

April 2021

Greetings Brethren:

It truly is a blessing to write to you—those who are holding dearly to revealed Truth and continuing to reject the noise of false concepts being espoused in many formats. Over the past year we have seen dramatic changes in the world that have affected our daily lives. How we go to work, school, and even food shopping has changed. Social activities have either been eliminated or significantly reduced due to state-imposed social distancing requirements. Observance of the weekly Sabbath and Holy Days has been impacted due to rental facility occupancy restrictions and mandates. But through it all, God continues to bless His children and provide the means to properly serve Him. That is a blessing we should not take for granted, especially if we think that even more changes will yet occur that will profoundly affect our lives. When they do, will we have confidence that God will continue to provide a way for those truly seeking Him?

Who can truly seek Him? Those in whom God has performed a mighty miracle—a miracle that is not to be discounted, thought lesser of, or relegated to an inconsequential action. An invisible miracle, but greater than visible miracles. Not only has your mind been opened to God's Truth, but with baptism and the laying on of hands by a legitimate minister, you received a down payment of the Holy Spirit. Do you agree that you were the recipient of such a mighty miracle? Do you think it was not as miraculous as the parting of the Red Sea, which provided Israel a way to escape the physical bondage of the Egyptians? If not, ask yourself why. Is it because it is not a visibly impressive miracle? Is it because it is just part of the "process" of being called? Is it because you stopped thinking about it?

Out of the billions of people alive today, you are one of the few who has the Holy Spirit residing in you. Every human being that has lived, is living, and will live in the future will have—at the appointed time—the same opportunity as you to qualify for inheritance of eternal life. But today is your opportunity. What are you doing with it? Are you properly preparing yourself? And, how exactly are you preparing yourself? By your own efforts, by physical obedience only, or through the power of the Holy Spirit? This is important because it is only through the power and influence of the Holy Spirit that you can develop righteous character and have the potential to inherit eternal life.

What Is the Holy Spirit?

Even though we frequently talk and read about the Holy Spirit, let us remind ourselves what it is. God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is the power, mind, and character of God as He works to fulfill His plan in our lives. A down payment of it is in you! Do you see how that is greater than the parting of the Red Sea? Technically speaking, that miracle involved moving physical elements in a way that is not inherently natural to their design. And yes, it was impressive! We are not discounting it, minimizing it, or diminishing the importance of it in God's Master Plan in any way. But, imparting Spirit—God's Spirit—into the physical (you) is in no uncertain terms incredible.

In Church of God, The Eternal's article titled, "What Is the Holy Spirit?," this statement clarifies the point: "The Christian is the habitation of God through the Holy Spirit." Read that again, and let it sink in. Yes, true Christians are ones who have God's Truth revealed to them and are given an opportunity to inherit eternal life through a conversion process. But, it is more than knowledge and opportunity. God resides in true Christians through the Holy Spirit.

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16).

How amazing is that! Do you agree—are you in awe? The All-Powerful, the Eternal God, resides *in you* through His Holy Spirit. In that context, do you see how that was a mighty miracle?

What does this allow you to do? It allows you to change from a carnal way of thinking to a spiritual way of thinking. This is what conversion is all about. And, it is what no other person who does not have the Holy Spirit is able to do.

The Holy Spirit will provide you the ability to know and understand right from wrong. Then, the power of the Holy Spirit will allow you to make the choice to do right. Remember, it will not force you to do anything, or do the work for you. You must make the effort! The effort we make, in summary, is the character-building process. We develop righteous character by recognizing the correct way, choosing to follow the correct way, and then acting upon that understanding and desire. It is a lifelong process.

In a basic sense, the Sabbath and annual Holy Days are examples of this. It seems so obvious to us that we are to observe the weekly Sabbath and annual Holy Days, and how these days depict God's Master Plan of salvation. But, who else on Earth knows and understands these things as you do? Those in the world may call you foolish, ignorant or

misguided, but the Holy Spirit provides the ability to understand these things. This is evidence of a change from a carnal mind to a spiritual mind.

The power of the Holy Spirit also enables us to keep these commitments we know to be right. Being willing to sacrifice family relationships and certain employment opportunities in order to properly observe Sabbaths are two examples of how we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit to do what we acknowledge is right, often in the face of obstacles. But, these are only examples of physical obedience. Our responsibility extends far beyond physical obedience.

Our Responsibility

Every person that has received the gift of the Holy Spirit has a very serious responsibility to use it appropriately. We demonstrate that in two ways: *personal overcoming* and the *manifestation of the fruits of God's Spirit*. If we do not sufficiently achieve these two things, we are denying Christ.

Personal overcoming, why? God wants to add you to His Eternal Family. He wants you to desire His Way of Life and His way of thinking. But, He made you with a mind that desires things that are opposite to Him. Your job, then, is to demonstrate that you want His way more than your way, the way of the carnal mind. You demonstrate this by a lifetime of fighting against and changing your carnal mind. However, if the carnal mind is the state of mind you value more, then the result will be death.

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be (Romans 8:6–7).

Enmity does not simply mean different. It means being actively opposed to or hostile to something. Our minds are actively opposed to God's mind, which means we must actively change our minds with much effort, daily! It is through the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit that we can change our minds and think like Him.

Traits of the Holy Spirit

To determine if we think like God, let us examine traits of the Holy Spirit and carnal mind to see which ones we most often exhibit. Just knowing and accepting the Truth and making efforts of physical adherence to the doctrines does not mean that you want to *think* like God.

Longsuffering: *Longsuffering* is having or showing patience despite troubles, especially those caused by other people. Synonyms for longsuffering include "patient," "tolerant," "uncomplaining." Antonyms include "complaining," "impatient," "protesting." Do the synonyms or antonyms describe you? Which do you think represent the carnal mind?

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy to remind him of his character, which is a reminder of what we should strive for in our lives.

But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience (2 Timothy 3:10).

At the time, Paul was being accused of not being a legitimate servant of God, not ordained to be an apostle, and not having the Truth, but instead preaching perverted doctrines. The worst part was that these accusations were made by many whom he personally regarded and had taught. If you were in his shoes and had those (and many other) accusations leveled against you, would you have the same reaction and attitude as he did?

Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Timothy 2:10).

The Apostle Paul was willing to endure the weaknesses of others if he could support their spiritual growth. These were severe accusations, yet he was willing to serve and to absorb others' faults. How do you think he reacted to someone's personal weaknesses? Someone who believed he preached the Truth? Someone who was striving for personal mastery? Someone who demonstrated personal weaknesses, character flaws, and at times let the carnal mind dominate?

He did so with longsuffering, charity and patience. This was his manner of life, and why he instructed the Corinthian church to do a similar thing:

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

And the LORD passed by before him [Moses], and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth (Exodus 34:6).

What, then, are we to do when a brother or sister in the Faith annoys us, criticizes us, continually demonstrates a personal flaw and weakness, makes a decision we do not agree with, stumbles by questioning the Truth, stumbles through lack of faith and takes an action contrary to our beliefs, or in some other way manifests a weakness? We are to be longsuffering, merciful and exhibit goodness.

This is how God thinks and acts. Remember, He wants us to be like Him and has given us a period of time, our conversion, to strive to become more like Him. Do you want to be like God? Do you want to become God? You need to in order to be in His Kingdom. And once there, these are character traits you will demonstrate forever. Do you want to and are you, right now, preparing yourself to be like that? When you exhibit the traits of longsuffering, mercy and goodness in response to others' weaknesses, you are.

Idolatry: In spiritual terms, *idolatry* is when we put something we desire above God's Way. It does not mean we do not value His Way or strive to adhere to it at times. It can simply mean that we value it less than our way.

And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. . . . 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 18:2, 4).

We are to extract ourselves from Babylon, and not desire the ways of the world. That applies physically to things like the entertainment we consume, the systems of education and business, and many other physical attributes of the world. The foundations and philosophies of these are contrary to God's Way. Important for us also to consider is the way of the world that we so easily desire, but frequently do not recognize. That is our carnal minds at work. When we prefer to live by our minds, our natural thoughts, emotions and reactions, we are preferring the ways of the world.

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5).

The continual evil was not just about crimes and injustices perpetrated against others. It was living according to a carnal mind, and not keeping God and His Ways in mind. If we do not change our minds to be like God's mind, are we not doing the same thing?

Strife: A basic definition is disagreement over fundamental issues. Synonyms for *strife* are "conflict," "disharmony," "friction" and "schism." Fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy and peace—the opposite of the stated synonyms. Which ones do we exhibit? As we think about that, consider it in this context:

Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves (Philippians 2:2–3).

"Can you believe he said that to me?" "Can you believe she didn't do that?" If we think these things to ourselves in the context of understanding a brother's or sister's weakness, and how we may be a support to them, that is one thing. It may be an outward expression, or thought, of godly love if our reaction turns into actions of help and service. But, when we say these or similar statements to others, simply to criticize, what are we really doing? First, we are filling our minds with negative thoughts and feelings about a brother or sister in Christ. Does that represent God's mind or our carnal minds? Are we covering or exposing? We are exposing with negative, carnal emotions. And how easy and often can these thoughts come to mind and be spoken?

Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue (Psalm 52:4).

Then, by talking about it to someone simply to criticize, we may be spreading a negative feeling or perception to another person. Is that showing love, accord and being of one mind? Or, does it promote conflict, disharmony or friction? What should our actions and words be like?

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1–2).

If you truly thought of others, or esteemed them more than yourself, would you not demonstrate compassion instead of criticism? If you held someone in the highest regard and desired their wellbeing more than yours, would you really criticize, or put them down, in that fashion? Do you want others to talk about you in that way? Then why is it ok for you to do so? You do not deserve it, but they do? Why does this apply to our conversion and preparation for the Kingdom? Because the carnal mind desires to care for and protect itself more than anything else, which is why it is enmity to God's mind. Reactions like this are easy, natural, and outwardly demonstrate our carnal minds. And never forget that Satan can capitalize on our negative emotions. He will do it subtly, relentlessly, and make our negative thoughts and emotions seem so right and justified.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

He can devour us when we let negative emotions and thoughts dominate our minds. Recognizing and harnessing our minds to think like God is an example of the daily work we must do in order to change them into spiritual minds.

Revealed Truth does not change. Heresy will not be tolerated. But support of brothers and sisters in the Faith as they struggle against—and work to control—carnal minds is something we all should strive for. We can understand the Truth. We can be obedient physically by observance of Sabbaths, Holy Days, tithing and food laws. But when it comes down to it in our daily lives, what mind do we really want most? If we truly want a spiritual mind, then we will be using the Holy Spirit to aid in our personal mastery and begin to demonstrate more fruits of the Holy Spirit.

How Do You Use the Holy Spirit?

There is no one way to use the Holy Spirit, but these are some things to consider: First, studying and knowing God's revealed Truth is paramount. Second, prayer, fasting and meditation are the building blocks of our relationship with God and can keep us connected to Him. But, as essential as these things are, there is something else that is required. What do you think should be next? As simple as this may sound, it is *thinking* and *acting*. We can know the Truth. We can pray to God. We can meditate about His ways and our lives. But apart from those items, what are we doing that is aiding our conversion? What are we doing that is changing our minds from what they naturally are into spiritual minds? That change is the key to developing righteous character.

We need to continually ask God to show us the way we must think, speak and act. Do you believe He will? How? He showed you the Sabbath, Holy Days and plan of salvation in a way that makes them seem so obvious, did He not? He will do the same here. It is a promise. Then, we need to ask God to help us be receptive to His instruction, because we naturally will resist it or quite easily forget it. After that, we need to listen. The more we train ourselves to listen, the more we will hear and be able to choose the correct way.

Too simple? Go to your backyard or a quiet place in a park, walk around and observe what you hear. Maybe some geese will fly over, or other loud sounds will be recognized. Then just stop, be still, and be quiet. After a few minutes you may be amazed at all the sounds you hear. Birds, insects, wind, leaves rustling and many other things that you could not hear previously. What did you just do? You took time to listen with the intent of hearing.

We have heard for years that we are to measure ourselves against the yardstick. What is the yardstick and how do we measure? The doctrine is the yardstick. Do we measure up by following it? The fruits of the Holy Spirit are also the yardstick. Do we measure up by exhibiting those traits?

This is a reminder of what we have been taught, but measure yourself. Throughout the day, when you are in the middle of your normal routine, thinking about, talking to, and interacting with other people, pause and assess where you are against the yardstick. Are your thoughts, words or actions, representative of longsuffering or of strife? Peace of mind or anger? Love or hatred? This frequent, daily pause and evaluation is part of the work we must do in changing from a carnal mind to a spiritual mind. The more frequently we pause and assess what our minds are thinking, or how they are reacting, the more we can catch ourselves and work to change our thoughts, emotions and actions. The evaluation we are required to make is not just prior to Passover, but all the time! This is how you train your mind to be more like God's mind and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5).

Where Do We Go From Here?

After receiving the Holy Spirit, can we lose it, or stop responding to it, if we are careless? Yes we can, if we fail to use it as a power of influence and guide to change our lives. One way that can happen is when we stop assessing our minds to see if we are thinking like God—we simply follow rules physically, and allow our carnal minds to remain dominant. If we do that, we deceive ourselves by thinking we are doing the work God requires of us.

In the parable of the ten virgins, all were given a lamp, which is representative of the Truth. They all knew the Truth and the requirements given by the Bridegroom. Five did not use the lamp properly. How? They did not replenish the oil, which is representative of the Holy Spirit, and it ran out.

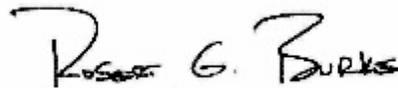
Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out (Matthew 25:1–8).

An important point to glean from this parable is that all ten slumbered and slept. That means all of us can, at times, prioritize our time incorrectly and not evaluate our minds as frequently as we should. But when we catch ourselves, and create the habit of evaluating our minds daily, we will be doing the work God requires and measuring ourselves against the yardstick of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

If we measure ourselves daily, we will be in a better place to effect personal mastery and begin to live by the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Living in the Kingdom equates to living by the fruits of the Holy Spirit. As Mr. Raymond Cole stated in his sermon series titled, *Do We Create Peace or Strife?*: "We are not going to inherit what we don't practice today."

Brethren, God performed a miracle in your minds. You have the knowledge and power to do what He is asking—to develop righteous character and inherit eternal life.

Your brother in Christ,

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