

Church of God, The Eternal

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This Is a Time to Evaluate Our Spiritual Progress

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Beloved Brethren:

Jesus Christ was the beloved Son of God, the Father (Mark 1:11), and you are the beloved of God if you are one of the chosen.

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

A Time of Darkness

It is a great honor in this *Monthly Letter* to again be able to address the beloved children of God, those who have the love of God's truth and are striving to hold fast. As we know, there are no Holy Days in these months of the fall and winter, thus we have less opportunity to convoke as a larger group and for some, not at all.

This is a good time to reflect on the past year and begin to prepare ourselves to be better able to observe the Passover and spring Holy Days. We can prepare for next season by taking a good look at our performance this past year. This is time afforded to us to evaluate our progress and to see how well we line up with the instructions of God's Word. Did we have specific goals in overcoming last year, and did we succeed in accomplishing them? We should ask ourselves pertinent questions concerning our personal and our spiritual lives to find out what our progress truthfully has been. Remember, if we judge ourselves we should not be judged (1 Corinthians 11:31). We know our needs and problems more than anyone else, and if we sincerely take those situations to God, He will give us the right understanding and help we need to grow and overcome.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28–30).

In order to be able to effectively make positive changes in our lives, we must be able to see ourselves more like God sees us. We cannot accomplish this by our own abilities; it must come by God's Holy Spirit working within us. This is a time for us to do as the Apostle Paul said to the Ephesians:

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:23–24).

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15–16).

In Romans 12:3, the Apostle Paul also says:

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

True Emotions

We all need spiritual balance based on honest, sincere character acquired by practicing obedience to the laws of God through good times and bad times. We never want to perform by working up our emotions temporarily, which may allow us to keep the letter of the law for a time, but not to have the true character to obey when our emotions are not driving us to stay on the narrow path. The passion of true emotions focused in the right direction is a good and marvelous trait that can accomplish much, but the emotions must be with the true balance of God's Spirit guiding them. They should never be used for show, especially if they are generated deliberately by a wrong purpose and desire.

Just understanding all of God's plan of salvation and the knowledge of all that is someday going to befall this world, along with being blessed to have been given this precious way of life, is not nearly enough for us to be saved. All of this knowledge must inspire us and help drive us into personally changing our lives—the way we conduct our lives from day to day.

The Apostle Paul explains the transformation that must take place in our lives. Notice Romans 8:8–17:

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

There are important lessons of life that can be learned from the parables taught by Christ. Let us take the time to see a very important lesson that Christ was teaching Simon in a parable about a creditor. Simon could not understand why Christ would allow a street woman, possibly a harlot, to continue to wash His feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair and also anointing them with very expensive ointment. He thought Christ should have known what kind of woman she was and not to have allowed it. Simon, a Pharisee and obviously a religious man, wanted some answers as to why Christ allowed this to take place. Let us read in Luke 7:41–50 the answer Christ gave to Simon:

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said

unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

Simon did not realize that this woman was deeply repentant. She saw her true self and was deeply broken up over her sins. She realized the awesomeness of the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of all mankind and for her own sins.

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

It should read: For he hath made him a sin offering for us (not to be sin for us). When we repent, we must recognize our sins and also realize that Christ paid for them. Our sins placed the blows of Christ's beatings and suffering upon Him. Our sins helped bring that heaviness and extreme pain upon Him—the severe mental pain that our Savior endured on that day of Passover. That sinner (woman) was in deep remorse because of what her sins had caused to befall her and our Savior.

Christ was teaching Simon that the one in the parable that was forgiven most would also love the most, hence this woman. Christ had a very important meaning that He was trying to get Simon to see from this parable. Simon must have committed physical sins because he was a leper; he was of the generation of vipers that Christ addressed in John 8:44. He was not able to see the many sins in his life, and must have been self-satisfied with his station in life. He must have been deceived like his brothers in Luke 18:11–12.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner (Luke 18:11–13).

The publican here in verse 13 had the right attitude just as this woman in Luke 7:37. He was so humbled by being inadequate and a sinner that he would not cast his eyes to heaven. The Pharisee felt righteous and good, not seeing himself as self-righteous and the sinner that he really was.

If we are to accomplish the spiritual growth that we desire this coming year, it is paramount that we truly start seeing ourselves and what we really are naturally. We should avoid looking at others and their faults, unlike Simon who was judging this woman. The Apostle Paul condemned it even in the ministry, and warned of the dangers of comparing ourselves and looking at others by judging outward appearances.

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; Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's. For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise (2 Corinthians 10:5, 7, 12).

Brethren, the woman in Luke 7:37–38 was so humbled and moved by the greatness of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, and His presence as the Savior, that she bestowed this great honor upon Him. Her repentant attitude and great appreciation caused her to wash His feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair and then anointing them with the expensive ointment.

The Right Priorities

Let us take notice, brethren, of another lesson that Christ brought to Martha's attention, by rebuking her for being so wrapped up in the physical act of serving Him at a dinner in her home. Martha had Christ in her home for a meal, and she was completely distracted by the physical aspect of serving the meal, to the point that she became upset with her sister Mary. Possibly she wanted Christ to scold Mary and get her to help out with the serving. Christ told Martha that she was careful and troubled about all of those physical things concerning serving and had neglected the needful part of the visit. The needful part of Christ's visit was to sit at Christ's feet and be instructed in the spiritual aspects of life, which Mary had rightly chosen. You can read the account in Luke 10:38–42.

To remain the beloved of God we must be able to choose the important part of this life which we are so blessed to have been given. That important aspect of our lives is our futures and how we put God and His ways first before all of the physical aspects of life. If we are not careful, we can become a proverbial Martha and possibly come up short of the spiritual oil in our lamps. Given the time that God so mercifully is allowing for us to overcome and qualify, we need to make full use of it.

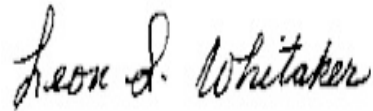
By evaluating our record of performance from this past year, we should be able to set some very necessary goals that we need to achieve this coming year. We can overcome, brethren, because we are promised the necessary help we need.

Our most important goal is to work together as beloved brothers and sisters in Christ for the ultimate reward of eternal life. We need to take the Apostle Paul's approach. He knew where he stood because he said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). And in verse 19 he said also to us: "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Brethren, my desire for each of you "beloved brethren" would be the same as the Apostle Paul's wish to the Philippians in verse 23 of the same chapter. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

We wish you the very best, and may God in His love and comfort help you through these trying times ahead.

Much love and respect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leon S. Whitaker". The ink is black and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Leon S. Whitaker