

March 2020

Greetings Brethren:

This year is already filled with the uncertainty of how major world events will unfold, weather-related catastrophes, the spread of communicable disease, and the continued promises by elected officials stating that a better way of life is just on the horizon. They claim to have the answers to the current problems and know how to institute the solutions. Regardless of the claims, this world will continue to defy God and as a result, curses remain. There will be a time, however, when everything will be restored. That will only happen with the return of Jesus Christ. Until then, there is required work for us. In just a few short weeks we will observe the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. All of us can easily produce a long list of reasons why we will do so. Jesus Christ provided a simple, concise reason we can understand when He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Simply put, if we love Him, we will follow His commands. And, who among us does not say that we love God?

Nominal Christians do all the time when they say frequently how much they love the Lord. While their intent is good, and sincere, the statement is inaccurate. They do not really love God because they cannot. This is not meant to disparage anyone nor their efforts, because there will be a time when they will have an opportunity to know and to love God. But for now, only those chosen, those who are called of God, AND those who endure their tests and trials until the end, really love God. Given the fact that only a small number presently have an opportunity to truly love God, can you say you are one that does? Not just a love for the concepts of God, eternal life, happiness or joy, but a real love for God? Before a yes answer is given, let us look at a few things we need to know that demonstrate real love toward God. Then, we can have more clarity as to whether we love God as He defines it, or primarily as we define it humanly.

Ancient Israel

The historical nation of Israel provides a wonderful first step into understanding our love for God. The marriage between Israel and the one who became Jesus Christ started with enthusiasm and excitement. The people cheered gleefully and agreed that they would accept the terms of the marriage covenant and be faithful to it. But soon after, the reality of life set in and the people chose a different set of rules by which to live. The basis for these rules was their carnal minds. They were selfish, rebellious and indifferent. Without faith, they demonstrated an inability to live up to the terms of the covenant.

But the marriage was still bound so Jesus Christ was required to die in order to be eligible to marry again. This will take place when He marries His Bride at His Second Coming. This time, though, His Bride needs to make herself ready first. Christ will not again marry a wife who holds dear the inclinations to rebel, grow tired of obedience to the covenant, change in character or just become indifferent to the Truth. Those called now, members in particular of that Body, must make themselves ready through their conversion process.

Will you be faithful until the wedding? Will you complete your tasks of developing righteous character, enduring to the end, and crucifying the self? Jesus Christ willingly gave up His life for you. Are you, in return, willing to give up your life for Him by subjugating the self and mastering your carnal mind? You made that promise to Him at your baptism. Will you keep your word? Or, will you be like ancient Israel and be selfish, rebellious, or indifferent? Will you claim to be faithful to God, all the while adjusting and modifying the requirements to suit your personal desires and preferences?

Recognition and Subjugation of Self

God does a lot to see His chosen ones become successful.

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

Success is defined as the mastery of self and being born into His Family. This is our main purpose in life. But, in order to fulfill this purpose, we each need to be able to accurately recognize ourselves.

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged (Luke 7:41–43).

We do see examples of individuals who have sordid pasts—and who have committed tremendously heinous acts—bitterly repent of their deeds. It seems that because they recognize the depth and scope of their sins, physically and mentally, they are better able to see themselves accurately and therefore are more grateful for God's love and mercy. With their repentance comes a visible change in their lives, physically and in attitude. Often, they

are more humble and grateful for the mercy God has extended to them. These are the ones Christ says love Him the most.

Does this mean that only those with wretched past lives can be in the category of those who love Him the most? Will others that have had a more favorable past, or even current lives, be in a lesser category? Absolutely not! It does, however, depend on one's attitude. People that have led "less sinful" lives, at least in their perspective of themselves, tend to have a harder time recognizing the depth and extent of their sins. If sins are not overt or grand in scale, the natural tendency is to minimize them in comparison to others sins. In doing so, we can create categories of sins and start to think along these lines: "I know I am a sinner. I'm just glad that I am not as bad as that person."

If we think this way, or any variation of it, we are involved in self-deception. The thinking is natural, carnal, and not godly. We are admitting we have sinned, something we need to do, but deceive ourselves if we say we fully acknowledge our sinful self. With that attitude, we are not truly recognizing the self as God sees it. If we did, we would not be putting other people down or ranking ourselves and our spiritual progress against them. Would we really be doing so if we viewed ourselves like the Apostle Paul did when he said, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). If any one of us can accurately recognize the self, then we can be one of those that Christ said loves Him the most. Do you want to be one who loves Christ the most? Or, just one who kind-of loves Christ?

How do we do that? By receipt of the Holy Spirit. By the power and influence of the Holy Spirit each one of us will have the knowledge and ability to change what we are by nature and to develop righteous character. That begins with recognition and subjugation of the self. It is not simply a race to see if you can claim how terrible you are, that you hate yourself, or that you are no good. That can lead to the human trait of negativity and feeling worthless. Recognition of, and hating, the self is not equivalent to feeling worthless. Taken down this path, many have even thought they were not worthy to partake of the Passover and did not do so. What an unfortunate manifestation of carnality!

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Romans 3:10–12).

God knows none are righteous. He created mankind with a nature that is evil and prone to self-destructive ways and thoughts. By a miracle He allows those He calls to see and understand this nature of mind. He wants us to see that and hate those ways. But, as a

loving and merciful Father, He also gave a Way of Life. Coupled with a down payment of the Holy Spirit, the ability is given to master and overcome that natural mind. The Apostle Paul stated how wretched he was when describing his understanding of his carnal nature, and the difficult fight he had in overcoming it. But, realization of the need to subjugate the self did not deter Paul at all.

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

He kept fighting, and remained loyal to the Faith, because he had the ability to comprehend, know, and desire what God has intended for us. We have that too! God has given us the ability to see what His character is like via the traits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. The more accurately we see what we really are by nature, the better we can understand what we have the potential to become. In addition to that, these are the traits we need to be exhibiting right now because we do have a down payment of the Holy Spirit. We need to, and can, demonstrate a degree of love, joy, peace, gentleness and temperance.

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love (John 15:9).

God loves you. So much, in fact, that Jesus Christ was brutalized, tortured and killed so that you would have an opportunity to be added to His Family. He also wants us to continue in His love.

Easy to Love God?

With this knowledge, and a desire to be faithful to God, we may say that we sure do love God and will continue in it. In reality, this is not an easy thing, humanly, to do.

Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God. Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you (Joshua 23:11–13).

Israel was freed from their bondage of slavery and given a Way of Life. We, too, have been freed from the bondage of our carnal minds and given a Way of Life. Israel joyously accepted a relationship with God and began to keep His laws. That mirrors what we have done too, does it not?

However, God knew it would not be easy to hold on to, which is one reason Israel was told to take good heed or risk going back and cleaving to the nations—meaning, be very careful and vigilant to remain faithful and not revert to old practices, customs or beliefs. Those nations typified human carnality. Our admonition, therefore, is to take good heed and be sure that we do not revert to our carnal minds and stop loving God. We will not say that we do not love God, but do our lives indicate otherwise?

Loving God

First, receiving the Word through God's servants is to love God. How easy that is to claim in principle. In practice, we see a very different reality. Israel thought the same thing, but they rejected the prophets God sent. The Jews claimed faithfulness to Moses, all the while rejecting Christ. Their test was how they viewed Christ in their midst, not how they viewed Moses historically. In order to pass that test, faith was required, which they did not have. The Jews were claiming to be holding on to the Faith Once Delivered, the Truth that Moses taught, while rejecting the One presently with them who had given Moses that Truth. Today, many have repeated, or are repeating, that very example.

How do you define the Faith Once Delivered? Spiritual Truth revealed to an end-time servant? Sure, but how many are looking back fifty-plus years and saying, "Oh, but Mr. Armstrong said this, so that is revealed doctrine"? Was Truth revealed to Mr. Armstrong as God's end-time servant? Yes, we believe that to be absolutely true. Was everything that Mr. Armstrong said in the category of revealed doctrine? No. And that forms the basis for this remnant organization and how we define the Faith Once Delivered: those spiritual truths which were revealed to Mr. Armstrong. Those revealed truths we will continue to hold on to and not change. Prophetic speculation and scholarly input are not revealed Truths. From the early days of this remnant organization, Mr. Raymond Cole clarified the distinction between doctrine, prophecy and administration. Prophetic speculation and administration *are not* revealed spiritual Truth. It is imperative to understand the differences.

God's true servants exist today, and wherever they are, they will be preaching His Truth. That was a promise made by Jesus Christ. That Truth, just like Jesus Christ, will be whole and complete. It will not be fractured into pieces with incomplete messages only containing some Truth, forcing the called one to pick and choose from among many. Nor

will any servant have most of it, but lack certain key parts. The necessary message will be total and complete, and His faithful ministers will be proclaiming that message. Rejection of those servants who are preaching His Truth is one way to demonstrate a lack of love toward God.

"I'm not rejecting God, I just think this group, or that minister, has a certain thing wrong and therefore I need to fellowship with multiple organizations, or decide who has the most fruits." That is exactly the error of Israel and why God called her unfaithful. Israel claimed to be holding on to the past teachings, while rejecting the current. They demonstrated a lack of love toward God because they did not remain faithful. The same can apply to any of us if we do the same and reject the current when those revealed Truths are continuing to be taught.

Second, loving God requires learning to evaluate our thoughts. How else will we be able to develop righteous character if we are not able to evaluate our minds? This takes effort because our minds are designed to operate in a way that is opposite to God's mind.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord (Isaiah 55:8).

Knowing the Truth does not mean your mind automatically thinks like God. It does, however, give you the knowledge between the two minds. From there, the hard work begins.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh (2 Corinthians 10:3).

The Apostle Paul is stating that we are involved in a war, a difficult struggle. That struggle, though, is primarily of the mind and spiritual in nature. Every day, every moment is a time to evaluate what is being conceived in mind as thoughts. And, it is these thoughts that result in incorrect speech.

If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth (Proverbs 30:32).

Wrong thoughts come to mind, automatically, and then end up as speech. What are we to do? We should do what the Apostle Paul told the Philippians when he admonished them to let the mind of Jesus Christ be in them. It was an action that needed to take place. How was this to be accomplished? First, by recognizing the wrong thoughts when they come to mind. If you are using the power of the Holy Spirit, and asking God to help you, the ability will be there. Second, we all must put forth the effort to fight the evil thoughts. We

must make the conscious decision to fight, or put down, our natural minds. By the inspiration of God, the miracle that has been given to you, the knowledge between the two can be known. The choice to act is yours. That choice, with action, is the development of righteous character. Third, be dedicated and not grow complacent or weary in well doing. It takes constant, daily effort to control the mind. If any of us are not doing these things, then we are not manifesting the proper love toward God.

Lastly, it is by our love for the brethren that we demonstrate our love for God. Some of the ways we can evaluate our love for the brethren is by our thoughts about them, and words to them. Our battle is constant because it is easy, and natural, to have thoughts and words that God says are wrong. Following are a few examples of areas in which we can demonstrate incorrect thoughts and speech—meaning a lack of love to brethren, and therefore to God:

1. Exposing the difficulties and problems of others, as opposed to covering them.
2. Distorting what others have said to create a false impression of them, or yourself.
3. Generating an answer to an issue or problem before all the facts and information are known, which causes a negative viewpoint or attitude.
4. Any form of self-justification that condemns or puts other people down.
5. Any statement or action that causes division.
6. Intolerance for the weaknesses of others.

What are some opposite examples that demonstrate true love to God?

1. Having tolerance, compassion and patience toward others, especially when they are experiencing difficulties or demonstrating a human weakness.
2. Being very careful to be accurate and honest when relaying information, as well as being honest with oneself that no ulterior motive is present to cast someone in a negative light.

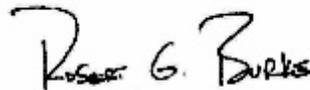
3. Giving someone the benefit of the doubt.
4. Creating peace.

Proof of Our Love Toward God

Many will claim that they love God, but by their daily lives demonstrate a lack of love toward God. Some of the examples in this letter illustrate what we need to do in order to love Him. But what is an ultimate proof of real love toward God? Continuing in that revealed Faith until the end. Without wavering. Without doubting. Without fearing. Trusting in God, and the Plan that He is working out.

Brethren, we all have the ability to do just that. As we approach the Spring Holy Day season, let us be sure to take a look at our lives and honestly assess whether or not we are loving God in ways He describes. Not just emotionally loving Him, but loving Him by our actions and speech.

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" and "B".

Robert G. Burke