

November 2017

Dear Brethren:

How blessed we are to have observed another Feast of Tabernacles. While it is true that our attendance is required at one of the locations where God places His name, the sacrifice and effort you made to attend was not done grudgingly. You did so with purpose and enthusiasm, even in the midst of many obstacles. Why? The Feast of Tabernacles represents the Millennium, a time when Jesus Christ will reign supreme and restore all things. The influence of Satan and his society will not be present. The Feast of Tabernacles is a special time when we are removed from our daily lives and can enjoy a reprieve from the negative influences that constantly surround us. We can enjoy wholesome fellowship, learn more of God's way of life, increase our spiritual understanding, and recharge our spiritual batteries so that we have the energy needed to stay close to God once we return home.

God has called you and given you something more valuable and special than anything else in this world. You understand something that cannot be understood by your natural mind: spiritual truth. You are in the process of conversion, or changing your natural mind to God's spiritual mind. You are working to add the character of God into your thinking and actions. And while you are putting forth this effort, your mind fights against you.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

Enmity is defined as a feeling or condition of hostility, hatred, ill will, animosity, or antagonism. These are strong emotions and reflect how our minds, by design, are in complete opposition to God's mind. We must learn to control our minds and not be controlled by them.

In addition to that, society works against our efforts. We must remember that it is designed to hurt us spiritually by derailing our efforts of personal overcoming. Satan is actively working to destroy us and to prevent us from inheriting eternal life. Now that the Feast is over, we must not allow our minds, Satan, or society to cause us to lose our spiritual focus. We need to resist those negative influences and continue our conversion process with a proper mental orientation. We must have the vision to endure to the end. Only then will we have the potential to inherit eternal life and be added to the God Family.

## Our Calling

By a divine miracle, God opened your mind and allowed you to understand and believe the Truth. How special is that to you? How frequently do you thank God for your calling?

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: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14).

God has not only called you, but has chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit. He sanctifies, or sets you apart, by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the supernatural power of God working on your mind, and it is helpful if we remember how this is accomplished. It can reveal the Truth to you, allow you to understand the Truth, write the Truth in your mind and heart, help you keep the Truth, help you develop the character of God, give you a spiritual orientation, and importantly, help you to *love* the Truth.

Why is it important to remind ourselves of these things? We are entering the dark days of winter. The next Holy Day will not be for another four months. Our daily obligations are upon us, and it is easy to settle back into our normal, pre-Feast routines. Now outside of the protected and uplifting Feast environment, we resume our daily lives.

We may think of the things required in our conversion. We attend Sabbath services and grow closer to God through Bible study, fasting and prayer. But, a significant danger we face is settling into a routine as we work hard to keep pace with our physical obligations of work, family and school. We may begin to think less on our spiritual minds in order to focus on other obligations. We continue with a physical and spiritual routine of listening to sermons, Bible studies and reading monthly letters and articles, but our constant evaluation of mind can become less frequent. We should not allow that evaluation to diminish, only to be renewed in earnest right before Passover when we are commanded to examine ourselves. Do you have a habit of daily self-evaluation? If that habit has not been created, then the days immediately after the Feast are a perfect time to do so. Just because we are called and understand the Truth does not mean we automatically and consistently think like God. We need to learn to think like God. Without daily reflection, we risk reverting to our natural thinking.

Remember, when Jesus Christ renders His judgement on whether or not we, individually, have qualified for His Kingdom and eternal life, a major determinant will be

whether or not we have sufficiently added and lived by the traits of the Holy Spirit. That begins in our minds. If we are not paying attention, our natural minds, society and Satan will distract us and cause us to lose focus.

## **Our Conversion**

Our conversion is about change and choice. First, we must change. Why? Because our primary goal and reason for existence is to become God. He is offering us the opportunity to be added to His Family and to rule with Him as Kings and Priests for eternity. But, God is spirit and eternal. Man is flesh and subject to death. Therefore, we must change in a certain way to be added into the God Family. Mr. Armstrong succinctly stated that this change starts in the mind. Our goal, then, is to change our minds to the righteous character of God.

What is our natural state of mind?

And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man (Mark 7:20–23).

How does that compare to the nature of God? Church of God, The Eternal's fundamentals of belief states: "We believe in ONE GOD, eternally existing in the heavens, who is a Spirit, a personal Being of supreme intelligence, knowledge, love, justice, power, and authority, the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, and the source of life." And, the Holy Spirit represents God's character.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law (Galatians 5:22–23).

If we want to change to God's character, we need to evaluate if we are acting and thinking in ways that reflect the traits of the Holy Spirit. How often do you say or think: "I want to become God, so what can I do today that will help make that happen?" All of us should do that, but with a proper orientation of mind. We should ask ourselves each day how, or if, our minds are changing to the character of God, for that is self-evaluation.

Secondly, conversion is about choice. We made a choice to accept our calling, to be baptized and to commit to this way of life. We made a conscious decision to begin our conversion process. We constantly make choices like attending the Feast of Tabernacles, weekly Sabbath services, and obeying physical requirements such as tithing and wearing proper attire for church services. In addition to that, we need to make specific mental choices every day. We need to choose to change our minds and to think like God's mind. Our minds do not change automatically after we are called. We need to make the effort to change them.

Joy and peace are fruits of the Holy Spirit, and we are commanded to have both. Are you experiencing joy and peace in your life, even during trials and difficulties? Or, are you making mental choices that cause you to be irritable and to frequently complain? When you see a brother or sister in the faith doing something wrong, or not according to your perceived best choice of action, do you immediately criticize? Are you irritated that they are not doing what you think they should do? Or, do you look on them in compassion and love? When you do not get your way, or others act inappropriately toward you, do you react emotionally? Or, do you catch your hurt feelings and ask God to help you control your thoughts? Do you watch political news programs and get agitated because the politicians on your side are not making things better? Or, do you acknowledge that all is happening according to God's plan and that nothing will be fixed until Jesus Christ returns? When you are late for an appointment and get stuck behind a slow driver or stopped at each red light, how angry do you get? Are you able to control and limit your annoyance and frustration?

These are small, daily situations. The accumulation of small, daily choices can have a large impact on your overall state of mind. Are you aware of your reactions through the day? Are you constantly working to control your immediate, emotional reactions? If you cannot control your mind in these simple situations, how will you be able to control your mind in difficult situations? How will you be able to manifest longsuffering, meekness or temperance?

And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him (Genesis 4:6–7).

A good paraphrase of verse 7 is: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be its desire, but you must gain the mastery over it." A problem with Cain was that he wanted to do what *he*

thought was right. He wanted to follow his ways, not God's ways. He wanted to live according to his natural mind and without overcoming.

God gave us each a carnal mind with the intent that we should master it and bring it into subjection. We are not to be ruled by our natural minds. That is why we need to make mental choices daily. We need to constantly choose to control our minds and emotions.

### **Maintaining the Proper Direction and Mental Orientation**

Just because we are working on our conversion does not mean we will automatically keep a proper mental orientation. Nor does it mean we will not be susceptible to change again, but this time in the wrong direction.

This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt (Acts 7:38–39).

The Israelites were taught God's Law. They knew it, but chose in their hearts to go back into Egypt. They chose to return and to live according to their carnal minds.

The Apostle Peter gave a similar admonition:

For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:21–22).

Peter is talking about those that were called and had begun their conversion process. They were making choices to live according to God's commandments and to overcome. But they turned and went back to their old ways. They went back to their old ways of being dominated by their carnal minds and doing that which was right in their own eyes.

Some may have completely abandoned God's way of life and rejected the Truth. They may have abandoned religion altogether or simply reverted to pagan practices.

Unfortunately, we have seen some of our beloved brethren do the same thing. They have abandoned the Truth altogether, or have looked for other groups that contain a mixture of Truth and error. Either option means they are going in a direction that seems right to their carnal minds.

If we read more than one example of people turning to former ways after they have been called, we should keep in mind that this is a real danger to any of us. God is telling us that because of the pull of our minds or influences of Satan and society, we are susceptible to turning away from the Truth. That is why we are told to endure to the end. It is not enough to know the Truth and currently to be working on overcoming. We need to remain faithful unto the end. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

These admonitions mean more to us than simply departing from the Faith. There is more danger to us than just that. We must also be mindful not to drift spiritually while keeping certain physical requirements, and assume we are overcoming. How would that happen? If someone is not changing the revealed doctrines, how can spiritual drifting take place? Prime examples are when we water down the doctrines, or become lax in our observance of the revealed requirements.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept (Matthew 25:1-5).

In this parable all ten virgins slept. This is telling us that even if we are called, baptized and working on our conversion, we have a proclivity to sleep spiritually. How might that apply in our lives? If we are energized after the Feast, feeling strong spiritually and continuing with frequent Bible study, is it possible for that to change? Have you ever been in a specific routine of Bible study during the week, only to then be consumed with other physical demands and requirements? Maybe the health of a family member or relative requires more of your time? Maybe longer hours at work are needed to help generate extra income? Maybe an unconverted spouse is asking you to attend more social activities? Without noticing it, all of a sudden your frequent Bible studies become less frequent. Maybe without noticing it you now are only listening to a sermon on the Sabbath and nothing during the week. Do you feel you just do not have enough time for daily Bible study, so you do nothing and try to catch up on the Sabbath?

The more you reduce the amount of Bible study and prayer, the more likely you are to drift, or to sleep, spiritually. You may continue to follow a physical routine out of habit. But, the less that God's words and instructions are reinforcing the proper ways of thinking and acting, the more your natural mind, Satan, or society will influence your thoughts and actions in the wrong way.

## **Society and Satan**

Society did not happen by accident. It is based on a system that is anti-God and designed to rebel against God. The danger to us is that we may remain a part of it and unknowingly accept a way of thinking that is in rebellion to God. The way the entire world lives and thinks is Babylonianism, which Jesus Christ will destroy completely. It has deceived the world and affects how we think, act, and interact with each other. It has a power over us because the concepts of Babylon are designed to appeal to our natural minds.

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues (Revelation 18:4).

We are told to come out of Babylon. Not just to avoid it, or to be aware of it, but to come out of it. To come out implies we are in it, partaking of it in some way, now! God is telling us to stop. It is bad for us. Therefore, we need to understand how we are involved with it.

Just because you are called, and working on following the revealed Truth, does not mean you do not want to be part of Babylon. If you retain parts of this world, or listen to your own mind, you are in Babylon. You can want to follow the doctrines and work on personal overcoming, and still like Babylon. You may still like this world and your natural mind. That is a real danger we face and something we must recognize and admit. If we admit it, we can work to overcome the pulls and influences of it. If we admit it, we may see we have become complacent in partially living God's ways and partially the ways of the world. That is trying to have both, and something we are not to do.

Do any of these things apply to you? You may say, "I know the Truth; I attend Sabbath services; I make time for Bible study, but":

1. "I still want to eat bad food—or good food just in the wrong proportions and quantities. I know God considers it harmful to my body, but I am

tempted because it is tasty." When your mind urges you to eat things that are not food, or the wrong quantity of good food, recall 1 Corinthians 3:16 to help you resist: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Strengthen your resolve and do not damage the vessel that contains the Holy Spirit.

2. "I still want to listen to satanically-inspired music. No, I don't want to listen to that bad music, just the good music." Is the music you listen to inspiring and uplifting? Are the lyrics godly in nature, or subjects that God calls abomination? Whether it is rock, heavy metal, country, pop or new age music, we need to be very discriminating. We need to be careful with all forms of entertainment that we allow into our minds, including T.V. and movies. These things are subtle, and may not seem significant, but *do* influence our minds and ways of thinking.
3. "I am frequently angry, criticize people and complain about things." These are all traits of the carnal mind we read about in Galatians chapter 5. These are the characteristics of man. We are to remove them and add the character of God. Reflect on your thoughts, words, and reactions to people during the day. Did you respond emotionally with traits of your mind? Or, with a controlled mind and traits of the Holy Spirit?

Satan is diligent. He is totally committed in his pursuit to keep you from inheriting eternal life. The primary ways in which he does this are subtle. He will try to make you sleep spiritually by distractions that pull you away from Bible study, prayer, and proper thinking. He will try to influence your mind, directly or through forms of entertainment, to get you to assume automatically your emotions and thoughts are proper. He will try to cause you to have contempt for others, and not to love as Jesus commands. He is enraged that you are holding on to the Truth and will try anything to separate you from God. But, with the help of God and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit you can resist him. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

We are told to resist because we are constantly under attack. Satan and his demons are relentlessly trying to influence us by trickery and subtlety. A simple thought, a little change in emotion. Do you know the source? Being called does not mean we are not subject to influence. Being called means we are a primary target of negative influence. To resist, we need to be awake spiritually. Know this, Satan is committed to destroying you. Are you committed to staying close to God and using the power of the Holy Spirit in personal overcoming?

## The Winter Months

In the months after the Feast we need to stay focused and remain close to God and the brethren. The following will aid us in that endeavor:

A. Keep studying God's word, and fasting, on a regular basis. If you never seem to have enough time, look and pray for ways to change your day and to find the time. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). Put God first, and ask, He will help you find the time.

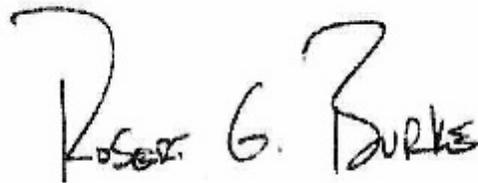
B. Deepen your personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ through daily study and prayer. Ask God to help you develop a greater personal relationship with Him. Does He seem far away? Is He real to you in your daily life? "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). We need physical food. We need spiritual food daily, too.

C. Make the effort to attend church as often as you can, and truly fellowship with God's people. Begin to develop or strengthen relationships. Ask yourself an honest question: "Are the brethren I meet with strangers to me, or are we developing a meaningful relationships?" "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34–35).

D. As much as possible, stay in contact with God's scattered people and the ones who cannot convoke on a regular basis. Your communication may be the source of strength they need.

God is a good God. He has given us an opportunity to inherit eternal life. Let us use these winter months to strengthen our resolve and to grow closer to Him.

With much love and respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert G. Burke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

Robert G. Burke