

Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

June, 2007

First Things First: Unless The Lord Shall Build The House

Jesus said, “Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who abides in me and I in him, bears much fruit; for **without me you can do nothing.**” (John 15:4-5 NKJV)

The words Jesus spoke as his “farewell message” to his apostles in John 14-16, and his prayer to his Father in John 17, give us deep insight into his heart. But are we really “abiding” in Christ? Is it possible that some congregations are building something that will come to nothing?

A genuine Christian is Christ-like. Since we all fall short of Christ’s values it can be confusing to know if we are truly bearing fruit, can’t it? But what is our heart like—our deepest desires and motivations? David did some horrible things, but the Psalms show us how David fervently sought after God. There was something about David’s heart that God loved. The Psalms show a deep humility and hunger for God.

A congregation will accomplish nothing of real worth if it is not connected to and “abiding in Christ.” Remember that “except the Lord shall build the house they labor in vain that build it.” (Psa 127:1)

A congregation can appear to be very much alive, just as the church at Sardis had a reputation for being alive.

A congregation can have many programs, publications, and other activities. In that environment

a member can feel safe and believe he is spiritually secure. Yet it’s possible that the individual member and the congregation as a whole can be building with wood, hay, and straw, and all the efforts expended will be burned up (1Cor 3:12).

What our heart is like determines whether Christ lives in us individually. The congregation is either *Christ-like* or not depending on whether the individuals within that church are *Christ-centered* or not. This must be our basis. Attempting to make congregations more “effective” by such efforts as cooperation with other groups, and improving programs and training based upon “here is what we are going to do” thinking... can be as effective in the long run as the efforts of the builders of the tower of Babel.

How can we know if our congregations are Christ-centered? It must start with each of us as individuals, for that’s how God originally worked with us and called us, wasn’t it? When God called you, did you feel self-satisfied, secure in your church, and somewhat smug? Or were you overwhelmed with your smallness, your



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sinfulness, and your one-on-one need for God's mercy? And God was merciful and helped, didn't he? How do you feel now? We must never forget: "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word." (Isaiah. 66:2.)

The Way To Spiritual Health

Jeremiah recorded: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." (Jer 17:9-10 NIV)

But Jeremiah also showed the way out: "I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps. Correct me, Lord, but only with justice—not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing." (Jer 10:23-24 NIV)

It takes guts to ask God to correct us. But we truly don't have the capacity to see how we've drifted from God. Could, for example, the churches at Sardis or Laodicea see that they were not right before God? Neither can each of us on our own. But God can. Ask him to

open our minds, to give us insight and correction. And when Christ does reveal things to us, then open the door to him. Jesus said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me." (Rev 3:20 NIV) Note that it is the one-on-one individual who chooses whether to listen to what Christ reveals. Christ only works with groups according to how individuals within that group abide in Christ.

When Christ then opens our mind it is a very humbling time. It leads us to cry out to God in our deep need, as we did when he first called us. It's what we need. There can be no growth either individually or as a congregation by bypassing connecting to Christ and becoming of a humble heart.

Always remember: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (Jam 4:6 NIV) We must become a transformed, Christ-like, praying people. We can't do that without asking him in mercy to give us correction, and then opening the door and letting Christ in.

This pill can be bitter to swallow. But it is the only pill that brings real healing. FN

Faith Networks on the Web

The new *Faith Networks* magazine website is home to a complete collection of all of the issues of *Faith Networks*, from February 2005 to the present. Each issue is in a separate PDF file, that can be displayed on your computer screen with the Adobe Acrobat Reader program. Most computers already have this simple program in memory, but there is a link on the website where you can download the program for free.



The Faith Networks site is at <http://www.youall.com/faithnetworks>

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The Simple Faith in the Goodness of God's Law

A Bible study guide written by a famous and respected theologian refers to "our inability to keep God's law." Did God give us commandments that we are unable to keep? Did he decree curses and the death penalty for law-breaking with full knowledge we could not obey the letter of the law? Not according to Moses. God inspired Moses to write:



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*Now what I am commanding you today is **not too difficult** for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. (Deu 30:11-14 NIV)*

One of my friends was paralyzed in an automobile accident. She is unable to turn herself over in bed; she is unable to groom herself, feed herself, or do any mundane task most of us take for granted. She can be described as having an inability to do many things. She wants to do these things for herself, but she can not. Her inability prevents her from doing what she wants to do.

Let's consider the reiteration of the Ten Commandments found in Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

Is a human mind unable to understand the concept that there is a living God who created and sustains all things?

Is a human mind and body unable to stop itself from bowing down to images of stone?

Are we unable to refrain from saying and doing things that tarnish the reputation of the Holy God?

We may have to go to some trouble to honor and assist our parents, but is it impossible?

Are we unable to refrain for 24 hours from working?

Doesn't it take a great deal of thought and energy to plan and carry out murder, adultery, and theft?

Lying and coveting often seem uncontrollable, but are they really?

The problem isn't a holiness paralysis; the problem is in our "want-to." Fix the "want-to" and The Ten Commandments become easy. What is so difficult about taking a full 24 hours to rest and be refreshed physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually? What is so difficult about refraining from pocketing that piece of jewelry so that you don't eventually end up in jail for shop-lifting?

Have you noticed? It takes work to break any of the Ten basic commands of God.

Right after God gave The Ten to Moses, he revealed what the children of Israel lacked and what we all lack that produces our disobedience:

Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever! (Deu 5:29)

My two-year old granddaughter is precious to me and the delight of my life. But her "want-to" needs fixing. She has on occasion looked her mother in the eye and deliberately and defiantly done exactly what she was just told not to do. She was not "unable" to obey; she simply did not "want-to" obey. She was not asked to do something beyond her understanding or capacity. She was asked to refrain from doing something harmful.

God has asked us to refrain from

harmful actions. On occasion, we defy his wisdom and authority in order to do what we "want-to" do and then we complain about the consequences. God has provided a repair for our "want-to."

I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. (Jer 31:33)

I will pour out my Spirit on all people. (Joel 2:28)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, **God did by sending his own Son** in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but **according to the Spirit**. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (Rom 8:1-5)

God has given us everything we need to fix our "want-to." He sent his Son to be a sin offering so that we are not under the death penalty for breaking his laws. Those who accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior receive forgiveness and the indwelling Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38-49) He has sent his Holy Spirit to change our hearts—our "want-to"—so that obedience to his law is **desirable** to us.

We do have a responsibility to **set our minds** on what the Spirit desires. God provides the willingness and strength, but we have to act on it. We have to strengthen the Holy Spirit-generated-desire to do things God's way by fixing our thoughts. "...we take captive every

thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (II Cor 10:5)

Not only do we have responsibility for controlling our thoughts, we also have the responsibility to control our actions. “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the **desires** of the sinful nature.” (Gal 5:16)

We do have a struggle between the “want-to” of the flesh and the godly desires placed in us by the Holy Spirit. We can yield more easily to the desires of the Holy Spirit by coming to

understand the benefits of obedience and the harmful consequences of disobedience. The more love we have for the instructions (the Law) of our Heavenly Father, the easier it will be to carry them out and the less often we will find ourselves in defiance of his desires. Love toward God is the greatest commandment and we express that love by doing what is desirable to him.

Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble. (Psa 119:165) FN

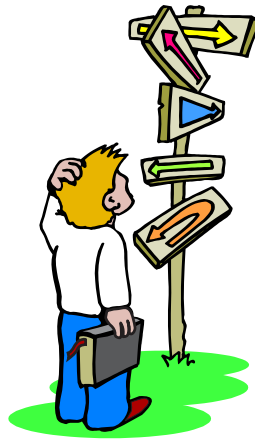
Questions—Are They The Answer?

Do you realize that we are constantly asking ourselves questions? Questions like: What should I eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner? What should I watch on TV tonight? What should I wear today?

Most of us go through life on autopilot, never really thinking about the questions we ask ourselves, and how they might affect us. Instead we blindly accept whatever life seems to throw our way, and call ourselves failures when we don't like the results.

The questions we consistently ask ourselves determine, to a large extent, the direction we go in life. This in turn affects the quality of our lives and our relationship with God.

So, if your life isn't everything you had hoped for, maybe you need to ask yourself a very important question like: “What kind of questions do I regularly ask myself?” Most people are totally unaware of the constant questioning that goes on in their minds, and how self-



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sabotaging some of these questions can be—questions like: Why is life so hard? Why does God seem so far away? Why don't people like me? Why can't I lose weight? Why can't I get along with my spouse or children better? Why can't I succeed at anything? Why can't I quit smoking? Why don't things ever seem to go my way? Why can't I find someone to have a loving and meaningful relationship with?

If these are the kind of questions you consistently ask yourself, you stand a good chance of leading a rather unproductive, unhappy, and self-defeating life.

On the other hand, you could start asking yourself better questions like: What can I do today to draw closer to God? What can I do today to help me overcome my addiction to cigarettes, or some other bad habit? What is the best way to accomplish the task at hand? What is the best way to present this product to my customers? What can I do to be more productive with my time? How can I positively impact my children? What can I do to make them feel special? How can I become more successful and passionate in my life?

As stated above, asking yourself questions greatly affects your focus, good or bad; and what you focus on will determine the direction your life takes.

If you want to live a productive and fulfilling life, you need to ask yourself questions like: What's wonderful in my life right now? What are some of the wonderful or exciting experiences I've had in my life? What do I have to be grateful for? How can I best contribute to others? What would I like to do if I could do anything?

I'm sure you could add many more yourself.

You need to start asking yourself questions that empower you, and stop the negative questions that hold you back and defeat you. If we don't learn to switch off the autopilot and take control of our thinking and the questions we ask ourselves, we will be destined to follow that well-worn path to Christian mediocrity.

So, are you ready for change? Are you ready to kick things up a notch? If you are, get a piece of paper and a pen and start writing down some better questions to ask yourself.

Again, the questions you ask yourself are going to determine, to a large extent, what you focus on and the decisions you

make. Keep in mind, when preparing your better questions, that whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you're right!

If you ask yourself why you don't feel as close to God as you'd like, or why you don't have any friends at church, your mind is going to come up with answers even if they're not true. More than likely it will come up with an answer that will make you feel lousy and unworthy of a close relationship with God or other church members.


Below are some questions you might want to start asking yourself. But don't stop with my questions. Come up with a list of your own.

What can I be grateful for right now? What can I do today to become more productive in my life? What can I do today to help me on my path to weight loss and peak health? What can I do today to impact someone else's life in a positive way? What kind of thoughts do I need to think in order to keep a smile on my face and in my heart?

You can add to your list at any time. Make three copies of your list. Hang a copy or two up at home where you will see it on a regular basis and be reminded to ask yourself the questions. Also put a copy in your wallet or purse so you can take it out wherever you are for a quick reminder and pick-me-up.

Also, be sure when asking yourself these questions to do it with enthusiasm. It will help kick-start the process and get your mind looking for a more positive answer.

Make sure you always state or ask your questions in the affirmative. Don't ask yourself questions like "Why can't I?" but rather, "How can I?"

Remember, if you ask yourself a better question, you are going to get yourself a better answer! 

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.
Galatians 5:22-23



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A Better Mousetrap

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door.” For much of my life I have been, in my own mind at least, the builder of better mousetraps. My ideas almost always seemed better than others. This attitude is the opposite of the fruit of meekness or humility that we are to be growing in our lives. Thankfully as time marches on I have at last begun to recognize my own limitations, appreciate strengths in others, and understand better where I really fit in the world.

We are admonished in the book of Proverbs not to be wise in our own eyes and not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, because those attitudes create a false sense of ourselves and pride that goes against the way of God. Pride and arrogance are called “evil ways” in Proverbs 8:13. They are the opposite of the fruit of humility because they seek to promote self above others, often at all costs.

Some unexpected wisdom on this subject came from the comedian Jeff Foxworthy, best known for his “You might be a redneck if...” humor. Mr. Foxworthy said, “Pride is the first step in people unraveling and companies unraveling and relationships unraveling.”

It is in this area of relationships that pride causes us to make many mistakes. The world is full of armchair quarterbacks rerunning plays everyone else makes. These folks are always finding

something negative to say about what others do or say. If there is always something wrong with the way others do things; if your way is always the best and/or only way; if your mousetrap is always much superior—then truly you will find your relationships unraveling.

The “I could have done it better” attitude devalues others because it lacks respect for their strengths and talents. And without a proper sense of humility, which includes courtesy, patience, and deference to other people, we cannot live in peace and harmony with them. We also seriously weaken our ability to successfully live day to day because no one can do everything. Or as John Donne put it, “No man is an island.”

And more importantly we are not on the right track with Jesus and God the Father:

And [Jesus] called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mat 18:2-4 NAS)

For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation. (Psa149:4)

So the next time you feel sure it is only your mousetrap that will work, stop and think: “You just might be a redneck if . . .”

FN

Freedom and Liberty

Part I - Losing a Physical and Spiritual Birthright



Michael Deering

Ask yourself these questions:

Would the United States of America have become the most prosperous and powerful nation in all history had our founders implemented an authoritarian central government that regulated and controlled all aspects of individual life?

Would individuals like Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and modern pioneers of technology like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates have been able to use their talents and ideas to bring invention and prosperity to the nation if an all-powerful and controlling central government infringed and impeded their pursuits? Would their contributions have even come into being if they required permission, license, and oversight before they could share their individual abilities with the rest of society?

The answers should be quite obvious.

Liberty is an essential element in achieving our potential, as individuals and as a nation.

Sadly, the importance of freedom and the need to encourage liberty is being lost on a people and society that are more comfortable being subjects and wards of the institutions of men, instead of being free bond-servants of The Most High in our individual conduct and lives.

Why is this? As Americans, one would think that the encouragement, promotion, and defense of liberty is a no-brainer, and a central tenet of all our thinking, transcending every aspect of our lives.

Today, it isn't.

Culturally and governmentally, America is slouching towards Authoritarian Socialism and the subjugation of liberty to the regulation and oversight of the

State. The reason for this is twofold: Most of us have no idea what true liberty is, and your neighbors do not trust you with what liberty you do have.

America is woefully ignorant of its history and heritage, and as such, has lost the understanding of what real liberty is. Freedom today is widely accepted to mean that we are free to do whatever we please as long as it doesn't "hurt" or "offend" someone else. Freedom is accepted to mean freedom FROM morality and responsibility; to be free from offense and judgment of any kind.

As a result of that accepted definition, a nanny-state ideology permeates the American mindset and is affecting every aspect of our culture. A growing proportion of the citizenry look to the central power of government to control and regulate freedoms. This enslaves all to the control of central planners, making as many dependents as possible by absolving them of personal responsibility toward maintaining their freedom. To put it simply, freedom exists only because of personal responsibility to keep and maintain it, and unfortunately Americans have become conditioned to surrender their personal responsibility to government authority.

This is not how Jesus Christ or our founders defined, or intended freedom to be for us. As Christians, one would think we recognize true freedom, but looking at the Christian church itself today, we would be wrong. Christians are confused about liberty as much as the rest of the citizenry of the nation. They no more trust their fellow brethren with

liberty than their neighbors do.

The kind of “freedom” American Christians believe in is one that has been permissive or silent in the face of debauchery and vice as the culture has continually defined deviancy down. Christians have been shamed into silence, buying into a false doctrine of “Judge Not” which society regards as acceptance of those things hostile to our Foundations. As a result, the culture becomes more depraved and criminal, and society requires greater assertive controls in order to keep peace and safety.

Benjamin Franklin himself noted, “As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.” A vibrant Christian faith was intended to influence the culture of America and “keep it on the straight and narrow,” restricting the claws of government so individual pursuits of happiness could be achieved.

Today it is exactly backwards. Americans think they cannot pursue happiness WITHOUT government

“Our Constitution was made only for a religious and moral people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.”

– John Adams

involvement, while moral principles are seen as intolerant and oppressive. If you look at the slide of our culture over the last 50 years, you will note that as we devolve from our moral roots, more authoritarian controls and oversight are needed to keep order. It grows to the point that almost every activity is governed and regulated by the State at some level.

We Christians have a large stake of blame for this present situation. Without

religion and morality being preached and promoted to guide a people, we all eventually become slaves to imposed wickedness and the tyranny of men.

Americans seem to be comfortable with such tyranny however, having no problems with much of their lives regulated and subject to oversight. We get upset when something affects our wallets like the price of gas, while your liberty to mention God in the public square has been abolished right under your nose with nary a whimper.

The Founders expected Christians and Jews to be the Knights of this Republic, the guardians of our collective culture. John Adams wrote: “Our Constitution was made only for a religious and moral people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.”

What our Founders were inspired to establish for us, and the Church, was a nation wherein the spirit of God could move individuals towards sharing great and mighty gifts to benefit the whole people and at the same time, fulfill its commission.

Sadly, the Church seems to have missed that truth, having shrunk into itself, and divorced from public involvement, it is no longer influencing the culture as it once did. The culture instead is influencing the Church and making slaves out of us all. Americans are losing their birthright to freedom and liberty for an absolution of responsibility with an empty promise of security.

How that has affected your spiritual freedom, what true liberty requires of you, and how vital it is in fulfilling our Commission to make Disciples will be discussed in the second installment of this article, in the next issue of *Faith Networks*. [FN](#)

Will there be any stars ...?

A while back someone on a Sabbatarian Church of God Internet forum posed an interesting question:

Does the mainstream Christian think their reward is for faith?



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The Bible mentions in Matthew 16:27 the criteria for the reward of the believer in the next life: “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall *reward every man according to his works.*” Perhaps the person asking the question had this passage in mind.

It has been typical in some Church of God groups over the years to equate the works mentioned here very specifically with obedience to the Law of God given at Mt. Sinai, with perhaps special attention to the proper observance of the Sabbath and Holy Days. It has also been typical to assume that those who are unfamiliar with the Law, and who believe that it is possible to have “faith without works” (contrary to James’ comment that “faith without works is dead”), must think that they will be rewarded not for their works, but for their faith.

However, this is not what I have observed. I’ve had a wide exposure for the past two decades to people of various Protestant denominations who take their faith seriously (**not** what are commonly called “pew

warmers”). And what I have come to see is that many of them think that their reward in the Kingdom is related not to their level of faith, but to one specific thing in particular, exemplified by the following song:

Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown?

*I am thinking today of that beautiful land
I shall reach when the sun goeth down;
When through wonderful grace by my Savior I stand,
Will there be any stars in my crown?*

CHORUS:

*Will there be any stars, any stars in my crown
When at evening the sun goeth down?
When I wake with the blest in the mansions of rest
Will there be any stars in my crown?*

*In the strength of the Lord let me labor and pray,
Let me watch as a winner of souls,
That bright stars may be mine in the glorious day,
When His praise like the sea billow rolls.*

*O what joy it will be when His face I behold,
Living gems at his feet to lay down!
It would sweeten my bliss in the city of gold,
Should there be any stars in my crown.*

CHORUS:

*Will there be any stars, any stars in my crown
When at evening the sun goeth down?
When I wake with the blest in the mansions of rest
Will there be any stars in my crown?*

That one specific thing is the fruit of their personal efforts to share the Gospel widely, so that many others will also be in the Kingdom—to be a “winner of souls,” as the song puts it. And I’m quite sure that many of them would not think this is only done by such things as passing out tracts door to door or being a professional evangelist. It would include feeding the poor, visiting the sick, being a light to your neighbors and such so that others are drawn to want to know more about your Lord.

The metaphor in the song of “laying down crowns” with “living jewels” at the feet of Jesus is likely based on a combination of the concepts in the three passages below:

*And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I **make up my jewels**; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. (Mal 3:17)*

After all, what gives us hope and joy, and **what will be our proud reward and crown** as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! Yes, you are our pride and joy. (1 The 2:19-20)

*The four and twenty elders shall fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall **cast their crowns before the throne**, saying,*

Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created. (Rev 4:10-11)

The point of the song is that if the 24 elders cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, that is symbolically what we will do with ours also. And the jewels—the “stars”—in those crowns will represent

people who belong to God in part through our efforts—our “works of evangelism.” We will cast those crowns at His feet, recognizing that all truly good works we have done in life bring glory to Him, not ourselves. Those works are a reflection of His glory, and evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Some might find the song a bit too syrupy and sentimental. Perhaps it is. And some may feel that such folks are going to be utterly ineffective if they don’t teach about all of the doctrinal distinctives which those in the Sabbatarian COGs believe to be crucial to the Faith. Perhaps that is so.

But in spite of those things, would this basic approach be biblical—of having one of your primary goals in life be “winning souls”? Would it be biblical to have an urgent desire to share with others the Truth you have about salvation available through Jesus, in the hope that they will be in the “first resurrection” with you? If that first resurrection is the “better resurrection,” surely we would want as many as possible to be blessed with that opportunity ., rather than just figuring “Oh, well, they will all get their chance some day after the Millennium is over.”

Obviously we can’t “do the calling” to assure someone becomes converted. It is God who “calls” people. Nor can we “convict” people of their sins so that they may repent and have their sins covered by the blood of Jesus. We don’t have access to their hearts—conviction must come from the work of the Holy Spirit. But as Ron Dart has often pointed out, **some** powerful inner urge seemed to be driving Paul to spread the Gospel as far and as wide as he could in spite of persecution and incredible physical hardships.

Perhaps Paul himself thought that his efforts really did have something to do with how God's plan for "firstfruits" for that first resurrection would work out. Perhaps he, figuratively, yearned to have

"stars in his crown" to joyfully offer as firstfruits to Jesus.

I certainly hope to have many in mine. How about you?

*Will there be any stars, any stars in your crown
When at evening the sun goeth down?
When you wake with the blest in the mansions of rest
Will there be any stars in your crown?*

*O what joy it will be when His face you behold,
Living gems at his feet to lay down!
It will sweeten your bliss in the city of gold,
If there are many stars in your crown.*

FN

Locus of Control

Part 1: The Individual

What controls the decisions you make? Maybe it's the school you attended, the political party, church, or union you belong to. Or does the control center lie someplace else?

On September 11, 2001, four airliners were hijacked by terrorists on a suicidal flight to turn civilian aircraft into flying bombs. For the passengers there was no way out. They were trapped, victims of the terrorists. Of the four planes, the only one that did not reach its destination was Flight 93, where passengers took the initiative to defend themselves. The movie *Flight 93* quotes passenger Todd Beemer as saying, "No one outside the plane is going to help us. It's up to us to do something." It was a defining realization that any opportunity to thwart the hijackers was within the plane.

Psychologists see this as changing the perception of where the "locus

of control" resides. Where is the location of control? Healthy people have an internal control center.

Unhealthy people perceive themselves as being controlled externally. As Paul wrote, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phi 2:12-13)

In other words, a healthy person takes ownership of his life. When you own a car you can paint it, change the radio, wash it, or let it deteriorate. You may view the car as a gift from God, but it is your possession and your responsibility. It is that way with your life. But owning your life means more than just doing a job, it means being responsible for the way you exist. You're not just responsible



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for whether you practice the piano everyday, you are responsible for whether you can play the piano.

During WWII the Nazis committed such heinous crimes that the world held court against the offenders. The experience added a new term to our vocabulary, the “Nuremberg Defense.” It is a legal defense that says the defendant “was only following orders.” The London Charter of the International Military Tribunal determined no such defense was acceptable. They wrote, “The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his Government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law...”

In other words, the ultimate responsibility for actions rests with the person acting. When American soldiers killed innocent women and children in the village of My Lai, the U.S. held the individual soldier responsible for his actions even if he was following orders of a superior officer.

The courts are regularly asked to resolve lawsuits from people who claim someone else was responsible for something they did. McDonald’s was sued for several million dollars because a lady spilled hot coffee in her lap. Is it the responsibility of the restaurant to keep a customer from spilling coffee? Another person sued the company that made his lawnmower when he was injured attempting to use it to trim hedges. The lawyer argued that the owner’s manual contained no warning against hedge trimming, so the manufacturer must be at fault.


This all reflects a growing trend of “victimization,” where self-control becomes a fading virtue. Convincing a man he is a victim seduces him to believe he is under the control of an external force. It makes him passive.

Passivism paralyzes a man’s will to act, leaving him vulnerable to evil. The English statesman Edmund Burke is reputed to have said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

When the Israelites came out of slavery they were a passive people. Pharaoh and his task masters had destroyed their spirit. By the time Moses entered the scene the people were afraid to stand up against criminals in their own camp. Moses had to admonish them to testify in court. “If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible.” (Lev 5:1 NIV) They were reluctant to do their duty because they wanted justice to be provided for them. They learned that the price tag for justice is courage.

Passive people wait for something to act on them. And then they react. Successful people don’t just react to situations, they initiate things. They do not see themselves as victims but as participants to influence a positive outcome.

For example, when something negative happens in the life of a successful person, he asks himself, “What can I do to make this situation better?” It doesn’t make any difference whether he caused the situation or not, he recognizes his personal responsibility to improve the circumstances. His *locus of control* is internal.

It can be a fearful thing to take responsibility for life. But it wasn’t until Todd Beemer and fellow passengers took responsibility that evil men could be stopped. In this life there will always be evil men. Maybe that is why the most frequent command in the Bible is “Fear not!” 

Heard a Good Message?

This Faith Networks recurring feature will provide brief summaries of good messages you might want to obtain from the presenters for your own listening.

The Natural Law

by Ronald Dart
Synopsis by Donna Neubert

How do God's laws apply to our lives today? Do God's laws require a "divine hand" to enforce them, or do natural consequences for breaking the law automatically occur? Explore these questions and others and contemplate the answers by reviewing the insightful message, *The Natural Law*.

As we begin, we are asked to consider our creation. "The moment you start imagining the act of creation, all types of questions occur." The complexity of our universe is staggering and the laws governing it complex. We know that water is crucial for life, but when you understand the ecosystem of the earth, you realize life on our planet requires enormous quantities of water. How do you move such enormous quantities of water in the oceans and seas around the earth? God designed the moon exactly for this purpose; otherwise, human life could not exist on the planet. The moon balances gravity and motion, and its mass affects the earth and its inhabitants. We refer to gravity as the "law" of gravity; however, gravity is not a law that you can break like man's law.

Like our solar system, man is also a system, and the man God made is

a balance of matter and energy like everything else He made. Man is a much more complex system, however, and governed by properties of matter and energy that we can't change. Many laws that govern man can be discovered in time by man himself, but some of the laws that affect the relationships of man and the lives of human beings we might never discover, if they were not revealed to us.

To a degree, God has written into man a system of logic to make him aware of right and wrong. Civilizations around the world see certain things in common—such as "it's wrong to become involved with another man's wife." The natural system of logic can only take you so far, however, and sometimes it is painful to learn things by experience.

God's law provides key things that man needs to know about himself, his relationship with his fellowman, and his relationship with God. If man is not told these things, he might never discover them. Genesis 26 indicates Abraham knew a system of law with structure (charge, commandments, statutes, laws).

There are so many lessons in the law of God that the person who spends time trying to apply it to his life will have a tremendous advantage over those who do not.

This message is available free on CD from Christian Educational Ministries (CEM), PO Box 560, Whitehouse, Texas 75791, (903) 509-2999. (Delivery: 3 to 4 weeks)

Immigration and the Bible

I am a proponent of immigration, but only of the kind that follows the rules. I'm not just speaking of the rules of the country. Those are important rules too, although those rules seem to be too porous for proper enforcement. Rather, I am talking about an ancient law that is surprisingly wise in its intent and application.

The books of Exodus through Deuteronomy are very much a codification of the basic law of an ancient nation. They contain hundreds of civil laws and judgements that clearly pertain to an ancient culture, but quite often would be impractical to apply literally to a 21st century culture.

For example, there is an interesting tidbit from the civil code found in the book of Deuteronomy: "You shall also have a place outside the camp and go out there, and you shall have a spade among your tools, and it shall be when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and shall turn to cover up your excrement." (Deu 23:12-13 NASB)

Can you imagine in our world everyone carrying a spade around in order to dig our own latrines as we need them? I think not, but nevertheless the law contains a principle that is still very applicable 3,500 years later, and that is the need for proper sanitation. Our society applies the principle of the law even though we might not keep the law in the letter.

In the same way, the hundreds of laws and judgements that cram the Torah have an ancient wisdom of their own, the principles of which we ignore at our peril. The requirement for two witnesses in a court of law, the discharging of debts through bankruptcy proceedings,

environmental regulations, health and cleanliness laws, and dozens of other concepts that have found their way into our society have their roots in the ancient texts that have come down to us through our religious forebears.

The texts even address the subject of immigration, and we as a nation of immigrants would do well to pay heed to them, for they outline the rights and responsibilities of both the immigrant and the host nation.

The foreigner in the land was to be under that same law as the native born (Exo 12:49). They were to get time off work for the Sabbath (20:10, 23:12) and the high days (Exo 12:19, Lev 16:29, Deu 16:11, 14), indicating that they weren't to be treated like slaves, for slaves never get a day off. It would follow from this that immigrants should be paid the same as native born for the work they do (which, by the way, would eliminate one of the primary motivations for illegal immigration, that being the desire for underpaid labor). However, they were not allowed to eat the Passover, for some things are reserved to citizens alone (Exo 12:43).

They were not to be oppressed, but were to be treated fairly (Exo 22:21-23:9). They were to be afforded the dignity due any child of God (Lev 19:33-34), and if they were poor they were to be allowed to glean the fields for food just as poor Israelites were (Lev 19:10, 23:22).

The foreigner was expected to keep the law of the land (Lev 18:26). Criminal behavior would be tried and punished under the same laws as a native Israelite (Lev 24:16, 22).



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It is surprising how humanitarian the laws were toward foreigners in the land, especially in light of the exclusivist attitude among the Jews of the Holy Land in Jesus' day.

Having said that, it is evident that the foreigner was expected to respect the laws and customs of their host nation even if they ultimately wished not to be

accepted into the congregation of Israel. This means there was a sort of social contract. "You will respect our laws and traditions, and we will treat you with fairness and respect."

Immigration may be a hot issue, especially the illegal kind, but the principle of mutual respect would take some of the fire out of the debate. [FN](#)

Advice for Forming a New Congregation

Larry Watkins
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Larry Watkins is the business manager for Christian Educational Ministries. The following material, sent out by CEM in answer to inquiries, may be of interest to some Faith Networks readers.

In view of the numerous questions concerning how to go about starting a new church congregation, the following information is compiled in a question and answer format. This information is designed to provide general information relating to federal tax rules, Internal Revenue Service procedures, and some general information on organizational procedures. It is intended as a reference guide *and should not be relied upon as legal advice pertaining to state or federal laws.*

Additional information can be obtained by contacting the IRS and acquiring several different tax information publications pertaining to churches. Also, you can contact the office of the Secretary of State in your individual state for information concerning your state laws.

1. Do we have to incorporate in order to form a church?

No, but some form of written organizational governance such as bylaws and the form of operational governance, i.e., a Board of Trustees or

a church council, etc., including elected officers, will be required. It is suggested that a Church Board have at least three members, preferably five, unless your congregation is too small to require a larger board. Board members should be elected by a secret ballot of all members, with the person receiving the most votes being elected the Chairperson or President. Other officers, such as Treasurer and Secretary, can be elected by the Board. If you do decide to incorporate, you will need an Articles of Incorporation document and Bylaws, but each state's requirements may be different. Most states will provide you with the necessary information free of charge, or for a slight fee, if you call the Secretary of State's office.

2. How do we open a bank account?

The first thing that must be done is to decide on a name for your new church. Then acquire IRS Form SS-4, Application for Employer Identification Number, to apply for an identification

number for the bank account. This form can be acquired on line at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fss4.pdf>. After receiving the number from IRS, contact the bank of your choice and open the account. It is suggested that checks require two signatures for the protection of all involved, and that the congregation be consulted on all major expenditures. You must also be prepared to provide contribution receipts to your members for tax purposes, and have some form of organized system to record and report income and expenses of the church, together with appropriate receipts, etc.

3. Does a church have to file with the Internal Revenue Service in order to be exempt from federal income taxation?

No, churches and conventions or associations of churches are not required to apply for recognition of tax-exempt status provided they meet the requirements of IRS Code Section 501 (c)(3). However, there are reasons why a church might seek formal recognition of tax exempt status, but that is not covered here. The term “church” is not specifically defined in the Internal Revenue Code. However, certain characteristics are generally attributed to churches, and these characteristics, together with other facts and circumstances, are generally used to determine whether an organization constitutes a church for federal tax purposes. Those characteristics which the IRS looks for specifically are: 1) a body of believers who assemble regularly to worship, 2) the provision for religious education of the young; 3) the conduct of public worship services; 4) an established place of worship; and 5) a recognized creed and the dissemination of a formal doctrinal code. Normally if a church is exempt from federal income tax they are also exempt from state

income tax, but a quick check with state income tax officials would be advisable if your state has a state income tax.

4. Are any other forms of organization available, other than a single, independent church?

Yes, there is a “group exemption process” and a convention or association of churches. These require special treatment.

5. Are there any restrictions that apply if a church is to remain exempt under IRS Code Section 501 (c)(3)?

Yes, all churches must be engaged in activities that exclusively further public purposes, rather than private interests. The church must not be operated for the benefit of any individual(s). None of the income may inure to the benefit of any of its members, except in obvious recognized acts of charity, such as helping poorer distressed members or paying reasonable compensation to bona fide employees for services actually rendered. In addition, no church may engage in any activity of which a “substantial” part is attempting to influence legislation, or be involved in prohibited acts of political activity, such as contributing to a political campaign. In general these types of activities should never be a problem!

6. Does a church have to file an annual income tax return with IRS?

No, exempt churches are not required to file federal income tax returns or the usual information return filed by other tax-exempt entities, Form 990. There are other reporting requirements that may be involved, depending upon the activities of the church, such as fundraising or hiring of employees. [FN](#)

Helping Children Grieve

Several years ago I performed a funeral for a woman whom I did not know well. Her adult children were present. They no longer attended services with their mother's congregation, so the congregation had not seen them in a long time.

After the service, members from the congregation and other family members gathered around those who had lost their mother to comfort them and pay respects. As I observed this scene, I saw off in a corner of the sanctuary a 12 year old boy sitting alone in the last pew. I recognized him as the grandson of the woman who had died. I knew that he lived with his grandmother rather than his parents, though I didn't know why. He looked devastated.

Adults hate to see children suffering. It creates incredible anxiety within us, especially when there isn't anything we can do to reduce or eliminate their suffering. The first thing any adult must do if they are to help children grieve the loss of loved ones is to put taking care of the child ahead of taking care of self. If we want to help them we have to do it in spite of our own feelings.

I walked over and sat down beside this little boy, who recognized me as the officiating minister, but who didn't know me. I sat there beside him for a while before I spoke. What could I say that would be helpful? A number of possibilities came to mind.

Should I say, "It will be alright?" I wanted to. Seeing him suffer compelled me to fix his problem. I wanted to make him happy again. Of course those were my desires; and if I said, "It will be alright," that would be me taking care of myself, rather than taking care of him. After all, he lost his grandmother, whom he lived with

and loved. How is that alright? Paul said death is an enemy. Her death has left a jagged, raw hole in his heart.

No, it is not alright. Further, if I tell him it is alright, he might think that something is wrong with him. He certainly doesn't feel alright. How is he to make sense of the adults telling him it is? He will feel more alienated and alone.

"You'll get over it," was another possibility. If we say that, he might wonder if getting over it means he has to leave Grandmother behind. That might make him feel like he would have to stop loving her. Job's term, "miserable comforters," came to mind.

How about, "Don't feel bad. You'll see her again." That's the truth. But that offering only points to how much he is missing her *right now*.

All the things I could think of were my own efforts to make us both feel better. Saying them would have made me feel better, but I doubt they would have comforted this grieving child.

We try to fix it, but we can't. Death is too strong an enemy. Is there anything we can do, then, as adults to help children grieve?

As I sat beside him I said, "It's really hard." He looked at me and nodded as a tear coursed down his cheek. I put my arm around him as he experienced the relief of tears.

When children are grieving the most helpful thing is to be understood. To listen when they are ready to talk, to reflect their feelings to them, helps them know that some one is with them in their suffering, and that is comforting. In fact that is the core of what humans can do to

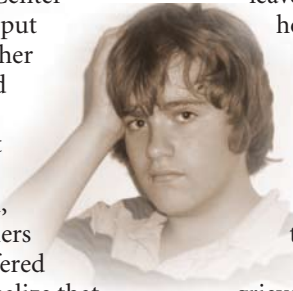


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help others. Paul said Christians should “weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.” There isn’t any fixing in weeping and rejoicing.


Once we understand that being fully present is comforting, what else helps children grieve their losses?

At the Children’s Grief Center of New Mexico, we would put children in groups with other children who have suffered the same kind of loss. I remember one teen boy, at the end of his time at the center, on a feedback form, said, “Having fun with others my own age who have suffered the same loss helped me realize that life could go on.” Only those who have suffered the same thing really know what it is like. That sense of knowing helps children bond and learn from each other. If you have a child who has suffered the loss of a loved one, grief groups help a lot. Playing in such groups is incredibly helpful because children resolve hurtful emotions through play.



Two other modalities we used at the center were arts and crafts. Since children rely more on emotions than on cognition, emotional processing is more helpful than talking. Drawing a picture of the deceased, or visiting the cemetery with something they made to

leave behind, photographs put in an honored album—all things done to memorialize and hold on to the loved one—are helpful in moving on. We don’t “get over” the death of a loved one, we put it in perspective and move along, while holding on to it.

One final thought: No one grieves in the same way or at the same rate. While it is true that some people get stuck in grief, it is not wise to push a grieving child. Instead, we can do all the things we’ve talked about in this article and do some additional research. A good place to start would be the About Parenting website at <http://childparenting.about.com/cs/emotionalhealth/a/childgrief.htm>. 

...Camp Outreach Continued from page 20

Camp Outreach Indiana 2007

Tuesday - Sunday

- July 3 Arrive in time for dinner
Bible study
- July 4 Prep Emily’s house
Barbeque
Fireworks
- July 5 Make more repairs
Bible study/small group
Cool off at Splash Island!
- July 6 Finish repairs
Bible study/small group
- July 7 Services/Potluck/Celebrate
- July 8 Return home

Camp Outreach California 2007

Sunday - Sunday

- July 22 Arrive in time for dinner
Bible study
- July 23 Paint, fix up, and repair homes
-thru- for local Olivehurst widows
- July 27 Finish repairs
Bible study/small group
- July 28 Services/potluck/celebrate
- July 29 Return home

For application contact Jennifer Swenson at Common Ground: Jswenson@7words.com or call 1-800-295-9681 or 317-707-5029.



Camp Outreach is an opportunity to get together with other young adults, teens, and families with a purpose in mind—to help out others who really need it. Ask anyone who has been part of one of the Camp Outreach projects, and they'll tell you it's hot; it's hard work; and it might just be the most fun you've ever had!

The Indiana Camp Outreach. Sponsored by Common Ground Christian Ministries, this camp will once again be held in Plainfield, Indiana. This year it's over the **Fourth of July** holiday. You'll spend your days working hard at making repairs on widows' homes. You'll eat well and make the kind of friendships that can only be forged by actually **DOING** service to widows with others. Evenings will include Bible Studies, swimming—and what's the Fourth without **FIREWORKS?!!**

California Camp Outreach. Church of God, A Sabbath Fellowship, in Olivehurst, California, will also co-host a full week Camp Outreach in conjunction with Common Ground **July 22- 29**. Besides repairing homes for those in need, each evening will include Bible Study, small groups and relaxing activities such as swimming and singing around a campfire.

You don't need to have special skills to participate, but if you're good at carpentry or painting, we'll utilize your skills.

Schedules on page 19

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