

April 2019

Greetings Brethren:

How blessed we are to be approaching another spring Holy Day season. Not only will we begin another annual cycle of observing God's Holy Days, but we are reminded of His Master Plan of salvation and our requirements for salvation. It is a reminder because we have been taught the Truth. The same revealed Truth proclaimed by Jesus Christ has been taught to us by an end-time servant. It is the Faith once delivered. Or, the Faith that was delivered once through an end-time servant by revelation, and from then on to be held onto without change! We know that Jesus Christ came to preach the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. We know that to those who overcome, an eternal crown of righteousness will be given.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne (Revelation 3:21).

We repeatedly hear that a primary job we have is to overcome the self. But just what do we mean by overcoming? And remember, there are two functional areas of overcoming, or personal mastery. First, mastery in our own lives by our actions, speech and thoughts. Second, mastery in our relationships with one another by our interactions and conversations with others. God created us with a nature that is evil and anti-God. And, if by nature we are anti-God, we must change in a certain way to become God. Not a lesser God or a mini-God. But God as God is. There will be authority and structure in the Kingdom, but all members of that Family will be fully God.

The God Family will be perfect, holy and righteous. The characteristics of flesh will not exist.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19–21).

For our pre-Passover examination, one of our tasks is to evaluate these characteristics and see how we have been exhibiting them. What spiritual adultery did we commit by desiring things that are not part of God's character and Way of Life, because this is in

opposition to the will of God? What form of hatred did we show when we looked down on, thought less of, or unjustly criticized a brother or sister in the Faith? What drunkenness and reveling did we partake in when we either consumed an excess of alcohol, or failed to take seriously the nature of our call and our job to overcome self? Have we been drunk like the people of the world? Has our focus been misdirected?

With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication (Revelation 17:2).

The people of the earth are drunk, meaning they are taking pleasure in and giving into their carnal hopes, purposes, and achievements. They are drunk with the wine, the concepts and philosophies, of her (Babylon's) fornication, meaning the illegitimate concepts and philosophies of the world. They are illegitimate because these concepts and philosophies are anti-God. Therefore, the people of the world are giving into, and enjoying, the concepts, philosophies and activities of the world. Are we giving into, and enjoying, the concepts, philosophies and activities of the world in a way that is improper? Have we still not discarded all association with improper worldly holidays? A subtle acknowledgment on Mother's Day instead of a card? A silent "hooray" at midnight when man's new year is celebrated on January 1st? Have we remained trapped in the snares of Hollywood with its content that is abomination to God? With music lyrics that denigrate women and glorify adultery? With TV shows with humor that mocks true godly principles of honesty and chastity? Have we allowed the pursuit of physical things—or daydreaming about the acquisition of these things—to become a priority in our thinking? If not, looking deeper, are they simply more enjoyable to think about than learning God's Truth? Have we simply resorted to living the Truth physically, but in heart and mind have fallen asleep spiritually by not making effort to control our minds and emotions? If so, have we not succumbed to the same thing? Has our focus been misdirected? Where is our true focus and what is it that we really love?

Two Ways

The Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures our conversion process. It is a period of seven days when we focus upon removing sin from our lives, as represented by leavening, and add righteousness into our lives, as represented by unleavened bread—the Truth.

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and

wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

We need to make a choice. We need to decide which bread we really love. Deep down, at the core of our hearts, what is it we really love? Our way, or God's Way? The reason for asking this question is to remind us that it is only one or the other. Desiring a combination of both is not acceptable, but that is what our carnal minds tend to do.

No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Luke 16:13).

Before we say to ourselves the answer is completely God's Way, take time to continue more reflection upon self. The audience of this letter is those who have been called, and by baptism, have accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior. A commitment to His Way of Life has been made. An appreciation, liking or even love for the Truth may be present. We may be exerting much effort and sacrifice to abide by the faith once delivered. That is not in question. But, the deception, brethren, is that even still the subtle influence of the concept of "both" may reside in hearts and minds. Both ways exist—our ways and God's ways. What we can do during the Feast of Unleavened Bread is to recognize this in ourselves and begin to root out undiscovered leaven. We can find the activities, concepts or attitudes that are part of our way and that to date we have not been ready to give up.

Why would we not be ready to give up these things? The answer may be that we still value, or love, those things more than God's ways. We remind ourselves of the things of God we abide by, and blind ourselves to the things that we know to give up but do not want to. For example, you faithfully attend Sabbath services but tend to cut the Sabbath short for social events. Before sunset, you get yourself ready and then drive to your destination so that you arrive right at sunset. You feel good because you observed Sabbath, but were the last minutes of it kept holy? Was the priority on the Sabbath for twenty-four hours, or making sure you did not miss your social time? Was the result of cutting Sabbath short having it both ways? Or, you are always kind and considerate to the brethren, but frequently get agitated and snap at a rude cashier at the store, a co-worker, a neighbor or a family member. In fact, you do not even pay much attention to your responses outside of church. Are we not supposed to have the controlled, settled mind of Jesus Christ at all times and in all circumstances? The most difficult things to give up, often, are not the physical things of this world, but the concepts, attitudes and thoughts that comprise our carnal minds. For everything that you have already given up and discarded, well done. Now it is time to move on to the rest.

What Is Real Love Toward God?

Will you move on to the rest if you still love, or want, those carnal things? If you love God more, you may, if those other things decrease over time. But if you only love parts of God more, and do not reduce those other things, then you might not. Foundationally then, what is it to love God? If a miracle has been performed in you and you now understand and know spiritual Truth, what is it to love God? This is what it is *not*: It is not just following the physical rules of the faith once delivered, although these things are absolutely required. Examples of these would be the acts of attending Sabbath services, tithing, avoiding foods prohibited and stated as unclean or unhealthy, and spending time in Bible study. These all are absolutely required for us to do. But, simply doing these things does not mean the needed change of mind is occurring. We can do these things but still value things of our carnal minds more.

Any of us can attend a Sabbath service and listen to a sermon, but that does not mean we will deem it as holy time and that we are conscious of the fact that we are in God's presence. In mind we may still focus on *our* things. Any of us can tithe by sending money to an organization, but that does not mean we recognize and value it as the means by which God is sustaining His work on Earth. Any of us can avoid eating certain foods because it is the rule, but that does not mean we do it because we value the physical body and acknowledge that maintaining health is a glory to God. Any of us can engage in Bible study, but that does not mean we will apply the teachings to our actions and thoughts. All we may have done is busy work.

We may value many of these things, but still value other things more. Our allegiance is divided. Why, then, can we do these things and not completely love God? It is because to some degree we still desire both ways—our ways and God's ways. We have not totally committed to Him.

Jesus Christ confirmed that we are to fear God, love Him, and abide by the Commandments, and to do so with total commitment from the heart.

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
(Mark 12:30).

A requirement for overcoming is not simply to follow the rules, or doctrines, by physical observance only. For example, attending the Feast of Tabernacles. Is physically being present at a designated place the only thing God requires, regardless of our attitudes or desires? Or, is there also a mental component to proper observance? Following the rules

physically is required, but it must be done with a specific attitude and desire. Following the rules by habit or routine *only* does not necessarily develop character. Following the rules should provide us guidance in how we must think and act so that we are thinking and acting like Jesus Christ. We must want to follow the Commandments and change the self. We must want to change the self because we must want to develop righteous character. It is by developing righteous character that God may deem us worthy to inherit eternal life. If we do not want godly character now, why would we want it when we are God? Just being all powerful does not mean we will automatically want righteous character. The desire to be holy and righteous as God is does not begin after we are changed from mortal to immortal. The desire and change in mind need to start now. Therefore, we must honestly ask ourselves if we truly want to change our character. Not just do we want eternal life. Not just do we follow the rules to avoid penalties. Not just do we partially want righteous character, and partially want to keep our carnal minds. But, do we want to be like God, completely? If the desire is not there, we can ask God to help us have the desire to properly change. We were made by nature not to want to change. But through the miracle wrought in us, we can have that desire.

Children are required to go to school. They will be made to follow the rules, learn a planned curriculum, and take tests. Some of those children will follow the rules but dislike the schoolwork. When recess comes, they will be excited to run free and have the shackles of school loosened for a while. But soon enough, recess will end, and they will be back to the constraints of the classroom. They will do what is required for years, but not enjoy it or really want to do it. They will follow the rules physically, but their hearts and desires are not devoted to it. It is tolerable because they have their recess breaks to provide enjoyment, knowing someday school will be over.

We are, in a sense, in school spiritually. We are being taught a planned curriculum—the faith once delivered. We take tests by applying the lessons we have been taught into our daily lives. Some tests we pass, others we fail. Regardless, we are working toward graduation, or inheritance of the Kingdom. If our hearts are like the children who do not want to be in school, we too will be excited for recess and make sure we do not miss it. Our recess can be categorized as those things that are deemed as our way, not God's Way. We can tolerate the rules of the classroom—that is, following the doctrines—because we know a break will be coming.

Our breaks are wanting to do or think things that are not part of God's Way or character. We do them because we still desire some of our way. The question is whether we are willing to give it all up and pursue the spiritual mind. Can any of these statements apply to you? I'll be nice to brethren at services and put on a smile, but once I am home I can relax and have a bad attitude about life and complain, because that's just what I do (variance). I'll

be kind to my brothers and sisters in the Faith, but find ways to help such that I am seen by others to be doing good works (idolatry). I'll tell someone I am not offended, but secretly hold a grudge (hatred). I'll be faithful and follow the doctrines, but in my heart know that I desire to vote in political elections, to eat bad food, or resent that I can't take advantage of the best shopping sales because they are on Sabbath. I wish I could be part of the world's way of life, at least sometimes (adultery). I resent that my standard of living is lower than what it would be if I didn't tithe, and it prevents me from having things I want (lust). I really don't like having to control my thoughts and emotions all the time. I wish I could just relax sometimes (uncleanness).

If any of us tolerate living this Way of Life because we get satisfaction from these kinds of breaks, then we are simply trying to have both ways. We may value God's Way but do not want to commit totally. We are not loving God with all our hearts and all our minds. How can we tell the difference? How can we gain insight into whether we are just struggling with overcoming a weakness, or deep down do not want to change one of our carnal traits? We want to hold onto parts of self. We have been called, baptized and allowed to understand spiritual Truth. We know it and have an appreciation for it. But, are we just following the rules because we know they are right, or are we desiring to follow the rules to effect real change in mind?

We know we are not to hate, to be envious, to be miserable, to be argumentative, to be selfish, to be uncaring, to mentally hold onto past injustices, and a host of other things. Apply this contrast to any concept, attitude, or the things we do when we recognize them in ourselves: "I shouldn't, so I'll try not to" versus "I can't stand it when I. . . ." We know we are not to hate. When you recognize any variation of hate in your life, do you try to stop it because you know it is the rule and out of respect you are following the rules? Or, do you detest that aspect of your mind and earnestly want to change it? When you have been emotionally hurt or let down by someone, and catch yourself complaining about it, what do you constantly say? "I know I should let this go, but . . ." and then proceed to complain, week after week, month after month, year after year? Or, do you say, "God, please help me get over my hurt feelings and give me the strength to control this carnal mind?" Do you see the difference? Are you following the rules out of understanding and respect for the rules only, or deep down do you truly want a change of mind? Are you just going through the motions and are not really into it?

Maybe we have not matured enough spiritually to grasp it. Maybe we just have not been able to see that fault yet, but will earnestly want change when we do see it. And maybe it is an indication that we respect the rules, follow them physically, but still do not desire a total change of character. For this Feast of Unleavened Bread, let us all think a little differently. Let us evaluate all the things we do and think. Why are we living this Way of

Life? Are we living it because our minds have been opened to know it to be right, but in reality, we are obedient just because we do not want the punishment for disobedience? Or, are we living this Way because we desperately want a change of character and the Way leads us to it? In everything we do, think and say, what is our motive? In your pre-Passover examination, did you take time, reflect, and state specific reasons for why you are living this Way of Life? If you did not, you should. If you did, what were your reasons? Was one of your top three answers to change your character to godly, righteous character?

Resistance or Recesses

What if the things stated above do not apply to you? What if these descriptions do not match the kinds of things you believe? You believe the doctrines and want to follow them. You really do want to develop righteous character. You are making sacrifices because you value the future reward. Are you in the clear? Is there no hidden, leavened bread that you want to hold onto?

How can you be resisting the purging of self, or still holding onto your ways, while at the same time seeing yourself as doing what is required? One way is when we focus on the big things and do not pay attention to the little things. It is the root of these little things that make them important when we evaluate what we really love. Non-compliance with the little things is one way we hold onto our ways. It is us saying we will abide by God's ways, but only up to a certain point. When we reach a certain point, we revert to our ways. The question each of us needs to answer is, where is our limit? That will help us see ourselves as God sees us.

Here are a few simple examples that most of us will encounter virtually every day. They can be used to illustrate the point of limits and provide a formula which you can apply to any circumstance in your life to see where you stand. As you read these examples remember that none of us is perfect. Mistakes will be made. Areas for growth still exist. A mistake does not necessarily mean orientation of mind. What we are evaluating is orientation of mind to discover at what point we admit we want our way *and* God's Way. We want both. It is only when we admit this that we can work to overcome.

Food. Let us assume you believe in healthy dietary principles, put effort into eating good food and are eliminating refined flours, refined sugars and other food stripped of its nutrition. In other words, you believe in eating according to God's ways. Have you been to a restaurant and all they had to complement your meal was white rice or white bread rolls? What did you do, and why? Did you refuse to eat it? Or, did you eat what you know and believe is not good to eat? But it was free. I would be hungry otherwise. There was no other

option so I "did my best." You say it is only a small physical sin, not a spiritual sin too. If eating better is something you are working on and acknowledge weakness exists, that is one thing. But, did you eat the food because deep down you did not think that it really mattered? This one-time, small thing did not really matter. What you are saying is that at some point of sacrifice, at some point of discomfort, you stop putting on the mind of Jesus Christ and desire your way. You acknowledge God's commands for healthy eating and agree. But, to do so ALL the time? Is it not OK to bend the rule sometimes? Was this event really your *food recess* and a break from the efforts and sacrifices of healthy eating? How about if you have access to drinking raw milk and you do not because you have an "issue" with raw milk? Are you obeying with all your heart and all your mind? You know it is good for you, yet you resist. Is this your recess from dietary rules because you are holding onto a small piece of your way? At what point do you reach your limit? No other person knows but you. Acknowledging your limit will put you in a position to grow more.

Self. You acknowledge weaknesses of character and try not to make excuses for mistakes. When corrected, you often take it as good advice and something to be worked on. But if certain people offer correction, you dismiss them or get agitated. Have you asked yourself why? Is this a recognized weakness of flesh? Or, is this a small piece of your way that you are holding on to? Is this your recess from abasing yourself? You have discarded much of yourself already, but to let go of everything? Recall Philippians 2:3: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Are we willing to give up our carnal selves totally? Or, are we trying to hold on to some of it? If the correction is valid, why resist it?

Love. Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and by nature we do not have true, godly love. But now that we have a down payment of the Holy Spirit, we should be exhibiting more love. Year by year we should be growing in the manifestation of love.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you (John 15:12).

It is easier for us to love our friends and family. It is easier for us to demonstrate love when there are no barriers to overcome. But is that the love we are commanded to have? Is it right to be selective in our love because it is easier? No, but that is the natural thing for us to do. What is one way this is demonstrated and easy for us to not be aware of? Cliques at the Feast of Tabernacles, and limiting our service to others.

If we have the mind of Jesus Christ, we will want to love and serve our brothers and sisters in the Faith at the Feast of Tabernacles, and throughout the year. But what if we are shy? What if we are too busy with life? What if we are too disconnected geographically?

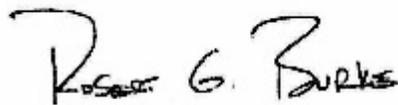
What if we just do not have time? What if we do not know what to say? These are all obstacles and reasons it is harder to stay connected or form new relationships. Is the real reason, however, that the work or effort involved is too much? Do you find yourself ever saying, "I would like to but. . . ." Is it just possible that your recess from the work of loving is to avoid making more effort? The point of this is not to set a standard for what each person should do, nor to suggest that time for our personal obligations and family is not important. The point is for each of us to ask a simple question: have I not made more effort because I reached my personal limit? Can you see how we want God's Way (to love one another) and our way (to hold onto self) simultaneously?

In these examples, it could easily be said that these faults are simply weaknesses. On our conversion journey, these are known areas where more work is needed. And as the Apostle Paul described the battle of mind, it is a constant struggle fraught with successes and failures. But, they may also be indicators of areas where we have reached our limits. We want God's Way, we want to reduce our way, yet we discover that we place limits on how much of ourselves we are willing to give up. Those are the nuggets of leavening we can remove.

Physical observance only is not what God is looking for. Paying attention to the major doctrines *only* is not enough. All things, large and small, matter. It all matters because it reflects desire of the mind and heart. Are we only following the rules out of physical respect, but our hearts are not really dedicated? Are we dedicated in many things, yet resist with other things? During the Feast of Unleavened Bread we are commanded to have no leavening, and to add unleavened bread. Our task this year will be to pay careful attention to ourselves and discover the elements of leavening we are keeping for ourselves.

May this be an insightful, rewarding and uplifting Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Your servant in Christ,

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

Robert G. Burke