



Issue No. 14: May 2009

How Is Your Spiritual Reflex Action?

by Robert Ardis

The Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread for 2009 have swiftly come and gone. In reflecting back on all that we heard in the sermons and sermonettes about the meaning of Passover and the spring Holy Days, I feel God really opened our minds to much more of His amazing Truth and His Plan of Salvation. This year we were able to read and study our booklet, *The Plain Truth About God's Healing* with a deeper knowledge of God's mercy. We were also blessed to have inspired articles in the *Philadelphia Witness* and *The Midnight Cry* prior to and during these special days of God that gave clear, biblical instructions into God's ways.

What particular Truth did you grasp more deeply this year than ever before? What New Truth in regards to the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread did you learn this year that you had never known before? Think about that!

A point that has really stuck in my mind is not something new to us, but its fresh application is very vital to all called as Firstfruits and especially as Pillars among the Firstfruits. This point is that we should be determined to live the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread every day of our lives—intent on keeping sin out of our lives! Doesn't that truly picture the role of a Pillar—setting an example as we follow Christ's example—being a light unto others as we walk in the Light of the Truth.

In the early days of the CGF I gave a sermon based on a message I had heard back in the days of the WCG. I titled the sermon "*How is Your Spiritual Reflex Action?*" I explained in that sermon that before God, in His mercy, began working with us, most of us did not know what sin was. I John 3:4 states very plainly

that *sin is the transgression of law*, but many thought the "law" was done away, therefore we did not know the meaning of **sin**. And we would sin and think nothing of it.

God's Ten Commandments define righteousness, thus the transgressing of these Laws of God are acts of sin! The Ten Commandments are ten separate points of the Royal Law that states: "***And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these*** (Mark 12: 29-31)".

I John 5:3 declares: "***For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous***". Romans 13:8-10 adds the following: "***Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.***"

Thus the plain truth of the Bible is that the Commandments convey love. They are divided into the two separate points of the Royal Law; the first four

(continued on Page 2)

Also In This Issue

Page 2: ***Greetings Brethren!***

Page 4: ***Feast of Tabernacles 2009: European Sites***

Page 5: ***Why Tests and Trials***

Page 7: ***Pharisees, Laodiceans and False Humility***

Page 11: ***God's Perfect Character—Our Ultimate Goal***

Page 13: ***Marriage and the Bride***

Greetings brethren!

Home sweet home! Following nine days away from Malta, it's great to be home and to slowly but surely catch up on work that will have accumulated.

As I work on the final preparations for this May issue of what has now become a *monthly* publication for CGF members, time continues to march on toward the half-way stage of our countdown to the Day of Pentecost – Feast of Firstfruits, which we will this year celebrate on Sunday 31st May.

Whilst in the Italian seaside town of Rimini, I was drawn into a conversation with a couple who were Jehovah Witnesses' members. As I usually do whenever I am approached by members of this organisation, I asked whether they were Sabbath-keepers. Of course, they replied in the negative as they ignorantly affirmed that the law was nailed to the cross. Amongst the scriptures referred to was Romans 3:20, where the Apostle Paul states that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight".

Meanwhile, it has also just come to my attention that there are some who, even though CGF members until very recently and perhaps even assumed to be *Pillars*, they too now share these ideas!

I shall therefore use this space to elaborate on this subject. We must ensure that we will "be ready always to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

The first point that we need to understand is that the apostle is here referring to the whole system of law and that justification requires the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. No law can justify sin – only Christ's blood can pay for our sins and justify us to God. Even keeping the commandments perfectly for the rest of our lives would not pay for the sins we have committed in the past by breaking the law.

Sin is the breaking of God's laws and the penalty for sin is death (1 John 3:4; Rom. 6:23). God's faithful begotten children will understand that the only way to have that penalty removed is through the grace of God and that, once forgiven, *we must stop sinning – STOP BREAKING GOD'S LAWS* (Rom. 6:1-2).

The Apostle Paul here makes it plain that what justifies us is the faith and sacrifice of Christ coupled with our belief in Him – not obedience to the law. But

this *by no means* implies that we must stop obeying the law. We must have active, *living* faith in God as Abraham had, which will in effect lead us to an increasingly more complete obedience to God's perfect and righteous law.

To put the law and justification question in a nutshell then: 1) only Christ's sacrifice and His life in us can forgive sin and save us (Rom. 5:10); but 2) Christ will not save any unless they keep His laws (John 14:15; 15:10; 1 John 2:3-6).

With much love, in Christ's service



Daniel Frendo

(continued from Page 1)

expressing love to God, the remaining six are actions of love toward our fellow man. But before God drew us to repentance most of us actually did not know what sin was. In my family with a Baptist background, we thought sin was drinking alcohol, dancing, going to the movies on Sunday, yet I don't recall ever going to the Bible to search for a definition of sin.

However, when God began working with each of us He brought us the realization of His Law and that all had transgressed the Law and had sinned. God brought us to repentance and the process of conversion. We learned to our amazement that the *wages of sin is death*—and we were under that death penalty. And we gratefully learned that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ—Jesus paid that death penalty for us! Therefore, we learned to struggle against sin—to live in God's Law of Love. A true Christian must grow up into Christ in all things.

In Rom. 12:1-2, the apostle Paul writes: "***I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God***".

Knowing that God has renewed our minds, let's look at the spiritual response we have toward resisting sin today as compared to our reaction to sin before God began working with us. Consider your **spiritual reflex**

Issue No. 14: May 2009

action today as compared to when you were first called to repentance. Think about your first knowledge of the Sabbath and the Holy Days! Remember your struggles with the pulls of the world and your family, friends and associates, your bad habits and possible additions. Then becoming aware of tithing—first, second, and third, with the understanding that you had to overcome as Christ overcame to be able live the Christian faith. How do you react today, immediately after the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread to the “simple sins” that might still plague our human nature; profanity, gossip, pride and vanity, selfishness, laziness, self-righteousness, hurt feelings, tactlessness, impatience, anger, lust, gluttony, smoking, overdrinking, or whatever prevents us from being **holy as God is holy** (I Pet. 1:16).

Check yourself out with the *Seven Steps of Spiritual Reflex Action* as seen below:

1. You sin and think nothing of it.
2. You sin. When cautioned about it, you continued to sin.
3. You sin. When cautioned about it, you stop.
4. You sin. You catch yourself as you sin, but in weakness still sin.
5. You sin. You catch yourself as you sin and stop.
6. You start to sin, but catch yourself and stop.
7. You do not allow the thought of sinning to enter your mind—bringing every thought to the captivity of Jesus Christ.

II Cor: 10:3-5 declares we should be walking the Days of Unleavened Bread all year long: “***For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...***”

Christ tells us: “**Become you therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect** (Matt. 5:48).

Jesus Christ, *That Prophet*, thunders to us in Matt. 5:14 and 16 “***Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven***”.

The Word of God is plain and clear that a true Christian must **grow up into Christ in ALL things**

(Eph. 4:15) and that Jesus will live His life in us: “***I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*** (Gal. 2:20).

God’s Word tells us: “***Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer*** (Rom. 12:12). By continuing *instant in prayer* and living the life of Christ, we will keep sin out of lives! Bathed in the presence of God and Christ, we will reflect their righteous LIGHT.

This is what impressed my mind mostly in our preparations for Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread—applying more effort and determination, struggling harder in keeping sin out of our lives. Let’s be ever more diligent as the Pillars of God’s Temple setting the example as we follow Christ. Ready to teach by example, our light and our works that must be seen for God to be glorified by our works! We must be focused as was Christ on God’s Work: “***Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work***” (John 4:34)—looking forward to the fulfillment of Rev. 3:9.

Through closeness to God and Christ let’s walk the Days of Unleavened Bread all year long—making those 6’s and 7’s of the *Seven Steps of Spiritual Reflex Action* an every day goal as we overcome as Jesus Christ overcame (Rev. 3:21).

Please send your Article contributions via e-mail as a Word doc. attachment to:

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Feast of Tabernacles 2009

“And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD... in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a Sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a Sabbath. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 23:33-34, 39-43).

European Feast Sites

Saint-Vincent, Val d’Aosta – Italy

The mainland European Feast will again be held in Italy – for the first time in the Aosta Valley, bordering France and Switzerland. *Val d’Aosta* combines all possible types of scenery, climate, fauna and flora passing from dells all to the way up glaciers.

Aosta Valley has a rich medieval history, which can be witnessed by the numerous castles in the area. This northern Italian region also boasts of a gastronomic tradition originating among the rural areas in the Alps



Some of the breath-taking scenery at Saint-Vincent in Val d’Aosta, Italy

and offers a wide range of wine made from grapes grown in the region.

Hotel Posta, where services will be held and where all Feast-goers will be accommodated, is located on the elegant walking street in the heart of Saint-Vincent, a town of shopping and city events.

Run by its owners and recently renovated with the original 1950’s style, the hotel boasts of a long tradition of hospitality and the staff is always friendly and courteous. The restaurant offers Italian cuisine in a typical Aosta Valley atmosphere, complete with a fireplace as well as a more modern dining room. There is also a small café, a tea room, an outdoor café under old chestnut trees and a sun terrace, where one can sit in peace and admire the beautiful surroundings of the Valley and all its peaks. The warm and relaxing ambience of the reception hall is bound to turn this area into the ideal place where we may get together and enjoy plenty of fellowship.

Services will be held in English and there will also be translations in an adjoining room for Italian and Spanish-speaking brethren.

A number of excursions are being planned, the highlight being an afternoon trip to *Monte Bianco* (or, *Mont Blanc*), the highest peak in Europe.

As we shall all be staying in the same hotel, we have been favoured with a heavily discounted tariff of 42 euro per night in a twin / double room on half board basis. This will include midday or evening meal with wine and mineral water. A limited number of single rooms are also available at an additional 10 euro nightly.

A coach is being organized from Milano Malpensa Airport to the hotel in the evening on Thursday, 1st October. The return transfer will be in the morning on Sunday, 11th October. The cost will depend on number of persons availing themselves of this service.

If you would like to transfer to Italy, you may contact Daniel Frendo: dfrendo@setapartbytruth.org

Torquay, Devon – England

The U.K Feast site venue this year is perfectly situated in the heart of Devon’s spectacular English Riviera at the seaside resort of Torquay.

Issue No. 14: May 2009

The South West of England is home to some of the most stunning and outstanding natural beauty to be found in the country, from the South Devon coastline to the rugged splendour of Dartmoor.

Torquay is the most popular and the largest town out of three in the bay called Torbay. The other two, Paignton and Brixham comprise the other towns in this beautiful bay area.

Torquay is not called the English Riviera for nothing, its famous seven hills provide the backdrop to the waterfront scene that matches anything you will find on the French Riviera, and with a climate that belongs somewhere much further south. The water front is the focus of life in the town. Here you'll find the palm-lined promenade, seafront gardens, a lively harbour and an International marina.



The Torquay Harbour and Esplanade Gardens in Devon, England

There is an abundance of all types of accommodation to suit everyone's budget as well as Pavement cafes, pubs, restaurants and night life, good quality shops and a host of attractions to suit every interest.

Of course all these attractions are very nice, but we will be there to celebrate God's Feast of Tabernacles. We have been able to secure a lovely hall for all our meetings in the Toorak hotel which is situated just a few yards from the seafront and will be very suitable for our meetings.

We would welcome any of our brethren to join us here in Torquay for the Feasts. The area is easily accessible by car, train or plane.

If you are interested in attending the Feast in Torquay, England please drop us a line at the UK office and we will send further details to you.

Let's all plan to rejoice with God and His people by getting ready in plenty of time to observe the Feast of Tabernacles and making sure everything is done to have a wonderful Feast 2009 wherever you may be.

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Why Tests and Trials

by Daniel Frendo

Rev. 19:7 affirms that when "the marriage of the Lamb is come, His wife has made herself ready." One way how our Husband confirms our readiness is by allowing us to go through tests and trials.

Here are four specific reasons why we must face tests and trials:

1) **To test our conversion.** God wants to know whether we will always be loyal to Him. God wants to be certain that we are like the man in the parable of the sower and the seed who "received seed into the good ground... he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matt. 13:23). Our office in the Kingdom of God is dependent on our fruits during this training period we call our life. God wants to know that we will continue to press on even when our friends or families shun us (1 Pet. 4:1-4). God wants to know that He is *Number 1* and that we will stay loyal to Him as we love Him more than anyone or anything else.

This physical life is merely a preparation for the real life that lies ahead and, like God, we too must look at the end result. Heb. 12:7-10 explains why God allows us to go through the grind: "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he **for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.**"

God desires us to be trained and educated through various tests so that, as we overcome these trials, we grow in that righteous and holy character which God wants us to develop. This is what conversion is all about – this is why man was created and placed on this earth in the first place. Here's how Mr. Herbert Armstrong defined a converted person: "A converted person is a person with a totally changed, or converted mind. A converted mind in which the very mind of God is joined with the human mind. As God says through the apostle Paul, 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' (Phil2:15). The Holy Spirit is the spirit of a sound mind, which is a

completely changed mind. It has made an about-face in its desires, purposes and intentions” (Mystery of the Ages, page 238). Here is the mind of a person in whom perfect character is being developed – that holy and righteous character which, as Mr. Armstrong wrote, “is the means to God’s ultimate purpose! His final objective!”

2) **To uncover hidden sins.** Job’s life teaches us that God had allowed Job to have a severe trial because He saw within him a secret fault – a sin that needed to be rooted out. Job was “righteous in his own eyes” (Job 32:1). Elihu quotes Job as saying that his “righteousness is more than God’s” (Job 35:2). This was evidence to God that Job had not really known Him and that it was only through the trials that he was made to go through that Job saw the reality of his situation. Through severe trials, Job finally saw himself as he really was: “Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but **now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes**” (Job 42:1-6).

Once his ego was completely deflated, Job finally got his mind off himself and grasped that God is the centre of the universe. Job’s trials led to the uncovering of his hidden sins. We need to understand that our trials will also lead to the same result, as we continue to overcome and move on to perfection so that we **will** indeed become ready for the marriage of the Lamb.

3) **To witness to others.** Daniel 6 gives us details of a conspiracy by people in high office against a man who was loyal to God and who would not compromise with God’s ways. Daniel was a man who had completely put himself under God’s authority – a faithful man who had *a little strength, kept God’s Word* and who *did not deny God’s authority*. Daniel had the spirit of Philadelphia and this got him into serious trouble. After King Darius had placed Daniel over his whole kingdom, the presidents and princes under Daniel conspired to get him out of the way. Eventually, they succeeded in getting him to be sentenced to a den of lions after he had disobeyed a royal Persian order to refrain from praying. Study Dan. 6:7-27. Hopefully, if we were to be in a similar situation, we too would behave like Daniel and be a witness to others.

4) **To develop patience and faith.** Severe trials teach us to look to God – to develop the habit of waiting for God’s answer. “...we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:3-5); “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (Jas. 1:2-4).

When we study the real-life story of Joseph, we see a man who never gave up believing God when he was unjustly imprisoned because of a false accusation by his employer’s wife, Gen. 39. Even whilst he was in prison, Joseph still looked to God, Gen. 40:8; Gen. 41. Joseph’s patience and the faith of God, which he continued to develop were greatly rewarded: “And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph’s hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:39-43).

Therefore, notwithstanding Satan’s endeavours to make us fail, let’s ensure that we enlist Jesus Christ’s help and allow Him to live in us as we overcome and move on to that perfection that He desires in us. As we do this, we must then continue to press on so that we may get to that finishing line when we will be privileged to hear our Lord and Husband tell us, individually: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:21). Then, we will be with the Lamb as part of those Firstfruits, the “hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads... they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins... which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14:1, 4-5)!

Pharisees, Laodiceans and False Humility

by Frank Borg

As God's people, we must ensure a correct and balanced approach to how we live and conduct our lives. We should not compromise one bit with God's Law as we stir up the Spirit of God and allow it to work within us. Our lives should radiate the fruits of the spirit to the point where others can feed off them (Gal 5:22-23). We must be a *light* to the World by allowing the fruits of the Holy Spirit to shine by the positive attitude and example that we set (Matt. 5:15).

To live by God's Law and set the right example, we need to exercise true humility. True humility involves being submissive to Him and having a teachable attitude: "...Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet. 5:5). Essentially, this scripture admonishes us to beware of *false* humility. False humility comes about when we do not have a submissive and teachable attitude and instead do things our way insisting they are God's ways. This type of attitude can quickly and very easily turn into pride, vanity and self righteousness – thinking that we are right, when in actual fact we are resisting God, His Voice and are being intractable.

The Pharisees are a group of people spoken of in the Bible that resisted Christ, His voice and were intractable, stubbornly insisting that they were right in what they did. They didn't want to be taught by Him. They went to extremes to do things their own way insisting that their ways were God's ways. Sadly, we see an increasing reminder of this today in God's Laodicean Church and elsewhere. The Laodicean leadership is increasingly imposing various restrictions and unbiblical doctrines on their membership in a bid to seem righteous, yet their motives are questionable. One doctrine that immediately jumps to mind is the unbiblical no-contact ruling imposed on the membership. Apart from covering any spiritual light they could otherwise project and not allowing others to feed off positive fruit (Gal 5:22-23; Matt. 5:15), this ruling has brought untold misery to a huge number of God's people. While the blind leadership has promised the membership that this is God's way of 'bringing lost sheep back to the fold', this unbiblical behavior has ironically further pushed away many of those that

have left the organization. It has ravaged and torn families apart and promoted dysfunctional family living which goes contrary to God's gospel message of family unity. The lessons that this policy is teaching the children are abominable! Despite the lack of positive fruit that this policy is producing the Laodiceans go on, heads bowed, 'resisting and shunning' thinking they are doing the right thing even though they are blatantly twisting scripture to support their vain practices.

I have recently completed a study on the Pharisees which shows that while they applied extreme measures thinking they were doing the right thing in God's eyes, they actually demonstrated a false sense of humility – vanity, pride and self-righteousness. These are qualities we must all be very careful of as we dodge the many traps of this nature which Satan continually sets before us! I would like to take this opportunity of sharing this study with you, and as you read through it take special note of the seven types of Pharisees that practiced at the time of Christ's earthly ministry. See if you notice any similarities between the Pharisees of Christ's day and the Laodiceans of today. Most importantly we need to be sure to glean vital lessons which can help us avoid the same obstacles which trapped the Pharisees, and are increasingly trapping the Laodiceans of today!

Just who are the Pharisees? Christ called the Pharisees "vipers, fools and hypocrites" (Matt 3:7; Luke 11:40; Matt. 6:5). Who were these mysterious people? What authority did they possess? Where did they come from? What was their relationship with the Sadducees?

These are the questions we will answer using the Bible and history to reveal the truth about these mysterious Pharisees!

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the Pharisees arose, because their movement is shrouded in mystery. However, the historian Josephus, first mentions them in connection with Jonathan, the successor of Judas Maccabeus. Jonathan Maccabeus was the leader of the Jews in the struggle for religious liberty and political independence during the years 161 to 143BC. The Pharisees were one of several groups to grow out of the revival and resistance movement of this Maccabean period. However, it was during the reign of John Hyrcanus I (135 to 105BC) that they really began to appear as a powerful and significant force in Jewish affairs. The Pharisees were very hostile to the possession of both the civil and the religious power by

Issue No. 14: May 2009

Hyrchanus that finally, Eleazar, one of the Pharisees told Hyrchanus to withdraw himself from the high priesthood and be content with the civil government of the people. This resulted in a clash between the two sides, which finally ended in Hyrchanus leaving the Pharisees, (to whose party he belonged), and went over to that of the Sadducees. This incident shows that the Pharisees and Sadducees had been in existence for some time and were in clear-cut opposition to each other.

The Pharisees wanted the high priesthood to be separate from the civil government and were opposed to the union of Church and State. The Pharisees appeared to be more a religious group and less a political party. They wanted the high priest to be a Pharisee and for the Pharisees to have control over the religious life of the people.

The Sadducees rejoiced at having Hyrchanus on their side, and made no protest against his possession of both the civil and religious leadership. But the Sadducees were at bottom a *political party*, while the Pharisees a *religious party*. The Pharisees were at this time the party in opposition while the Sadducees were in authority and they showed their resentment of each other in vigorous fashion.

In his Work entitled *Antiquities*, Josephus wrote that the Sadducees and Pharisees fought so bitterly, that they ordered about eight hundred Pharisees to be crucified, and while they were living, he ordered the throats of their children and wives to be cut before their eyes. Evidently, the Pharisees had kept their leadership of the people, but had lost the king and high priest.

Right up to the time of Jesus' ministry and beyond, there was a constant struggle for power, which made the bitterness between these two parties extremely sharp. During Christ's ministry, the Sadducees had control of the high priesthood. The chief priests were the Sadducees. The Sadducees were more hospitable to foreign influences of all sorts, while the Pharisees stood firmly by the tradition of the elders and the integrity of Judaism. (It is important to note at this point, that history proves Judaism is NOT the religion of the Old Testament scriptures. Judaism is simply the religion of the Jews; a religion manufactured by their own ingenuity. The Jews of Roman times had appropriated the name of Moses as the author of their religion, but in actuality, they had rejected Moses.

In John 5:46 -47, Christ said: "Had you believed Moses, ye would have believed me ...but ye believe not his writings". The Jews used the name of Moses, but they didn't practice what he commanded.

The Pharisees were the major sect among the divisions of Judaism. This was the most influential group at the time of Christ. They were the lay leaders. Most of the priests represented the Sadducees. Members from most groups remained in the Sanhedrin, (this being the ancient Jewish court system), but they were almost always divided on policy. The lay leaders, with the religious Jews on their side and believing in the traditional laws, gathered themselves together into one major group. The priests, on the other hand, who tended to agree with one another, gravitated into another group. This breach between the two leading religious divisions among the Jews was the beginning of two prominent New Testament sects: The Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Out of a Jewish population of nearly three million, Josephus records that there were only about six thousand Pharisees in all at the time of Christ. Even though they were such a small group, they had greater religious influence over the people than any other group. The main reason for this is because the individuals in charge of the majority of synagogues were Pharisees.

Ninety five per cent of the Jews in Christ's time were not members of any Jewish sect. This lack of interest in religion among the Jews in New Testament times had its origin within the period of religious anarchy. The Jewish people as a whole never recovered from the condition that existed within the anarchical period.

The Pharisees, however, did have on their side most Jews who were religiously inclined. However, the majority of the population was not really interested in the religious squabbles among the Pharisees and Sadducees. Josephus, the Jewish historian, had this to say about the Pharisees in his book *Antiquities of the Jews*:

"The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, and are not written in the Law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our fathers. And concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the

Issue No. 14: May 2009

Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side”

A major decision of the Pharisees was that of rejecting the sole authority of the priests (Sadducees) to be the religious authorities. The Pharisees admitted that the priests were the only ones with the right to perform the ritualistic services in the Temple. But other than this minor role in directing the religious life of the people, the priests had little else to do. The Pharisees came to recognize *themselves* as the only religious leaders.

In assuming the religious leadership, the Pharisees reasoned that they were taking the place of the priests whom they considered unfit to govern the people because they rejected the traditional laws.

The Pharisees thought that they were also competent to be the ultimate judges concerning all religious questions. They reasoned that this gave them the right to speak in the name of the Eternal just as the Prophets before them had done.

The Talmud and Apocrypha record that “it is certain that the Pharisees regarded themselves as the successors of the prophets, and that not merely in fact *but by right*.” In effect, this is saying that the Pharisees believed they were given the spirit of Prophecy, as the Prophets before them had.

There are many other references in the Talmud and Apocrypha that comment on this same theory. One particular passage in the Herford, Talmud and Apocrypha (p.72) states:

“The Rabbis (the Pharisees) felt that they had, no less but even more than the prophets, divine authority for what they taught, and that this was given to them after the time when the Prophets ceased to function. It was the way of expressing the belief that the revelation did not cease with the extinction of prophecy”.

The Pharisees considered their laws and commandments (Mark 7:7) and the way they administered them to have more weight than those of the prophets. They believed that what they were teaching was divine teaching even though, in so many cases, it did not agree with the plain and simple commandments of God as revealed in Scripture. The Pharisees were not really united together, except when it came to opposing everyone else!

There is a passage in the Talmud that sheds abundant light on the perception of the Pharisees. There were seven different types of Pharisees. Following is a description of these seven varieties:

1) **The ‘shoulder’ Pharisee** (Matt 23:4). This type of Pharisee wore his good deeds on his shoulder. As Jesus said in Matthew 23:5: “But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments”. The word ‘*phylacteries*’ that Christ used in this verse gives us great insight as to what exactly this type of Pharisee did. They copied prayers and bible passages and put them in boxes called *phylacteries*. These boxes were bound on their forearms and their foreheads.

2) **The ‘wait a little’ Pharisee** (Matt 23:5-7). This type of Pharisee always had an excuse for not doing the good deed just at that moment. In Luke 10:57-60 one is reminded of the man (most probably a Pharisee) whom Jesus invited to follow him, but who excused himself on the ground that he must first go and bury himself: “And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” The idea of this man was to go and stay with his father till he was dead and buried, and then to come and follow Jesus. Luke 9:61 shows that another man wanted first to bid farewell to those at home before he followed Christ. Here we see the Pharisee preserved his creed at the expense of his conduct.

3) **The ‘blind’ Pharisee** (Matt. 23:23-24). If this type of Pharisee feared that a woman was coming in his direction, he would shut his eyes to avoid seeing her and thus reduced the chances of looking at her lustfully. He would often stumble against a wall, which would make blood flow from his face. This type of Pharisee would be anxious for the blood to be seen by others in order to gain credit for his devotion. This type of Pharisee looked on women as representatives of evil. (Matt. 23:23-24 “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel”).

Issue No. 14: May 2009

4) **The ‘humpbacked’ or ‘pestle’ Pharisee** (Matt. 23:27-28). He walked with head down in mock humility. This type of Pharisee walked as though he had the whole weight of the law on his shoulders.

5) **The ‘ever reckoning’ Pharisee** (Matt. 23:29-32). He was always on the look-out for something ‘extra’ to do to make up for something that he has neglected. He tried to counter balance his evil deeds with his good ones. He was anxious to have his few sins deducted from his many good deeds. (One is reminded of the Roman Catholic system of indulgences).

6) **The ‘fearful’ Pharisee** (Matt. 23:13). His relationship to God was one of trembling awe in dread of punishment. They imagined that they could satisfy God with good outward performance. Matthew 17: 15 quotes Christ as saying, “Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves”.

7) **The ‘God loving’ Pharisee** (John 3:1-9; 7:50). Hypocrisy had come to be the distinguishing characteristic of the Pharisees. There were a large number of Pharisees who quickly flocked to Christ, till he exposed their emptiness, and then they deserted him. John 8:45 shows Christ as saying, “and because I tell you the truth ye believe me not”.

The Pharisees were so afraid that the Jews might be exiled to Babylon again, that they observed the letter of the law as meticulously as they thought they could. They set themselves apart, not just from the Romans or other gentiles, but even from other Jews, who they thought could make them unclean in the eyes of God by eating with them or touching them.

The Pharisees were neither priests nor teachers. As mentioned earlier, many of them belonged to the Sanhedrin. They listened to Jesus, but they thought his ideas were too radical (i.e. they thought he would talk to or eat with just anybody). Christ repeatedly told them that they kept the letter of the law, but missed the spirit. He condemned them as teaching the doctrines of men as true doctrines (Mark 7:7). They knowingly taught their own laws and commandments “on the authority of their own reason and conscience, and not by seeking their authority in the written text [the Bible]” (Rabbinic Essays p.70). Mark 2:23 to 28 shows one example of the many extreme doctrines (or traditions) implemented by the Pharisees:

“And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the Sabbath day; and his disciples began, as

they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath”.

The Talmud (section 15b) clearly states that the Pharisees admitted that from 160BC they stopped teaching the word of God as Moses had. They knew they were departing from the truth. They knew they were introducing new commandments, which had nothing to do with the authority in the Law of Moses. Judaism represents a departure from the religion of Moses, and the Pharisees admitted it!

It is important to note that the Pharisees were an association of men who had bound themselves to strictly keep the Levitical laws of purity. They had not bound themselves to keep any set doctrines. At no time was it required of all Pharisees to believe alike. Other than their desire to keep the laws of purity and tithing, the Pharisees represented a group of men with unlimited differences of opinion. When it came to the matter of religious doctrines, they were not one unified group. Different individuals could teach their own understanding on a religious question as long as they kept themselves bound to the Pharisaical rule of life.

Now that we know some of the history of the Pharisees, who they were, where they came from, what authority they possessed, and what they stood for, we should easily understand why Christ fully condemned their practices and warns us against falling into the same trap today! Let us continue to be submissive to Him and teachable by Him, ensuring we live a life and do things His way – now more than ever before!

God's Perfect Character - Our Ultimate Goal

by Rodrigo Matabaran

God is in the creation business. Through the Word He created the universe in perfect beauty. Later, the rebellion of sinning angels rendered it chaotic and empty. His ultimate creation was Man whose destiny was to become God as God is God. Man was created to develop the very mind and character of God, to become worthy to be a member of His Divine Family. His firstfruits were destined to become Kings and Priests in His Kingdom. Should they fail to overcome and grow and develop His mindset, this priceless reward and responsibility would not be given to them.

All who have ever lived on this earth, barring Christ, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We fall far short of what God desires us to be. Of ourselves, we are unable to attain the level of perfection of Jesus Christ but God has given us the power of His Holy Spirit to enable us to achieve this fantastic, incredible goal – that of changing our carnal mind into the very character of God.

God the Father and His Son had a plan of redemption for this very reason. God's great love and mercy redeemed us from the penalty of sin committed in this life through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Christ ransomed our lives (I Tim.3-6) through His sacrifice so that by His saving grace we are promised glory in His kingdom which will be established here on earth in the near future and further on right into the whole universe.

Every single human who has lived on this earth features in this great plan. Lofty positions have been prepared for those considered worthy – His elect and faithful – those who strive to follow His commandments and do His will without compromise (John 14:2; Rev. 20:4). The requirement is that Man is to keep His law and take a stand for Him amidst the temptations, evils and confusion of this world.

God measures us

Our God is good and upright, His character is flawless. He has set standards and His people are to measure up to them. He put into place a plan whereby His people are to grow in grace, understanding and knowledge. He gave His people His government and placed over them apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and

teachers to guide and shepherd His chosen ones into the true knowledge and understanding of His word, to nurture and develop his people to totally conform to God's way of thinking (Eph.4:11).

Ultimately, God wants to determine whether we are worthy to be entrusted to such exalted positions of responsibility within His coming Kingdom. In Rev. 11:1-2, Christ says "Rise, and measure the temple of God and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles". At this very time, God has raised one man who, together with other faithful ministers are measuring God's people. They are being measured now and it is only those who are in the outer court who will need to be purified in the Great Tribulation. He measures them now because it is His desire that they are perfect as He is perfect! God's ministers have been given to His people to help them attain that measure of perfection. If we do not continue to grow in Christ's character, we too will be measured and found wanting and, because God wants to finish that which He has started within us (Phil. 1:6), He will put us through the Great Tribulation in order to give us the opportunity to take the chaff out of our character!

How near are we to that desired perfection? I am sure we have to agree that we all still have a way to go. Christ knows our hearts and minds. He wants us to "all come in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). This verse explicitly shows that perfection and unity is an ongoing process within God's Church. In this end time, God's people are not united as He wants us to be.

If God were to measure His Church now, collectively, and its members individually, how would it rate? Can God's people just sit relaxed and comfortably in the over 300 different splinter churches, all learning different doctrines, statutes and rulings? It is quite obvious that we need to be a part of the ONE Church of which Christ is Head, where His people may *now* be measured.

Seeking God's servant and His Church

We have seen why it's so important to find God's servant, His ministers and His Church. Without the guidance coming from God's inspired ministers it will be difficult for us to attain God's perfect character and ultimately to fulfill God's purpose for us. God has given us the ministry to help us become perfect. One

Issue No. 14: May 2009

way of identifying God's true Church is to discern its human leader. To see whether that leader submits to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. Fruits have to be forthcoming. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;...Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he falls into the condemnation of the devil" (I Tim 3:1-6).

These are indeed highly important character traits which necessarily need to be found in God's true servant. However, in I Tim. 3:9, God inspired the Apostle Paul to emphasize one aspect which is to be found in His servant, one that is so unique and so very vital. This most important aspect is one that is always the least considered and most overlooked by God's people in determining who His true minister is. God's faithful servant should be "holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience".

This single verse lays down the foundation in identifying the true servant of God. The other verses prior to this one are the basis for further establishing the identity of God's true servant but they come second to and after one has established the issue of faith and pure conscience. Therefore, God's people who are looking for His servant must place most importance on the manifestation of faith and pure conscience rather than to physical and behavioral manifestations. These are seen in the manner with which the person interacts with people and lives his life. However, we must remember that the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9) and that, ultimately, just looking at the behaviour of a man claiming to be God's true servant can be deceptive. That servant could merely put up a show of good conduct.

This whole issue that is being referred to here is practically anchored in faith. On the faith found within God's servant, as this helps us to identify and ascertain where Christ's true servant really is and therefore where the Church Christ is leading also is. God's servant who is faithfully doing His Work and is sighing and crying to God's people to *wake up, time is short, the Bridegroom is here* (Matt. 25:6). Remember, faith is not about things that are seen (Heb. 11:1). Faith goes beyond that, beyond the physical realm. Those who have God's Spirit will be given the wisdom

to discern the faith in God's true servant who leads His Church under Jesus Christ.

We should ask questions! Do we know the history of the church we belong to? Does it hold on to the mystery of faith originally delivered to God's apostles and the truth of the gospel restored through His end-time Elijah? – a Church that embraces the government of God, headed by Jesus Christ and administered by His human servant. What are the reasons for recent doctrinal changes, if any have occurred? Are they coming from God or from the mind of a man?

Did the church you belong to start on faith, with His servant taking a stand for God? Or was it organized simply because of the human desire to associate and worship with others? Be reminded that religion is not about numbers. It is about faith and truth. It is all about following His will and respecting His authority! God is not interested in the number of people in a church! God was with the prophet Jeremiah even when he was alone in the dungeon!

Be ye perfect

We can become the flawless gems and precious jewels God wants us to be, with and through the help of His Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul emphasized the task of God's faithful servants to work hard for God's goals to be achieved: "Warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). This is how important it is, in your quest for perfection, to find God's true servant and ministry. God can use us more effectively if we grow to a level where we can assume our roles in the Body of Christ fulfilling His perfect will for us: "Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together (*in total unity*) and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:15-16). "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt.5:48).

We now need to put in that extra effort and dedication to achieving His perfect character. We, His people are being judged now. Whether we attain this now or through the Great Tribulation is up to us. God has promised and given us His help, His Holy Spirit. Although we are given just an earnest of it at baptism, we must exercise that Spirit so that it grows to the point where it is *Christ in us* who makes us perfect.

Issue No. 14: May 2009

Let us therefore grow in God's truth, in His love and, most importantly, in faith always.

Marriage and the Bride

by Allen Wood

We are all aware of the subject of marriage; many of us are married ourselves. Whatever your status in life is, let us look at the forthcoming *Spiritual Marriage*.

Jeremiah 3:14 states: "Return, O backsliding children, for I am married to you." The promises for this are outlined in Exodus 19:4-6, and in verse 8 of the same chapter we read: "Then all the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do.'" The marriage covenant was affirmed on that Day of Pentecost at Mt. Sinai/Horeb.

It turned out that the generation rebelled again and again, and they all perished in the desert without entering the Promised Land. The younger generations continued the wedding vows and went on to enter that area under Joshua. They served and were faithful to God until that generation died. In Judges 2:11-15 we are told "they did evil in the sight of the Lord", and served false gods.

If you were living at that time, what would you have done? Would you have done the same, followed the crowd, or perhaps strived to live according to God's ways? Answer yourself truthfully. God tested His people and He will continue to test us to see where each of us stand.

The children of Israel continued to do evil, but when they realized they needed help, they cried to the Lord, who raised up Othniel. Through him, the Lord saved Israel, and they had peace for forty years.

After the death of Othniel, the children again turned to evil in the sight of the Lord. When things got too bad for themselves, they again cried to the Lord. This time Ehud was used to save Israel. The full story is found in Judges 3:12-31. Again Israel was saved, and had peace for eighty years, and once again did evil.

God is reproducing Himself through mortal human beings (Gen. 1:26). Billions of God beings are in the making. Having been selected, chosen and are baptized, we are each required to grow spiritually to produce the Fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

The fourth chapter of Judges discusses Deborah and Barak. What fruits did each display? And Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite? If we were walking in their footsteps, what would we have done - individually? What fruits would we have displayed in each case? We must remember that God is listening to our evaluations of ourselves.

Judges 6:1-6 states that they turned to do evil 'in the sight of the Lord'. Verses 8-10 give us the Lord's evaluation. Does this fit with what we are really like? Judges 8:11-40 gives the account of Gideon's life after speaking face to face with our Lord and how he eventually doubted (verses 36-40). Are we guilty of the same thing? Would we fall into the same trap tomorrow, the next day or next week? How faithful and loyal can we be if we are in a doubtful mind frame? Do we have spiritual back bone?

1 Peter 4:17 states: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the House of God." Judgment begins with us first. God is presently evaluating each and every one of us. Are we growing in Godly character today? Are we honestly preparing to take up our possible positions within God's Family?

The ninth chapter of the book of Judges discusses Abimelech's conspiracy to become king. Think of the negative fruits that he displayed to reach his desired position. His youngest brother Jotham, on the other hand, climbed up Mount Gerizim and with a raised voice cried out the parable of the Trees. Jotham had the courage to do this on that day, and spoke to all the men of the area (verse 6). That took courage. We must think of what we would do? Who could we compare ourselves to? Are we stirring the spirit up or is it remaining as a tiny seed somewhere in the deep recesses of our minds?

Throughout history the Israelites admitted to living the wrong way, doing what seemed right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6). Some of them turned to God for deliverance, but others turned to men! They exalted human leaders more than God. Where do we stand?

How much spiritual character have each of us developed since our baptism? Are we waiting for another Apostle to come on the scene, to goad us into doing something positive and constructive about your character? Take Revelation 3:12 personally! God wants fully developed God-beings, who are mature enough to be ready to be married to His Son at the appointed time.

Issue No. 14: May 2009

Is our character developed enough to stand firm or are we ready to turn tail and run the other way, and do what seems right in our own eyes? Remember, God is recreating Himself, by creating innumerable God-beings, who have willingly developed Godly Character. We must be compatible in character with our future Husband, Jesus Christ.

To do this we must nurture and develop our character to become Holy. It is so easy to become complacent. Our character need to be ready! We need to be growing, maturing, and ready to be born again as Spiritual Sons, ready to walk in and take up our positions today!

The Faithful Philadelphians will be Pillars in the temple of God. We will take on the name of God, just as a bride takes on her husband's name in a physical marriage. What an exciting future we have! Each one of us must develop spiritual backbone and be ready to stand firm, like a "Pillar" in God's Faithful Church. Stand firm and be ready to be counted worthy for the position offered in Revelation 3:12.