of STDs.

Instead of this happening, the State has essentially replaced God in our schools—fulfilling the words of Communist philosopher Leon Trotsky: "God is the State; the State is God". Sure, our governments do not actually claim to be God, but when one examines the behaviors of school staff and students, that is what has taken place. If the government says we cannot talk about religion, we don't talk about religion. If they say it is all right for teens to have sex, then it is all right. Even if all of our leaders were sincere atheists at heart, they should have the wisdom to see from a historical/sociological perspective that the young people in schools would be better off waiting for marriage to have sex. But they keep promoting their promiscuous agenda.

The above is only one of many examples were the policies of our powerful governments are bringing the judgment of God upon our nation. While they try to ignore God, they cannot alter the fact that God judges nations whether they want to be judged by Him or not! Just because they choose to ignore the sources that show us our sin, does not mean we escape the immediate consequences of sin or God's ultimate judgment upon us.

Are there good civil government leaders today who want to address the important issues and implement moral solutions to them? Yes! Do most Americans pay attention to them or even know about them? No! A few of those leaders are small voices in the big political parties. Others are in small, struggling parties, some are completely independent. Some promote just and moral principles from a Christian perspective; others use a secular perspective for much the same teaching. Either one would help us avoid the consequences of national sin and judgment.

Many people today, even Christians, are confused into thinking they must support the "lesser of two evils" because they are the only ones that have a chance to win. The result is still evil and we are not to join a multitude to do evil (Ex 23:2). While their may be no leader who shares our religious or secular governing beliefs exactly, some certainly represent the teachings of basic morality and the Scriptures much better than others. It is not the purpose of secular government to bring our nation to God—that is the purpose of the Church. But it is the purpose of secular government to be just (Deut 16:18-20) and to avoid bringing national judgment upon us.

How we deal with ourselves, personally, is much different. We are responsible to live by every word of God (Luke 4:4). We cannot expect to bring about our own personal deliverance simply by promoting the right people and laws. We must rely on our faith in our heavenly Father to protect His children who serve Him (Mal 3:16-18). But if we do take time to get involved in civil governments, we need to support the massive changes that could actually produce a favorable judgment on this nation. We must not get fooled into following those making minor changes to a secular system that is largely evil.

10 Legislative Goals — Supported by the Golden Rule and the Bible

The following ten points were the guts of a support letter sent by Gerald Van Sickle, chairman of the US Taxpayers Party of Michigan. (known as the American Independent Party in California, the Constitution Party in most other states.) It was not intended to cover everything important, but to cover 10 important things. There are other small parties, and a few major party candidates that also embrace these ideas. The letter does not mention God or the Bible, but contains Biblical principles. We include all 10 legislative goals, below, and a statement afterward showing how these goals can be supported from both the Golden Rule and the Bible.

Nearly all religions and even most atheists support the Golden Rule, so our secular government is without excuse. Our leaders should be able to see the justice in these principles. They should be able to enact the kind of laws they would want to have if they were an ordinary citizen. Citizens ought to vote for candidates who support these principles rather than voting for a smooth, well-presented candidate whom they think will win. Citizens participation in government should not be like sports or petty arguments where the main goal is to be on the winning side. It is about standing up for just and fair principles whether they win or lose a particular political contest.

The scriptural teaching is also expounded because God shows us what is right and often shows us how to implement it. We might go astray with our own reasoning on the golden rule, but we will not go astray with God's reasoning. We do not need to learn lessons by many years of human suffering when God already has shown us what to do.

1. *PROLIFE—End the Killing! 50 million Americans killed in abortion chambers because Democrats and Republicans refuse to provide them the protection of the law!*

Golden Rule: How old are you? That many years ago, plus six months, you were a fetus. You are glad your parents did not abort you. We should not abort anyone else. We all think the law should protect children from being killed by their parents. Newborn and pre-born babies both cannot legally represent themselves, but they both have a constitutional right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Abortion ends that. We don't want that right terminated for us and we should not terminate it for anyone else.

Bible Teaching: "You shall not murder" (Ex 20:13). Other verses permitted people to kill in times of war or to punish someone lawfully found guilty of capital crimes. The only question that remains is, "Does the Bible teach unborn people are people?" "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my [David's] body and knit me together in my mother's womb (Ps 139:13). "...Two nations are in your [Rebecca's] womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger" (Gen 25:23). "Luke 1:31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:31-32)."And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41). It is clear that God recognizes some people and their destinies before they are born. These women, thankfully, understood it would be wrong to abort these babies and resist the plan of God. What plans does God have for babies being conceived today? We do not necessarily know, do we?

2. *Return to the American Values of Faith, Family, and Individual Responsibility — Put morality back in our schools!*

Golden Rule: Most older people today feel their childhood schools were better than the schools of today—both from an academic and a moral point of view. People were happy to have grown up in a family with a mother and father who had strong moral values. Those whose parents were not like this, wish theirs were. Nobody likes neighbors who can't be responsible for themselves, but who always want somebody else or some government agency to provide for them. Even people who claim to be atheists like to be treated like someone special with a purpose in the universe, as opposed to 1 out of trillions of other evolutionary happenstances competing for scarce planetary resources. We were all better off when we had less government. We should want to give this same opportunity to others, especially our young people.

Bible Teaching: This is the thinking that made the early USA successful: "...If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt 17:20). "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward... Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed..." (Ps 127:3,5) "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1Tim 5:8). "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Eph 5:3, NIV).

3. *Protect American Independence and Sovereignty—Defend our Borders.*

Golden Rule: We should stay out of other nations when we are not invited, and they should stay out of our borders. If Americans go to other countries and break their laws—including laws of entry, we should expect consequences. People coming to our country should expect the same thing. We expect to be rewarded if we obey the laws—so every person who has applied for legal immigration to the USA should be accepted here before anyone who has entered illegally.

Bible Teaching: God intended for nations to have borders: "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26). The Bible says people of other cultures living among us will be a snare to us (Ex 23:32-33). If foreigners do live among us, they should obey our laws (Ex 12:49). What sense does it make to spend $900 billion trying to kill uncertain enemies in a foreign land—killing thousands of civilians in the process—when our own borders could be secured for much less cost?

4. *Restoring Manufacturing jobs to America—Replace the income tax with a revenue tariff!*

Golden Rule: We do not want millions of Americans working for low wages to have our goods exported to another country. So we should not buy lots of cheap goods made with near-slave labor from other countries. Placing an import tariff on these products bringing their prices in line with those of domestic items greatly reduces the amount of foreign goods sold here and encourages other countries to pay a decent wage even when it increases the cost of their product. (The USA would reduce our tariff to keep it in line with the cost of domestic products.)

Bible Teaching: Nations should be subject to their own laws and under God. Multi-national trading corporations often evade most national laws. God is opposed to large world-dominating trading empires (Gen 11; Rev 13; 18; 19), especially ones that are lawless (Matt 7:23; Matt 23:28; 2Thes 2:3-8—*"man of sin" is "man of lawlessness").*

5. *End judicial tyranny—Restrict jurisdiction of federal courts. Remove out of control judges who debase marriage, sanction immorality, grab guns, and trample the Constitution.*

Golden Rule: Judges derive their authority to make judgments from the Constitution, and they swear to uphold it. Yet they make many decisions contrary to it. Furthermore, they make decisions against other people which they would not want made against them-

selves. The Constitution empowers the legislature to remove corrupt judges, but they almost never do. The legislature makes itself immune to most of the unfair laws they pass, and the judges do nothing. Both of these bodies, singularly and collectively, are not treating others like they want to be treated.

Bible Teaching: "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Deut 16:18-20).

6. *Reduce taxes—Limit government to its constitutional functions!*

Golden Rule: The Executive and Legislative branches love to exercise the power and spend the money the Constitution authorizes them to do. They should be fair and use that power only for the functions this constitution authorizes.

Bible Teaching: The Bible warns us that placing too much power in government will cause heavy taxation and oppression of the people (1Sam 8). We do not need a strong central government (Lev 26:8), but we want one because we see other nations have one (Deut 17:14).

7. *Implement a self-sufficient energy policy—Providing energy is more important than pandering to environmental extremists.*

Golden Rule: Many of the politicians and businesses that are crying the loudest about global warming and environmental pollution live an extravagant life style that uses many times the energy of the average world citizen. The are not setting the example of personal conservation, but are demanding a worldwide tax. Some of the same scientists that are so convinced we have global warming were predicting a global ice age 30 years ago (see next issue).

Bible Teaching: While men are commanded to be good stewards of the earth (Gen 2:15), agricultural prosperity depends more on a nation's righteousness than it does on how it controls the earth's environment (Lev 26:3-6; Deut 28:1-12). "Thus says the LORD: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited' " (Jer 17:5-6). Our leaders rarely carry out policies and spend money as promised within their 2 to 6 year terms. They repeatedly borrow from the future to finance programs today. Are we foolish to trust them with huge amounts of tax money to supposedly solve a problem that is 20 or more years in the future—when most of them will no longer be living?

8. *Improve road maintenance and infrastructure—Set proper priorities.*

Golden Rule: Citizens form and pay taxes to governments to accomplish things for the common good that they cannot do themselves, such as building roads, railroads, utility systems, etc. Politicians frequently divert money from these projects, to projects of their own. Politicians expect to be paid their promised salary and benefits, they should spend the citizens money in the way they promised

Bible Teaching: Roads should be built to important cities (Deut 19:3) The Bible praises leaders for using their authority for important infrastructure: Solomon built walled cities and an ocean-going fleet (1Ki 9:15-19; 26-28), Hezekiah built a city water system (2Ki 20:20; 2Chr 32:30), Nehemiah organized the repair of city walls (Neh 3); Gaius was a director of public works (Rom 16:23, NIV).

9. *Eliminate laws that violate property rights!*

Golden Rule: When there is a dispute as to which city, county, state or country a particular piece of land belongs to, politicians on both sides fight hard to claim that piece of land for themselves. They should similarly recognize the desire of their own citizens to keep and control their own property.

Bible Teaching: King Ahab knew he had no right to take a citizen's property, even though he wanted it (1Ki 21). So his wife, Jezebel, made false charges against the citizen, the corrupt court put him to death, and she took the property. Our governments work similarly today—and will be judged like Jezebel if they do not repent.

10. *End Racial Discrimination—Equal Rights for every American and special privileges for none!*

Golden Rule: This is so easy to understand, but people just do not do it. For years, our governments had laws discriminating against minorities. Now, there are laws discriminating against the majority. Nobody wants a less-than-equal status at law, so governments should not collect data on people's races or treat them in any way differently based upon it.

Bible Teaching: " 'One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you" (Num 15:16). " 'You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's"... (Deut 1:17)

These may not be the 10 most important areas of government, but they are much more important than the issues discussed by most legislators, today. These leaders must realize that their authority is ultimately from God (John 19:11; Rom 13:1-7), and that they will be judged for the decisions they make (Ps 110:6; Matt 12:36). If God can hold the unbeliever accountable for his unjust rule, how much more so can he hold the believer accountable? (1Cor 6:2-5).

Feast 2010 Homeless Project

The 2010 Feast of Tabernacles at Utica, Illinois was a wonderful event for the whole family. In addition to the regular excellent Bible teaching, food, activities and fellowship, a project was organized to make a lot of repairs improvements to a nearby homeless shelter in Ontario, Illinois. Over 100 brethren volunteered to help. Several brethren skilled in construction made the plans ahead of time and had materials ready.

This short article cannot cover all that was done, but the value was certainly worth many thousands of dollars to the shelter. The brethren painted the building, both with a sprayer and with brushes. They built a shed

from scratch in that single day—the progress evident at right. Cleaning, both inside and out, landscaping, heating and cooling repairs, and other vital tasks were accomplished.

A great blessing from this project was the working of people of all ages together. There were old people working inside, numerous adults working everywhere, and teens and young people all finding jobs to do. Some of the brethren were simply involved in bringing food and water to the others. The place was filled with a sense of teamwork and accomplishment.

Everyone had a chance to tour the shelter and find out how it worked. The shelter was open only during the winter months when it is too cold to stay outside and the need for help is greatest. The homeless people receive a bed, a small locker and a plastic tub to store their belongings—all the personal space they

How to Help the Poor

by Norman Edwards

The two main philosophies of how to help the poor can be summarized this way:

Liberal: Give the poor people as much as resources allow: shelter, food, clothing, and medical care, maybe even some entertainment and spending money. That should make them happy. The negative side is that most of them will have little incentive to ever escape the poverty trap and their lives will never be fulfilled or meaningful.

Conservative: Give the poor as little as possible so that they will have to learn to take care of themselves, thus removing themselves from poverty and learning to live a fulfilling life. The negative side is that many of them, especially the ill and disadvantaged, will struggle to achieve a minimal subsistence above which they cannot rise, often going to an early grave.

The truth is that the poor differ vastly, possessing numerous abilities and disabilities. Here is one brief way to break it down.

1)can't work—due to disability
2)can work
  a) some work as much as they can
  b) some won't work at all
  c) some seek every imaginable configuration in between
3)don't know how to work
  a) want to learn how to work
  b) don't want to learn how to work
4)don't have the resources to work
  a) would use resources provided to learn how to work.
  b) would consume resources provided instead of channeling them toward work.

(Resources include things like a "home address" to receive mail to apply for jobs or assistance, a phone, transportation, work clothes, tools, training, credentials, etc.)

Bible Says: The Poor Need Justice

What do the poor really need? The Bible tells us in a word: justice! People who are struggling need a fair chance to live by their own efforts. Please read just a few of the many scriptures about this.

"You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute" (Ex 23:6).

"Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow." And all the people shall say, "Amen!" (Deut 27:19).

Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy (Pslm 82:3).

The righteous considers the cause of the poor, But the wicked does not understand such knowledge (Prov 29:7).

Open your mouth, judge righteously, And plead the cause of

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get! They receive two hot meals and a sack lunch every day, and have facilities to shower and do laundry. The living room/dining room is shown below. There is not much privacy!

The homeless people all are asked to leave the shelter during the day and go look for a job or go to the local library and use its computers to better their skills or to find a job. This is a useful function as well as a prevention for fights and squabbles that would almost certainly occur when dozens of people are cramped together in a small space.

While this may seem to be a very drab existence, it is far better than sleeping on the street. The shelter staff

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the poor and needy (Prov 31:9).

Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, Who write misfortune, Which they have prescribed To rob the needy of justice, And to take what is right from the poor of My people, That widows may be their prey, And that they may rob the fatherless (Isa 10:1-2).

For I know your manifold transgressions And your mighty sins: Afflicting the just and taking bribes; Diverting the poor from justice at the gate (Amos 5:12).

Many people become poor because they were defrauded by employers, landlords, governments, insurance companies, lenders, lawyers, con artists, criminals, etc. Other needy people are not able to leave poverty because of unfair systems.

God commanded that all debts be forgiven every seven years (Deut 15:1-11). He also commanded that people receive their own land from which to produce wealth each 50th year (Lev 25, see Sept-Oct 2008 Servants' News). These are systems that should be implemented on the national level. In our society, the equivalent is helping a poor person to file bankruptcy, or providing resources to them so they can make a living on their own.

Many of the poor need someone to personally get to know them, to treat them with Christian love, and to tell them that they are wrong and they need to change in certain areas of their life. While not having an exact percentage, this writer agrees that most poor people could probably get out of poverty by changing things that are within their ability to change. Unfortunately, because they see so much corruption and unfairness in society, they often place nearly all the blame there, and do not look to themselves enough.

This is why Christians need to help these people. Christians need to stand for Godly, biblical, just principles—in opposition to government corruption as well as personal corruption in the poor people who also need to change. Lest any of our readers remain in doubt, legal systems for millennia have favored the rich:

But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? (Jms 2:6)

Today, it is the same. This writer has had a judge tell him, in court, that he should find an attorney because "people who represent themselves don't do very well." Our constitutions guarantee our right to represent ourselves. Isn't it the job of a judge to make sure that trials are fair no matter how each person is represented?

Even so, most court personnel provide less help to those representing themselves than they do to attorneys. This writer has seen people representing themselves in court who asked for legal relief rightly due them, but who lost large sums of money and received more time in jail simply because they did not know the proper legal procedure to ask for relief.

In most civil cases, if a person cannot afford an attorney, the court will not provide one. Attorneys will only take cases for a share of the proceeds if they are virtually certain a big payout is forthcoming. But for the middle or lower income person who, for example, loses $20,000 because of faulty work on their dwelling, or who is sued by someone else for a frivolous reason, they will usually have the choice of trying to represent themselves or losing their life savings to an unscrupulous person.

In criminal cases, court appointed attorneys frequently work more closely with the prosecuting (opposing) attorney than they do with their own clients. They are usually paid a flat fee equivalent to an hour or two of their normal billing rates, and have no time for investigation or discovery for their clients.

Even a person of average means who can hire an attorney is not likely to get a fair trial when facing a wealthy or well-connected opposition. The "little guy's" attorney is often more interested in not going against his fellow attorneys than he is in winning the case for a person of little influence.

Does our system provide a remedy when judges and attorneys "walk all over the poor"? Yes, there are appellate courts. But the victim often does not even know what or how to appeal. Even if he does, the Michigan court of appeals manual states: "Bringing a case before the Court of Appeals without an attorney is a difficult, if not impossible, task." A very precise legal form as well as hundreds of dollars are needed. Using an attorney will cost thousands.

The poor need wise, godly people who can accurately determine the cause of their plight, and either help them to change, or help them overcome the evil that has oppressed them.

Not Programs

Today, most government and charitable methods of helping the poor are reduced to some kind of program that goes something like this:

1) People pay money (taxes or offerings) into the program.
2) The program hires administrators who write rules for how they will give their resource to the poor. The administrators vary from people who really want to help the poor, to those who want a job to those who use their position to embezzle or extort wealth for themselves.
3) The poor fill out forms or make personal visits to obtain the benefits.
4) The ones who get the most benefits are usually the ones who are the most aggressive, most persistent, best actors or best liars. The penalty for supplying false information is frequently only the denial of benefits—no different than if the person had never applied. The program administrators develop a tough approach to try to keep down

waste. The professional "program applicants" learn to accept the tough talk and keep on getting benefits.

5) The people who really need help are often embarrassed to ask. When they do ask, they are most likely to be rebuffed by the tough approach and receive few or no benefits.
6) Occasionally, more often in big government programs, the administration becomes corrupt with a significant percentage of the resources not being received by the needy at all.

The programs rarely address the issues causing people to become impoverished. Poor people frequently suffer from unjust landlords, unfair working practices, addictions, scams, gangs, extortion, etc. Poor people often have unbelievable stories—some false, some true. Both are difficult to work with.

Little success is achieved when a massive number of people give to centralized program administrators who channel aid to a massive number of people. What is needed is a lot of local Christians closely involved with the mass of local needy people in their local areas.

A friend who spent years helping the poor cited the Iron Rule:

Never do for people what they can do for themselves.

If a person can work a little, they should. If they can fill out forms for themselves, they should. If they can take care of their own personal needs, or their children's needs, they should. Programs tend to have stringent application requirements, but then once a person is "on them", they can keep on going. The goal should be to remove people from assistance as soon as they are able.

In Your House

The poor need people to be with them, to get to know them, and to see how much of their trouble is due to their own mismanagement, due to injustice and oppression from others, or simply due to unfortunate circumstances. This cannot be done well through forms, rules and distant one-size-fits-all administration.

"But I do not want to get close to these people; they are dirty and my family could get diseases from them." So some might say. But what does the Bible say? Does it warn you about the dangers of getting sick from taking poor people into your house? Or does it promise you healing? Check this out:

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard (Isa 58:6-8).

While taking poor people into one's own house is not the only means of helping, it is certainly one of the best ways to help homeless people—those who "are cast out". There are other scriptures that teach this (Gen 19:2; Jdgs 19:21; Job 31:32, etc.) And there is a promise of speedy healing.

Both Jesus and the apostles continued this teaching, not just for physical healing, but as an instrumental part of the Kingdom of God:

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me'" (Matt 25:34-36).

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. 3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also (Heb 13:2-3).

Making it Happen

Not everyone can effectively help the strangers, the poor and the prisoners in their locality. But as Hebrews warns, the problem is that we often forget them, not that we are unable to help them. If all we do is give money to someone we don't know who asks for it, we will not be very effective—we may simply enable con artists to make a better living. But only a little work and experience helps us to do better than that. If we wait to help until we are 100% effective, we will never start.

Help starts with the willingness to spend time with someone and understand them. Following that is a wonderful exercise in preparation to reign with Christ in his Kingdom (2Tim 2:10-12). What does each struggling person need? The Gospel? (Matt 11:5). Correction from the Scripture? (2Tim 3:16). Food and water? (Rom 12:20) Other stuff? (1Jo 3:17). To learn to work in order to eat? (2Thes 3:10) This is our opportunity to share whatever limited resources we have to help others toward the kingdom of God so that we can work effectively when we have the powers of God (Phil 3:21; Col 3:4; 2Pet 1:4; 1Jo 3:2; Rev 20:4).

The job of helping poor people is difficult and taxing, but provides a true understanding of love. It is not nearly as difficult as what Christ did for us.

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1Jo 3:16).

May God give wisdom and strength to everyone who undertakes to serve those who are in need!

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But he directed his efforts to the poor, the brokenhearted, the blind and the oppressed.

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18, see also Matt 11:5, Luke 7:22).

In general, the world has been divided into a relatively small group of wealthy people who oppress the larger group of poor people (Jer 22:13-17; Ezk 22:25-29; James 2:5-6). Though not impossible, Christ said it was very difficult for the wealthy to enter into the Kingdom of God. (Matt 19:20-23; Mark 10:23-27; Luke 16:19-25). It was largely the poor who desired and heard Jesus' message.

Jesus' primary mission was spiritual. He taught righteousness and proclaimed the Kingdom of God. He did provide for the poor as well, both feeding people by miracle (Matt 14:21; 15:38) and from the bag of money Judas carried for his ministry (John 13:29).

Part of his righteous teaching was that each person was responsible to help others not as well off as themselves. He taught a loving, caring way of life where people should be concerned with not just their own needs, but also the needs of others (Phil 2:4). He gave frequent instruction to help others who are not as well off as we are:

"But rather give alms of such things as you have…" (Luke 11:41).

"But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. 32 "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 "Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys (Luke 12:31).

Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. 13 "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:12-14).

The Believer does not do these things in order to look good before other people. Indeed, Christ taught that it is simply a Christ-like attitude that causes a person to want to help others—and that God will reward us for it in due time:

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matt 6:1-4, NIV).

"And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful (Luke 6:33-36).

Note that God is kind even to those who are unthankful and evil. They receive rain and sunshine as well (Math 5:45). There are also times when they receive nothing, or receive punishment for their sins, but that is more of God's concern (Rom 12:19). We do not have unlimited capacity as God does, so all of our giving is based upon what we have to give—which at times may not be very much.

While it is easy to think, if we had a lot more, we would give a lot more, the opposite is often true. Those who have the most are the most desirous of holding on to it. Notice this very interesting theological discussion with Jesus about what is required for eternal life:

So He [Christ] said to him,.... But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." 18 He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, " 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 19 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt 19:17-19).

Jesus cited the ten commandments and the Golden Rule (Lev 19:18). The young man, like so many church-going folk of today, was fairly sure that his doctrine and his practice were correct. So what happened?

The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. 23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 19:20-23, see also Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22-27).

This man was specifically challenged by Christ to give up all his wealth to be a part of Christ's ministry. Christ did not command everyone everywhere to do this. But Christ knew that was necessary for this man to live by faith and no longer trust in his possessions. Christ was not asking the man to do anything that He had not done himself. Christ set aside both his power

as God and the wealth and universe (Phil 2:6-7) to be poor to help us:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2Cor 8:9).

The Bible records another case of a rich man who successfully repented and changed. Here was his solution, approved by Christ

Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; 10 "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:8-9).

Disciples Continued To Help the Poor

Like Christ's purpose, the main purpose of the Apostles was not solely to help the poor, physically. In the first days of their ministry, a crippled man asked Peter for money, but received a rather shocking answer:

Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." 7 And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8 So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them — walking, leaping, and praising God (Acts 3:6).

The twelve Apostles continued the miracles and the message of Christ, but they also continued the teaching of helping people less fortunate than ourselves. Notice the apostle Paul's account of their teaching when he first met them:

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do (Gal 2:9-10).

The previous verses are about preaching the Gospel, but all the apostles also wanted to provide for the poor. Paul spoke of giving alms himself in Acts 24:16-17. God himself approved of the giving of the first non-Jewish convert, Cornelius:

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" 4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God (Acts 10:1-4).

We conclude this section with a few other quotes showing the continued teaching by our spiritual mentors of the need to help people who need our help:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all... (Gal 6:10).

But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Heb 13:16).

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (Jms 1:27).

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? 7 Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? 8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well... 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment (Jms 2:5-8, 13).

Helping Believers

The Apostle Paul summed it up this way:

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal 6:9-10).

There is a lot in those verses. Working hard to help others can be tiring especially when they do not appreciate it, and when we have little to show for our efforts. But as we will see below, our efforts are for eternity, not just for this present life. "As we have opportunity" acknowledges we are not able to help everybody or help all the time. It is when we can do it that God expects us to. (If you think you never have opportunity to help anybody, ask God to show you when you can.) "Do good to all" shows our help is not limited to believers, though the "household of faith" deserves special attention.

There are numerous references throughout the New Testament epistles to help the poor brethren in various areas that needed it. There was no particular system for doing it: no tithes, no pledges, no counts of how much was collected or how many people were helped. Just each person giving as they were able and just distribution of the proceeds. The entire chapter of 2 Corinthians 9 is devoted to this. Here are many other interesting short quotes:

Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:29-30).

But now I am going to

Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. 27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things (Rom 15:25-27).

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come (1Cor 16:1 -2).

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints (2Cor 8:1-4).

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver (2Cor 9:7).

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need (Eph 4:28).

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share (1Tim 6:17-18).

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (Jms 2:14-17).

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (1Jo 3:16, NIV).

Helping the Poor Is Not Always the Most Important

The Bible does contain examples of things that are a higher priority than helping the poor. For example, a person cannot use "giving to others" as an excuse not to help his own family (Mark 7:11-13). Paul taught:

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1Tim 5:8).

How much does a person need to provide for his family? How big of a house? How many cars? How much food? The Bible cannot answer all of the specifics. But they certainly will be a matter for judgment. We are told to love our neighbor as ourselves. If we eat $50 dinners and we cannot help a few people get $2 dinners, we have a very different standard for ourselves and our neighbors.

On the other hand, giving physical things to poor people can distract them from the spiritual lessons that they need to learn. Christ ran into this problem.

Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." 28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:26-29)

As one more example, a woman anointed the feet of Jesus with fragrant oil worth almost a year's wages (Matt 26:6; Mark 14:3-9). Jesus disciples criticized her for not selling it and giving it to the poor, which appears to be their customary use of expensive things. But Jesus said that this act was an anointing for his burial—something that God wanted done. It was her property to use as she pleased, and she pleased God. Giving is something we voluntarily do with our own possessions (Acts 5:4), not with the possessions of another. (We realize that the politicians of our day have not learned this lesson, but that is the subject for another article.) To clarify its importance, Christ said:

"For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always (Mark 14:7).

Indeed, there may be other expensive things that God wants done, so we should not be surprised to see things like that in His Church. On the other hand, there are many people in churches who like expensive things and are willing to spend church money to do them—even when God has not asked for them. We need wisdom, prayer and discernment to know.

Some believers place great emphasis on certain scriptures that they call "commissions" (Matt 24:14; 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-18; Acts 1:8; Rev 14:6-12). They believe that these are given to today's Church and that the resources of the Church should be used to preach the Gospel according to those commissions—that the millions used for these commissions are like the oil poured on Christ—the money should not be used to help the poor.

But Christ's example of the

expensive oil is a single act, not the continual way of an ongoing ministry. We must realize that the Apostles and New Testament Church also were fulfilling the commissions given to them in the Scriptures and giving to the poor while they were doing it! There commissions were clearly given to them by Christ or in miraculous ways, but they never once said, "we do not help poor people because we are too busy with our commission." To the contrary, they wrote more verses about helping the poor than they did about commissions. The Christian is never excused from sharing what he has with someone he knows to be in need.

The First Resurrection and Entering the Kingdom

While the Old Testament Law certainly permits a hard-working man to acquire and keep as much wealth as he can honestly earn, Christ set a higher standard. To a rich man who decided to build bigger barns to hold his wealth, Christ said:

... 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:20-21).

Christ taught laying up "treasure in heaven" or eternity. We also read the story of the young rich man who was told to sell all he had and follow Christ. Christ again tied that to our Eternal life:

So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, 30 "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life. 31 "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Mark 10:29-31)

What is the "first last" and "last first" about? It is about entering the kingdom of God, the order in which one does it. A person who is poor in this life, who learns to trust God for his sustenance and who learns to share what he has with others is soon ready for eternal life. A person who has much in this life and who need not trust God still has things to learn.

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (Jms 2:5).

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:9-25) shows the judgment of the rich man who did not help the poor:

"But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. (Luke 16:25).

"But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13)

Luke clearly says that helping the poor will be repaid in the "resurrection of the just". This is the first resurrection, the goal of the Christian:

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev 20:6).

Paul also wrote about giving to the poor in the context of the resurrection:

"I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. 16 This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. 17 "Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation (Acts 24:15-17).

Where To Go From Here?

God expects us to help the poor as we are able, both believers and unbelievers. It should be neither a token part nor the only part of our lives, but a significant part of our lives. It is both a benefit to the poor and training for us to live a Christ-like life. It is a determining factor in our Eternal lives.

The best method any one person can use to really help the poor is not always easy to determine. It often requires more time than money—see "How to Help the Poor" in this issue!. Many people want to simply give to a charity and feel their responsibility is complete, but many charities spend more money on themselves than they do on actually helping the poor. When church congregations took up collections, they appointed one of their own members to transport and administer the gift (2Cor 8:16-24). Seeing others give of their time and resources to help those in need is a great witness for Christ. It should be done by Christians who live and teach His ways, not by people simply hired to do the job.

How can one change one's life to give to those in need more? The answer is simple in concept. Whatever process you use now for budgeting your time and money simply needs to include helping people less fortunate than yourself. For example, when you know you will be needing a new vehicle, you begin setting aside money for it and take time to find out what kind of vehicle you need, what it will cost, and where you can obtain one. If you don't know enough about it, you get help. If you need to stop some other things you are doing or cut some other expenses, you do.

Helping the poor is very similar. You can look for a way to do it that you have the time and money to expend. If you don't know how to do it, get help—it may make sense to work with someone. Like the car, you may need to cut out other things in order to do it.

Start with a prayer.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us (1Jn 5:14).

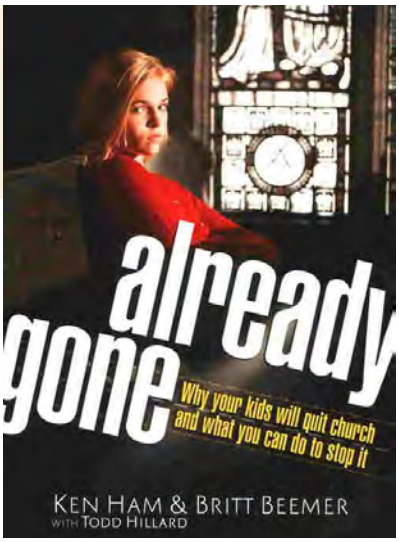
Books Worth a Look

by Bill Buckman

Already Gone

Why your kids will quit church and what you can do to stop it

By Ken Ham and Britt Beemer • Copyright 2009 by Ken Ham • Master Books



Ken Ham is the president and founder of Answers in Genesis (AiG) and the Creation Museum near Cincinnati, Ohio. AiG produces an abundance of creationist materials, hosts a website and sends out creationist speakers all over the country. Ham is a prolific writer and speaker and has appeared on several major TV programs on big networks including Fox, CNN, ABC and BBC.

Based on his own experience and research by pollster George Barna, Ken Ham believes we have an epidemic of closing churches mainly due to young people leaving and not returning. After interviewing 22,000 adults and over 2000 teens Barna concluded "six out of ten 20-somethings who were involved in a church during their teen years are already gone." According to 2006 Barna Group statistics on twenty year olds, 19% did not attend church as teens and still don't. Of those who did attend as teens, 61% no longer do so.

Ham wanted to learn more detailed reasons for this high attrition rate. Britt Beemer, a market research analyst who had done work previously for the Creation Museum, and his America's Research Group polled 1000 individuals from all over the country who had regularly attended church as teens but did not attend now. Based on a wide variety of questions no one clear reason for dropping church attendance stood out. The top 5 reasons given were: boring services, legalism, hypocrisy of leaders, too political, and self-righteous people.

Another major finding of this survey was that, "We are losing many more people by middle school and many more by high school than we will ever lose in college." Among those who no longer believe that all the accounts and stories in the Bible are true, almost 40% had their first doubts in middle school and almost 44% in high school. Ham says: "many parents will fork out big bucks to send these students to Christian colleges, hoping to protect them in their faith. But the fact is, they're already gone. They were lost while still in the fold."

This study also revealed that, "Sunday school is actually more likely to be detrimental to the spiritual and moral health of our children." Those who regularly attend Sunday school are more likely not to believe all the accounts in the Bible are true, are more likely to defend abortion, more likely to defend premarital sex and gay marriage, more likely to believe God used evolution, more likely to believe the earth is billions of years old and much more along the same lines.

Ham offers two major ways to counteract this trend. First he calls for a total renovation of church educational materials. He believes the Bible is taught as just "stories" and "not really connected to the real world" and we yield science teaching to the secularists. He stands for the teaching of strong biblical apologetics in general and creation apologetics in particular. He believes a major reason the church is losing its young people is because we no longer take a firm stand on the straightforward reading of the Genesis accounts. If they can't trust the beginning of God's word, why should they trust any of it? Ham writes, "It's not enough to just tell students, 'believe in Jesus!' Faith that is not founded on fact will ultimately falter in the storm of secularism that our students face every day". Secondly he strongly exhorts parents, fathers in particular, to take responsibility for their children's religious education, citing Deut. 6:4-10 and Eph. 6:1-4. Don't just drop them off at Sunday school.

Those surveyed were also asked what they missed by not attending church. "Only about 7 percent said they missed the music, and nobody was missing Sunday school. Most of them simply said, 'I miss worshipping God.' "

There is very much more to this 190 page book including a 14 page appendix detailing some of the Beemer survey questions and several lists of teaching resources (not just from AiG).

While some smaller church groups may think this was a study of mainstream churches, and not applicable to them, this writer challenges them to honestly accumulate statistics of their own. Of the young people in your group for the last ten years, where are they now?

This writer agrees with much of this book and believes Servants' News readers could learn some valuable lessons from it. Ken Ham believes the primary way for each of us to make the church relevant is "By defending the Word, living by the Word, and standing on the Word uncompromisingly."

We print a representative sampling of our mail—both positive and negative. We do not include names unless we are fairly sure that the writer would not object.

To avoid any difficulty, writers should specify how much of their name and address they would like us to print.

Catholics Struggle with Resurrection Teaching

LETTER: *[no date]*

Recently, I sat in a Catholic prayer meeting while a self-confessed rebel priest tried to explain the "mystery" of the resurrection. In other words, a resurrection from life to life makes no sense. Two people immediately got up and contradicted him, proclaiming the immortal soul.

Later on, I thought of the verse, "the soul that sins shall die" (Ezk 18:4), but I also thought of the wineskins bursting. Sometimes I wonder if there is a point in trying to pass on true doctrine. People have been martyred over just this kind of thing. I hope it isn't too cold for you there and that things are working out.

Sincerely,

—Ray Chandler

RESPONSE: We must realize that there are people in religions everywhere who are seeking God from His word. A friend of mine had once attended a funeral conducted by two Catholic priests. The priests explained in detail how the man was dead and awaiting a resurrection. My friend spoke with them afterward, exclaiming, "your church doesn't teach that—you teach that they are either in heaven, hell or purgatory." They replied, "yes, that is the teaching for the masses, but there are those of us who study the Bible and we know".

Christ clearly taught that truth brought freedom (Jon 8:32). But He also realized people are not ready for all truth at once (Mark 4:33; John 16:12; 1Cor 3:1-2). Many times our Savior was most impressed by people who were not Israelites and probably understood little truth, but who had an attitude of love and faith. The famous "love chapter" (1Cor 13) leaves no doubt that love is more important than doctrine, spiritual gifts, etc.

When people literally go to war, or cast someone out of their church over doctrinal heresy, it is not usually because they really want to protect the other person from the "false doctrine" that he believes. If the doctrine were that bad, why don't they just let the other person believe his "false doctrine" and suffer the horrific consequences of it as punishment? The reason they want to persecute the one with different doctrines is because they tie their own salvation to having all true doctrines. To see someone else with different beliefs, especially doing good Christian works, is upsetting to their own religion's foundations. So they fight to prove themselves right!

—NSE

Likes Feast & SN

LETTER: *November 16, 2009*

Dear Norman,

Just wanted you to know that we were spiritually blessed to attend the 2009 Feast of Tabernacles at Grizzly Jack's Resort in Utica, Illinois

We also receive the Servants' News. Your articles about "What is True Forgiveness" and "Faith to Face the Future" is what we need to help us not to fear but to draw closer to God as we see the time of the end approaching.

Included is an offering of [amount deleted] to help with your ministry.

Sincerely,

— Mr-Mrs Ralph Stark, Wayne City, IL

RESPONSE: I found it to be an excellent Feast site as well. The programs are good, but it also provides a wonderful place for like-minded believers to meet together. Thank you for encouraging our ministry as well!.

—NSE

Proclaiming Bilical Feast Days

LETTER: *August 28, 2010*

Hi Norman,

Thanks for the update. I'm going to the Feast with a group in Tennessee. Michigan a little too far for me.

Question: (not trying to start an argument) Just something to think about. How is it that that the Feast of Trumpets is Sept. 9th? The Scriptures say to keep the Feasts in their SEASONS. (Spring and Fall) The first day of the 7th month is Sept. 22. Moving the Feast Days up and down the calendar out of season is not sound doctrine, is it?

Be Blessed,

—Mike

RESPONSE: Thanks for the letter. There is a short answer to this. Your reference to "in their seasons" is probably from this verse:

> These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons (Lev 23:4, KJV).

Many people take this to mean the Feast days need to be observed during certain seasons. However, if one looks at the Hebrew, or a more accurate translation, there is no word in this scripture meaning "season of the year" or "spring, summer, fall or winter", Both the word for "feasts" and for "seasons" are from the same Hebrew word, moed. The CSB more accurately translates it:

> "These are the LORD's appointed times, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times" (Lev 23:4, CSB)..

The verse does not really say when to proclaim them, but states that they should be proclaimed when they are kept. Leviticus 23:2 and 37 also command these days to be proclaimed. This means that one calls

others to them, invites them, lets them know. The command to proclaim is clear—and most people have done a fairly good job of this.

We do find out more about when, in general, to proclaim the feasts in verses like this one:

> "Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year" (Ex 34:22, NIV).

The words "turn of the year" are translated from the Hebrew tequwphah {tek-oo-faw'} (Strong's # 8622). The best research I have read says that it refers to the equinoxes and solstices, in this case the first day of fall. It mentions the Feast of Tabernacles as being at the "turn of the year", not the Feast of Trumpets. With the present Jewish calendar, the Feast of Tabernacles is almost always after the first day of fall. Even so, neither this verse nor any other clearly says that the Feast Days must come after a certain equinox. Clearly the Feast of Weeks must come with the wheat harvest, so we know that must be early summer. Other clues to Feast timing are elsewhere in the Bible.

The Bible contains enough clear commands that I struggle with, causing me not to be overly concerned about the things that are unclear or not even commanded in Scripture. We do proclaim the Feast Days we observe as commanded in Scripture, and I hope you do the same. If I felt I could be of greatest service to my family and fellow believers by attending the Feast you attend, I certainly would do it at the time you proclaimed it.

What are the big commandments that I struggle with? Ones like this:

> "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends " (John 15:12-13).

—NSE

All Men Created Equal?

LETTER: *February 2, 2010*

Hey Norman!

What does it mean when scripture says, "All men are created equal"?

— [name withheld]

Actually that is not in the scripture, but in the U.S. Constitution:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Some people teach that some races did not descend from Adam or that some races are superior to others when it comes to salvation. I think that is an evil teaching. Here are the scriptures that show it to be false:

> Gen 3:20 And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.
>
> Acts 17:26 "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings."
>
> Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

God does choose nations and individuals for specific purposes at times, but there is no class of people that are innately superior to any other.

—NSE

Keep Going Through Trial

LETTER: *August 11, 2009*

Hello Norm,

Thank you for the latest Servants' News. I have a new address:

[address omitted]

From the information I have received from various people, particularly Laura Lee, I know you have come through an extreme trial. Congratulations on your endurance and holding everything together.

Take care,

— Wily Elder, Florida

RESPONSE: Thank you. It has been quite a trial. But it is in trials that we grow. Most the stories of the Bible are about trials that believers went through. There just are not many Bible stories of believers who had a nice job, a nice marriage, nice neighbors and lived in that condition until their peaceful death.

The difficult thing is that not many brethren seem to understand that. Most people take the approach that if we are struggling it is because we are doing something wrong or because God is not in this. Over time I have learned not to worry about this either. There are plenty of trials to go around and God will certainly allow the nay-sayers

—NSE

Don't Want Denomination

LETTER: *August 11, 2009*

Servants' News,

I was raised and baptized as a Catholic, I no longer practice the Catholic Faith. I belong to no religious group (denomination). I believe in the god almighty and his son, our lord Jesus Christ and the holy spirit. I believe that the Bible was inspired by god and I believe in following the ten commandments. My purpose in life is to serve God and become one of his chosen children and live forever in his kingdom as part of his family. I want to become a true Christian and find the true church of god.

RESPONSE: I consider what you have written to be a very sound doctrinal statement. When people try to write much more extensive ones, in their efforts to try to be clear, they end up putting in their own ideas. Do not look for a denomination to join—that is not the church. However, there may be many true brethren in denominations—they are just in error on that point. (Revelation 2 & 3 shows that the church has errors.)

> "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).
>
> If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love

his brother also (1Jo 4:20-21).

A church should be a place where you can edify others and be edified yourself (1Co 14:26). Also a place you can serve others, and be served yourself as needed.

There is a long-time Servants' News reader in Brooklyn named Sydney Brown, [address omitted]. I don't have a phone or e-mail for him. He said he would not mind being contacted.

Another person in Brooklyn who has a good ministry is Gilford T. Monrose <gmonrose@yahoo.com>.

I am by no means trying to say that these are the only Christians in Brooklyn, or even the "best ones" if there is such a thing. They are just brethren I have known for some years. They may (or may not) help you in your goal to serve the Eternal. Pray and ask that He will lead you to a place where you can serve and edify as well as be served and edified.

—NSE

Repent For The Kingdom of Heaven Is at Hand!!! (Mat. 3:2)

LETTER: *November 13, 2009*

Peace be unto you!

Hear this, all ye people, give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world (Ps. 49:1).

I heard the voice of the Lord God Almighty saying unto me: "Tell all my people to repent and I will forgive all their sins" Thus saith the Lord God Almighty.

And that repentance and remission of sins shall be preached in His name in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then the end shall come (Matt 24:14).

He that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches (Rev 2:7)

— The voice of the Lord God Almighty
Church of the Holy Spirit Healing Miracle
Sec. Reg. Nos. 200626392
Purok 11, Tupi South Cotabato
Philippines 9505
holyspirithealingmiracle@yahoo.com
+639093052783 +639104991305
+639293968970 +639185251027

RESPONSE: I accept that this is a message from God as it is almost completely composed of Scripture. People, churches and nations all need confess their sins and repent of them. This is more important than all of the political, military and doctrinal manueverings that we do in a n effort to protect ourselves.

Since I received identical letters both to Servants' News and PABC, I would guess you are sending this letter to many groups. May the Eternal bless it. Even though you provided a lot of contact information, our experience has shown that you may not receive much communication and support. Admonishing people to repent has never been very popular. The prophets of the Old Testament and our Messiah himself did not build a large following during their earthly ministry. But the fruit of their work was good.

> And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Gal 6:9).

—NSE

Needs Sabbatarian or Sacred Name Guitar Music

LETTER: *September 14, 2009*

[relevant excerpts of this letter]

I have a small request of you if possible? I've been fellowshipping here on Sabbath's with the Seventh-Day Adventists and for our worship music we've been using the Protestant song book which a lot of the music reflects erroneous doctrine as you know. I've got a Sacred name song book that I tried to introduce, and most of the guys were ignorant of the Name and used the excuse that they didn't know how to read "piano" sheet music. Do you guys have a song book with songs about the Sabbath and other true doctrines that have "guitar" sheet music?

If so, could you make a few copies of some select songs and send them to me? I'd really appreciate it!

Thanks in advance, and may Yahuah continue to bless you all at PABC.

— John Joseph Adkins #B-235577
Kinross Correctional Facility,
16770 Water Tower Dr
Kincheloe, MI 49788

RESPONSE: We are sending you a few songs that we have with the traditional sacred name in them. It is true that there are less musicians that know how to read sheet music these days. Both guitarists and many keyboard players just play from chord symbols. Those symbols do not convey the melody—the player has to know it. (Our Father has seen to it that a great many people are gifted with the ability to remember thousands of melodies.) However, somebody who does not know a song cannot learn it from just words and chord symbols. I do not know if music can be delivered to prisons via tape, CD or download of some kind..

We hope some of our readers, especially those who use the sacred name, will take it upon themselves to send you some good songs with chord symbols and to possibly write you and find if there is a way to get you a CD or other audio version so that you can learn the melodies. We can assure our readers that you are good at writing back!

—NSE

Sharing the Bible at a Big Church's Prophecy Meeting

[Suzette wrote a letter asking for help in bringing biblical truth to a large church's prophecy meetings that she was attending. That long letter is not printed here, but NSE's response and then her following letter and response are printed.]

RESPONSE: May the Eternal grant you wisdom and peace in dealing with the pastor. I can help you a little. Here is an important scripture.

> Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us. But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a

millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:38-42).

From that time until now, there have been people claiming to do the Eternal's work, who are not really follow the master. Some of them do good things "give cups of cold water", some of them do bad things "cause little ones to stumble". We can end up causing little ones' to stumble if we make Christ appear divided unnecessarily. That is not to say that we accept or practice their false doctrines.

Yahshuah spoke the truth in saying:

"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (Matt 12:30).

But, he did not give us the job of deciding who is gathering and who is scattering. Remember the parable of the "good Samaritan". (Luke 10:30-37). Yahshuah told the Samaritans that they did not know what they worship (John 4:22), but he still honored the works of a Samaritan over the Priest and Levite who would not help the injured man along the road.

As far a prophecy is concerned, I have believed some different prophetic interpretations in my life time, and all of them have turned out wrong. I would much rather work with a group that claims that they don't know when Messiah will return than one who thinks they know and is wrong. Prophetic teachers almost always use a lot of Scripture, so their writings sound "Scriptural". But it is still their interpretation of Scripture. In the past, God has shown me things I need to do through other people or in occasional dreams. I trust our Father to continue this. I think we need to read prophecy and know what it says, but it is a mistake to get a group of people together and agree what it means, and then base our actions on that human agreement. Before I can accept that anybody has an understanding of biblical prophecy, I want to see a track record: Read their old writings, see that what they said would come to pass so far has happened, and also make sure they have not claimed things would happened that did not. I've never seen this happen. Usually prophetic teachers that are specific just keep revising their predictions every few years.

Anyway, may the Eternal bless your meeting and may everyone be encouraged to study the Bible more!

—NSE

LETTER: *January 13, 2010*
Norm, what a wonderful and encouraging and wise reply. Thank you very much. Bless Yah, He sends messages and gives me information through people like you!

[Section about another prophetic teacher removed.]

I did have the pastor [of the prophecy class] call [me]. It went well, praise Yah. He was concerned that I would go in there with my doctrines and have 30 people follow me out and "sit in my basement with a bunch of candles to wait for Jesus". I calmly (Praise Yah!) replied that I hoped his opinion of my faith wasn't that. That by no means are we a cult, that we don't even have a head minister or have a control factor where we all must agree on every point.

I believe Yah put some good words in my mouth, that hopefully His words came out and not my own. I did get to explain some basics because the pastor asked. Like that I don't believe in eternal hell,...

RESPONSE: I will jump in and commend on each of your "basics". Dispelling the "sinners eternally suffer in hell" doctrine is one of the best teachings. Most people are glad to find out about it. Many preachers and religious zealots do not like the truth about this getting out because many people attend churches and give to them largely because they think it will keep them out of hell.

LETTER: *...that people are not in heaven right now,...*

RESPONSE: This is obviously true, like the last one, and easy to find scriptures about, but some people will go to Rev 6:9 where there are souls under the altar in heaven. I think this is symbolic or figurative, but with Revelation, almost everybody picks what they think is literal, symbolic or figurative. I have found it is easier and more effective to reach people with the fact that God does not send people to burn in hell forever before dealing with the heaven issue.

LETTER: *...that He has a name,...*

RESPONSE: and it isn't "Lord" or "adonai" or "ha shem", etc. Saying exactly what the Name is and how to pronounce It is more difficult. There are so many heartfelt, in-depth writings that come to such different conclusions. I do not stress this teaching.

LETTER: *...that the Sabbath is a prophetic picture of Yah's timeline for man,...*

RESPONSE: I like to show the Sabbath in Genesis 2 and Exodus 20—it came before the ten commandments were given.

LETTER: *...Biblical astronomy, the Bible code,...*

RESPONSE: I don't see these as fundamental, but they are good

LETTER: *...the error of the Trinity doctrine,...*

RESPONSE: This one is easy to use to wake people up. Many are surprised that the word "trinity" is not in the Bible or that when Stephen sees into heaven in Acts 7:55-56, he is personally full of the Holy Spirit, but he only sees the Father and the Son there.

LETTER: *...the four blood red moons and 2 solar eclipses on the Biblical Holy days in 2014-2015.*

RESPONSE: I discovered the four lunar eclipses causing the red moons in astronomy tables, but had not studied the solar eclipses.

LETTER: *He's really afraid of The Sabbath ("Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath, we can have Sabbath every day") and me bringing up the pagan holidays (although I didn't call them that, but I could tell by the way we skirted around the issue and the fact that one of the first things he asked me was how my holidays were — and it was a test, I just knew it). I think those are his two big concerns.*

RESPONSE: Obviously, if people feel compelled to meet on different days, they will no longer meet with His group.

LETTER: *We ended with an agreement to disagree on several points, for me not to dominate the group (as he said I will have more information than most or all of them—do you think he might want to consider why?) and I can't take in tracts or handouts. They must be pre-approved. I can live with that for now. I*

told him I wouldn't go to cause dissension but that I wouldn't lie about my faith if asked or deny my faith. He was ok with that. So I'm on thin ice. If I get out of line I will be asked to leave. Please keep praying that I can share truth without breaking the "rules of engagement" and without denying or misrepresenting truth.

RESPONSE: Yes, it is fine to go with these rules. If people are interested in what you have to say there, they will talk to you another place.

LETTER: *Ei, Ei, Ei, this stuff can get so complicated. I wish I had the boldness to just walk in there and pronounce some truth like Yahshuah or the apostles did and walk away leaving them with their mouths hanging open and move on, shaking the dust off my feet as I go if they don't listen to truth. I think a meek approach is going to be best on this one. Yah willing, if I can keep my flesh in check.*

RESPONSE: Truth is not accepted everywhere. At times, Yahshuah was asked to leave certain areas and He did. He told His disciples they would have to do the same:

> "Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.' But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city" (Luke 10:8-12).

Now, we do not generally have the miraculous power that He gave this seventy, so we cannot expect quite as dramatic of a reception. Sometimes the apostles were beat up or tossed out of the places they went into. At other times they were asked to leave and they did. Owners of church buildings in this country have the right to send people out who disrupt their studies and services. I want the same right here, though I would certainly try to answer contrary questions for a long time before sending someone out. Be content with the opportunity that you have within the rules of those who run the meeting. (A higher level of confrontation may come soon enough)

LETTER: *Thanks again Norm, your words and scriptures that you shared were truly appropriate and very much needed and appreciated. I just love this body of believers!*

Shalom,

—Suzette, Michigan

RESPONSE: *May the Eternal bless your service to Him.*

—NSE

Five Simple Bible Questions

LETTER: *December 19, 2009*

Dear Norman Edwards,

Could I ask you a few bible questions? They are:

1. *What does 16 Nisan remind you of?*
2. *Is the Two House Teaching correct, according to you? Short answer please: False / True.*
3. *Is the British Israelism Teaching correct, according to you? Short answer please: False / True.*
4. *What is Galatians 3:19 speaking of?*
5. *What does 6 Sivan mean to you?*

Just 1-sentence replies are fine. I will give my answer as well, after you have done so.

Remain blessed,

— Tallytha, Amsterdam

RESPONSE: Generally, when someone wants very short answers to very complex questions, they are attempting to entrap someone. They may hope to simply make a person look wrong or foolish, or possibly get him to say something that is illegal. This happened frequently to our Messiah (Matt 16:1-4; 19:3-9; 21:23-27; 22:15-46; John 8:3-11; 10:22-39).

When they asked Him if they should pay Roman taxes, they thought He would have to either speak against Roman law, for which they might be able to get Him prosecuted, or that He would have to place Roman authority above God's authority, which they would endlessly repeat to the people, thus discrediting Him. Of course Christ answered with the famous line: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

If they insisted that He answer the question "yes" or "no", He would not have been able to do it. If the purpose is to impart understanding, then it often takes more than a one-word answer. When people were not looking for understanding, just trying to condemn Him, Christ did not answer (Matt 26:63; 27:12). In an effort to share understanding, I will answer as briefly as I can and still be accurate.

1. Nisan 16 is the second Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Rabbinic Jews and some Sabbatarian Christian groups always observe this as the day of the firstfruits or "wave Sheaf" offering (Lev 23:10-14). It was offered on the day after the Sabbath (v 11), which most Rabbis will say is the First Day of Unleavened Bread, but others will say it is the weekly Sabbath in the Days of Unleavened bread. Thoroughly answering that question today requires a book.

2 & 3. There are so many versions of these teachings and I do not know which one I would be saying "yes" or "no" about. There is no doubt the houses of Israel and Judah were divided by God (1Kngs 11). I do not believe that the prophetic reunification of the two houses has been fulfilled as they do not dwell in peace and a resurrected David is not king over them (Ezk 37:15-28). I think history shows that many people in Britain, the USA and other countries are descended from Israel, but exactly who is and who is not, and where all the tribes are today is a complex issue. Whether each prophecy applies to physical Israel, the church (spiritual Israel) or both is another complex question (Rom 2:29; Rom 11:19-32; 1Cor 3:16; Gal 6:16; Rev 21:12). I reject both extreme views: only Israel/Jews can be saved and Israel/Jews cannot be saved.

4. Let us quote the section in the KJV, which is more faithful to the Greek as I understand it:

> And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after [the promises to

Abraham], cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. [18] For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. [19] Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator (Gal 3:17-19).

The law in discussion here is that law added by the covenant with ancient Israel at Sinai. The Hebrew torah and its equivalent Greek nomos have broad meanings-much like our English word "law" which can refer to federal, state or local law, case law, church law, private law or even police officers. We cannot quickly answer what law was added, but will briefly state that even before Sinai the Bible teaches the Feast days (Gen 1:14), the Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3, Ex 16), clean animals (Gen 7:2); not eating blood (Gen 9:4), the death penalty for murder (Gen 9:5-6) and for adultery (Gen 20:3). While no law produces salvation, Gods commandments teach us his holiness (Rom 7:12). Too many people are too interested in trying to declare large parts of the Scripture obsolete, rather than understanding it and skillfully applying it to the Christian life.

5. Sivan 6 is the date of Shavuot or Pentecost observed by Rabbinic Judaism and some Sabbatarian Christian groups. With a fixed calendar (as opposed to an observed calendar where any given month may be 29 or 30 days long), 50 days from Nisan 16 will always be Sivan 6. Hundreds of books and papers are devoted to the dating of Pentecost. I cannot answer every question on the subject. God has clearly told us to proclaim and to observe these days (Lev 23:2-4). We should honor the obedience of believers when they observe these days based upon the sincere (but possibly wrong) proclamation of other believers, lest we be found guilty of offending the "little ones" for whom Christ died (Matt 18:5-6).

—NSE

Passover Papers, Lamb Size & Pentecost Always on 6th?

LETTER: *December 28, 2009*
Dear Mr. Norm Edwards,

I would like a copy of the Passover Papers

RESPONSE: The Passover Papers by Paul Finch was reviewed in our Sept-Oct 2009 issue. We do not give away the books we review, though occasionally the authors make them available free of charge. That issue listed Internet sources for the book, but in addition, almost any book store can get almost any book today.

LETTER: *Most C.O.G. churches teach that the Passover lambs were killed at sundown. If that were so, and Christ replaced the passover lamb, then how come he died at the 9th hour and not at sundown? Did Christ break the pattern he set up?*

If Christ was the God of the Old Testament, which I think He was, did He not set up the sacrificed pattern from the beginning? Also, in Deut 16:6, the Bible said the lambs were slain in the evening, at the going down of the sun, not sunset.

I have never heard a minister yet, quote that. It also says to keep the lambs until the 14th day, not late evening or night. It was killed the 14th day and eaten that night.

RESPONSE: You have raised many of the significant points covered in this book and the many other writings on the Passover timing. Most people on all sides of the controversy, have explanations for their view. Some are honest differences in what a language means. For example, does "going down of the sun" mean "the sun disappearing below the horizon" or does it mean "the afternoon when the sun is visibly going down"? Other teachers, will take issues such as the timing of Christ's death, and say there is no importance to the time, all he had to do was die on the same day that the Passover was killed.

Obviously, people should practice what they understand the teaching of the scripture to be. As one learns, the main thing to watch out for are Bible teachers who refuse to answer certain questions or who are upset when certain questions are asked. This is not an effort to teach, but an effort to stop people from finding out that they do not have all the answers.

LETTER: *I know a family that killed a lamb at sundown and tried to eat it before midnight and it was still raw (against the rules). Also, I heard one minister say [they ate] a 25 or 30lb lamb, which would have been a new born, not a year old or even ½ year old.*

RESPONSE: This is very interesting experience that most people today do not have. I did a little research and found that lambs typically weigh 8 to 20 pounds at birth and gain around a pound per day. With the biblical requirement for lambs to be with their mother seven days (Ex 22:30; Lev 22:27), and then four more days from Passover lamb selection (10th day) to sacrifice (14th day), the lamb would have to be at least 11 days old for a Passover sacrifice. That makes the absolute minimum weight of a passover lamb in the 19 to 31 pound range, but obviously all lambs are not born on Nisan 3rd.

Lambing time in Israel is typically in February, about two months before Passover. It is interesting that my research showed lambs are usually weaned at 60 days—just in time for Passover. They would be weighing 60 to 80 pounds by then.

Exodus 12:9 commands the lamb to be cooked whole, but cannot be raw, so it does make more sense that the lamb was killed in the afternoon, rather than after sunset, and eaten before midnight.

LETTER: *I believe most C.O.G. Churches keep Whit Sunday for Pentecost. In Ex 19:1 it says: in the 3rd month they came into the wilderness on the same or 3rd day. Then the Lord instructed them to prepare and be ready for the 3rd day which would have been the 6th day of the month. I think that set the pattern for Pentecost. I have found nowhere in the New Testament instructing us to count fifty.*

RESPONSE: I do not think it is harmful to claim C.O.G. brethren are keeping Whit Sunday. First of all, Whit Sunday is counted from Easter, not the Sabbath in the Days of Unleavened Bread as our Brethren count it. Myself, as well as many

other brethren kept Pentecost for years, never having heard of "Whit Sunday", based upon these verses:

> "And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed." Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD (Lev 23:15-16).

If one starts numbering from an annual Sabbath—the counting method that always arrives at Sivan 6 by the modern Jewish calendar—the fiftieth day is not usually a Sabbath. Whereas, if one begins counting fifty days after the weekly Sabbath, it is always a day after the weekly Sabbath—called "Sunday", today.

Yes, people will claim that the word "Sabbath" in the above passage should be translated "week", but the vast majority of translations say "Sabbath" here. Two that do say "week" are Roman Catholic translations: the Douay-Rheims and the New Jerusalem Bible. If keeping Pentecost on Sunday is a "Catholic doctrine", why do the Catholic Bibles support the opposite translation? I cannot solve all of these issues in this letter response (indeed, I may not be able to solve them all, period), but I know many serious Bible students who have spent many hours and come to the conclusion that they should observe Pentecost on the first day of the week.

I do not believe I have previously heard your explanation of Exodus 19:1:

> In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai (Ex 19:1).

You are taking the "same day" to mean the "day with the same number as the month". I used my computer Bible to find that the exact same Hebrew expression used 491 times in the Old Testament, and it does not appear to mean what you think it means. It is more often translated "this day" or "that day". Bible translations vary on this verse, some implying it was the first of the month and others the same day that they left Egypt. In any event, one cannot be sure that no more days elapsed between this verse and verse 10 which says:

> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people (Ex 19:10-11).

If you accept that no days elapse between verse 1 and 10, "today", above, would be the 3rd of the month, "tomorrow", the 4th and "the third day" the 5th, not the 6th. This is an example of "inclusive counting", common in the ancient world. With an observed calendar (each month potentially being 29 or 30 days), counting 50 days from the second Day of Unleavened Bread could place Pentecost on Sivan 5th, 6th or 7th. Pentecost on Sivan 6th is not at all certain, here.

But the most important point here is that this verse does not portend to be a command on how to count Pentecost. In fact, the giving of the law on Pentecost is not a Biblical clarity but a Jewish tradition. Indeed, that tradition may be right, but we should not hold Jewish tradition above Christian tradition—and certainly not above the Scripture. Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16 contain instructions on how to keep Pentecost and these should be our primary source.

You are right that no New Testament verse tells us to "count fifty", but the New Testament rarely repeats the detailed instructions of the Old. Even so, the New Testament writers choose the Greek word for "fiftieth", Pentecost, rather than a Greek word that means "weeks"—equivalent of the Hebrew Shavuot.

LETTER: *The barley harvest of grain, according to all I can find was the 16th, the 2nd of Unleavened bread, the day after an annual Sabbath, beginning the count of 50 days. If I'm wrong, send me proof.*

RESPONSE: There are certainly a great many believers who share your view—as well as many who do not. But all is well with this because one commandment of the scripture is clear:

> "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts (Lev 23:2).

The children of Israel were given the responsibility to proclaim these days, even though they were God's Feasts. The Children of Israel, the same people responsible for keeping them, are responsible for proclaiming them. There is no chapter telling people they have sinned if they ignorantly miscalculate the days of the Feast. To the contrary, 2 Chronicles 30 shows that God was pleased when His Feast Days were kept an entire month late: Passover (which the Scripture does authorize—Num 9:6-13) and the entire Days of Unleavened Bread (which the Scripture does not authorize)

On that basis, I recommend that you, as well as others, proclaim and observe the Feasts as you understand them. It is also good to share what we know about them, so that we can all grow in true knowledge. I think we need to be very careful not to judge the Feast days other brethren keep:

> So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ (Col 2:16-17).

Yes, we all should be keeping those days, but if we condemn our brethren for keeping it wrongly, even though they are doing it according to their Scriptural understanding, what will happen if we turn out to have unknowing error in the judgment:

> "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matt 7:2).

—NSE

Utica Feast 2010 Homeless Help

continued from p. 17

works hard with each of the homeless people to find other housing and jobs for them before they close in the late spring.

The project taught me a good lesson that needs to be shared with Feast planners and Christian leaders everywhere: Churches do not need to organize a continual stream of social entertainment for their members. They can find good things to do to "shine their light" for others. This is especially true for young people!

Young people have a natural desire to meet others their age, to participate in group activities that bring them together, to learn to do new things, and to let their abilities, strength or beauty be seen by others. Sure, those things are usually done at entertainment outings, but they can also be done at service projects.

Even more important, Christian young people want to put their Christianity to use—not to simply sit and listen to teachings until they are some day old enough to teach themselves. Knowing that they attend a group that takes an active part in changing the lives of others is very important to most of them.

It was wonderful that these Sabbath-observing brethren helped the Christians that run this homeless shelter. Sabbatarians need to go further to begin and run their own outreach projects to help those in need. This will give them a chance to reach a diversity of people with the Bible truth they understand.

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