

Maintaining the Ability to Hear

April 2014

Greetings Brethren:

As we in the Northern Hemisphere are in the beginning of the spring season, it is a time of stark contrast to that of the winter. So much of the beauty of spring is found in the return of what has been absent. It is a time of year when we see life springing up and budding out all around us. We hear the birds singing *very early* in the morning, and the other wildlife stirring about. As the days lengthen, we can feel the temperatures warming up, and we open the doors and windows of our homes; we shake out the dust from the rugs and we let the fresh air in. Everywhere we look greenery abounds, from the grass putting forth new shoots to the trees budding forth new leaves. In this area, wildflowers in a variety of yellows and oranges pop up and abound far and wide. The sweet aroma of the citrus blossoms fills the air—the grapefruit, orange, lemon and tangelo trees—coming into bloom, at just the right time. And then the bees are out and about, buzzing around pollinating them perfectly at the right time. In areas where there is snow, it starts to melt and increases the flow of water through creeks and streams, and hibernating animals like woodchucks and bears awaken—at just the appropriate time. Migrating creatures like the humpback whale, ruby-throated hummingbird and the monarch butterfly prepare to begin their incredible journeys. Other birds are building nests, and it seems that everything is scurrying about gathering food that is now coming forth—right on time. A very precise, detailed, complete, brilliantly united and synchronized set of events. It is as if all of creation is *busy, busy, busy* with a feeling of excitement and vibrancy of life in the air.

The awesome Creator God that we worship definitely knew what He was doing in using the above physical circumstances of spring to help us visualize what He is doing through His spiritual plan of salvation for mankind on earth. It should be an exciting time of year for each one of us as well. We are once again rehearsing that plan of life, in which we were called to come out of the depth of a dead winter on the path of destruction to the place we can finally, through a miracle, have the opportunity to spring forth to life. Physically, if spring never came, all life would die. So also for us, if we were to stay on the path of destruction, we would die. But through the incredible wisdom and planning of God Almighty, He has made choice for some to be given that wonderful opportunity to spring forth now.

And as in nature there is much to be done at this time of year, so also with each one of us as we look out at our homes, yards, cars and other possessions. Is not this a time when we see much that needs to be done? For those that desire a garden, much preparation needs to be done—clearing the weeds, tilling the ground, selecting and planting the seed, watering, tending and protecting those little plants, continuing to weed, water and tend, as we look forward to harvesting.

So also spiritually in our path of development, there is much to be done. God begins His plan with our acknowledgment and acceptance of all that Jesus Christ represents, pictured by the keeping of Passover. Next, that spiritual plant cannot do well if the proper preparation is not done. Just as ancient Israel got up and walked out of Egypt on the Night to be Observed, so are we now walking out of the way of sin. Those sinful weeds in our gardens need to be removed. We picture that process of preparation by searching for and removing leavening out of our homes. But how often when we only cast a casual glance out toward the garden does all look well until we see something shooting up past the tomato plants? A *weed*! And as a weed steals vital nutrition and needed moisture from the soil to strengthen itself, many times extending itself to overshadow the desired plant, so also can just a casual glance at our lives fail to reveal sins that we need to root out. So then, by the vigilance we put forth before and during the Days of Unleavened Bread in making sure we physically do not harbor or partake of leavening during this time, we picture what needs to be done as well in maintaining our spiritual gardens. More than a casual glance is required if we are not to be caught off guard.

As there is a stark contrast between winter and spring, so also is there a stark contrast between those that believe, and those that believe not. Coming out of winter into spring is a process, so also is coming out of unbelief to the point we believe with *all* our hearts; it is a process. As we reflect upon our lives and evaluate where we are in relationship to that perfect standard, how are we doing with coming to fully believe in all that the truth represents?

First, why is it important to believe? The end result of these physical lives is that we are going to die. There is no hope of anything else during or after this life, unless a miracle occurs to save us from the end result. God who created us also gives us the answer in Ephesians 2:8. We are told that it is by believing, or through faith, that we shall be saved from this path of destruction we are on. We see in Hebrews 11:6 that "without faith it is *impossible* to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that *diligently* seek him" (emphasis mine). In 1 Timothy 6 we read that it is not just something that we need to work on to acquire and then move on to something else, but instead, that it requires an *ongoing* effort to hold on to it.

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses (vs. 12).

Faith, like all of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, is a gift of God. God does His part in providing a quality seed and planting it at just the perfect time of year. This work of God starts as a seed planted when the called are baptized and have hands laid upon them. It is then our job to hold on to it, to water and grow that faith in order to come "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). One of the hardest things that we each have to do is the maintenance of our faith.

But many *claim*, or *profess*, that they believe. We see in Ephesians 2:13 that in coming to truly accept Jesus Christ and all for which He stands, and in coming to acknowledge more of what we each are by nature, we are able to draw nigh to Him. But it is not easy to *really* accept what we each are by nature. We see that there are many who profess or claim to be of God, but in the end God says that they are not being honest (Titus 1:16). The end result for those who are not maintaining that faith, not being honest in the evaluations of the self, not working to keep on drawing nigh to God, is that they are rejected (Matthew 7:23).

We know that there is a course set before each of us. We are to recognize and lay aside every distraction, so that we can with patience get about that task, knowing (believing) that the author and finisher of our faith will bring us to the end goal of God our Father—that of being born into the very family of God—to be God, as God is (Hebrews 12:1–2). How then is the author and finisher of our faith doing that?

In this *Monthly Letter*, we will review several of the challenges the called face in maintaining the faith required to be able to navigate that course successfully.

Brethren, this is not a newsflash, but instead a simple reminder of how God works. How did God work in each of our lives, and how does God continue to work? Is it not by the foolishness of preaching (Romans 10:14–15)? *The* faith cometh by hearing—and *only* by hearing—the Word of God. It not only comes by hearing, but it is also maintained by *continuing* to hear. However, many have not accepted how God works, nor believed His Word, and therefore have not obeyed the gospel (vs. 17, 16).

Maintaining Our Ability to Hear

After the miracle when God opens our minds, and gives us the ears to hear in order to begin understanding and comprehending spiritual things, our first challenge in growing is the requirement *to continue* to hear that instruction.

In the parable of the sower, Christ states in the beginning of Mark 4:3, "Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow . . ." and He finishes up the parable in verse 9 by stating again, "And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." He does not state that everyone will have ears to hear, and confirms His intent to speak only to those called by His choice of delivery of the message in a parable. But for those called who have been given the ears to hear, He is saying, "Hearken." Hearing is important, but how many times do we only hear casually, or more accurately stated, not hear very well? If we were given the ability to hear, then what happened?

Let us read on in Mark 4:10: "And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable." Many think He responds with the answer in verse 14, but actually the answer is in verses 11 and 12:

And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

Christ is saying that the whole purpose of the mystery of the Kingdom of God, in a nutshell, is that salvation is afforded to individuals at select times by allowing them to see, hear, understand and thereby become converted so that their sins can be forgiven. If our sins are not forgiven, we will not receive salvation, correct? And how are our sins forgiven? Is it not when we are converted and become convicted to acknowledge them before God? How are we made aware of our sins? Is it not when we hear the truth? How do we hear the truth? Is it not when our eyes are opened to recognize the servant God sent to speak the truth?

The Apostle Paul when before King Agrippa, reaffirmed that this was his mission from Christ to the Gentiles:

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me (Acts 26:18).

God sends a pair of miracles that work hand in hand in the lives of the called. First, He opens the mind to receive spiritual understanding, and second, He gives that understanding of the truth from the beginning through a chosen servant.

But His disciples did not get this brief explanation given in Mark 4:11–12, did they? They still must have had a mystified look on their faces, because we read in verse 13: "And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?"

He is saying, "Don't you get it? If you do not understand how the whole plan of God is being worked out, how are you going to qualify for salvation yourselves, let alone teach others?" So He goes ahead and elaborates further in a detailed word picture about an individual that sowed seed in a garden. In every case that seed was sown by hearing, but the end result was different for each one, was it not? Was there a difference in seed? No, it was the same quality of seed in each case. The difference in whether or not the seed produced was in how the message sown was either heard or not heard. Go ahead and read verses 14–20; the point is that maintaining that ability to hear is critical.

A few areas that can impede our ability to comprehend properly are: 1) failing to hear well because of preconceived ideas, 2) personal arrogance, or 3) selective hearing.

Preconceived ideas can cause us to have diminished or blocked hearing, thus stifling the growth of that spiritual plant. Examples of this are when we think that the church of God should contain only certain individuals, that it should always be peaceful, or that He should heal or fix my situation on my time frame. It can be expressed in actions that demonstrate we do not believe that physical sin will keep us out of the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 11:19). Preconceived ideas can come from many sources; however, the root is not of God (John 8:42–45).

Personal arrogance also can deflect our requirement to hear by leading us to believe that others need to conform to our way of thinking or doing things, instead of working on conforming the self to the perfect standard (1 Corinthians 1:10). It can be exhibited in harboring a concept, usually gained by personal Bible study, that we are superior or think that we know better on a particular topic. So in the meantime, we are going to just stay put and pray that God reveals the "right way" to the ministry (1 Corinthians 1:26–29; Isaiah 55:7–9).

Selective hearing is an area in which we all must be on guard. It should be an area in which we engage in weed control of antiproduktive and negative thoughts entering into our gardens. But too many times it is employed when we do not want to hear constructive criticism or correction. We may not want to hear about our lack of self-control in certain areas that we need to work on, and we often tend to "blow our own horns" in areas of our perceived strength.

Let us look at three examples of what the Bible says in regard to hearing:

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matthew 13:15).

Conversely, when we hear God's instruction in our lives, as noted in verse 16, we are blessed.

Emphasis is given to the above principle by repeating it in Acts 28:27, but we see that those being spoken to would not hear. But even if they did not respond, God was going to use the same principle of hearing with others:

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves (Acts 28:28–29).

Lastly, Hebrews 5:11:

Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

We see by these examples that the called have a natural proclivity to let the gift of hearing the Word of God become diminished over time. Therefore, maintenance of the ability to continue hearing is the critical first area that the called need to work on consistently in order to avoid choking out the growth of that spiritual plant.

Next, although hearing is important, of what value is it if we hear but then do not implement the next crucial step of *retaining* what we have heard?

Retention

We all go through different experiences in life from which we hopefully learn, and yet, what is one of the things that we all dislike hearing? Is it not when we are told something but dismiss it, only to find out later it was valuable, and especially if someone adds, "I told you so!" There is nothing like the feeling of someone adding insult to injury, is there? There are several different reasons: maybe we were not paying attention, maybe we discounted the source, or maybe we just were not in full agreement. Retention is the ability to hold or to keep something. If we pour water on a sponge, it has the ability to absorb or to hold the water. However, if we pour the same water on glass, there is nothing absorbed, and we are left with little else besides perhaps some surface scale from the water's presence. So also spiritually, if we have impermeable soil in our gardens, then when the rain of God's Word comes, it just runs off and does nothing to nourish the roots of the plant.

Therefore, the purpose of listening and retaining the Word of God is to soften the heart further to be able to nourish and grow our gardens. Through King David that is exactly what we see God saying is necessary to live:

He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live (Proverbs 4:4).

King David heard the words of God and learned that the value was in retaining those words. A synonym of *retain* is used in the latter part of the verse. What was King David to retain? He would live if he retained or *kept* the commandments.

The Word of God is a tool that is provided for us, like a hoe for breaking up the soil and removing weeds in a physical garden. When we hear the Word of God and handle it properly, it can be a very useful tool. However, God reveals that not all of the called are using that tool properly to receive the full benefit. We see that exhibited in James 1:21–24:

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

This individual was given the ability to hear, but was like the example of the water poured on the glass—it was not absorbed, nor was there any lasting benefit from the Word of God. What we see at the end of the story is that the ability to keep—or to have retention of—that Word, takes effort.

Another example of retaining is given by God in Proverbs. One of the topics covered at the youth camp is character. No one else can ruin our individual character—only you and I can—and therefore we are responsible for that. And that is exactly for what each of us is striving—building character for a lifetime. But doing the right thing, consistently, takes much effort. How easy it is to incur damage to our honor, just like it is easy to have our money go through our hands if we are not consistently working to retain it.

A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches (Proverbs 11:16).

It takes work. *Much* effort. When we are faced with choices in life, many times we must do those things that we might not prefer or like to do, but as we grow into more mature individuals, we realize we must do it and therefore we get about the task set before us. Coming *to like* the task is a whole different level of conversion. It is what is required, as the Apostle Paul states:

And even as they did not *like to retain* God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient (Romans 1:28) [emphasis mine].

Although we can be called and given the opportunity to understand, hearing is only beneficial if we come *to like* to retain the Word of God in our minds. Common pitfalls here include: 1) being present to hear, but allowing that Word "to go in one ear and out the other," 2) allowing it to fall on a hard heart, and instead of nourishing the plant, it has the effect of water falling on glass, or 3) if we become distracted by looking at others instead of working on the self.

We have seen that maintaining our ability to hear is important because it is the vehicle God uses to deliver life-supporting water to our gardens. Coupled with that, if we do not soak up that water and retain it, we will not endure for long. Now, those two areas are a

good start; however, there are still many that do well in this point, yet miss the next vital element and make the same mistakes over and over again.

Third on our list of items that are required for success is that we must not only hear and retain, but also *remember!*

Success Requires Remembering

Now we are all inclined to remember certain things more than others. Some can read something once and remember it. Some remember events, oftentimes because of an emotional attachment to them. Some things we seem to remember forever, while other things we cannot seem to remember for the life of us! That is why we tend to write down certain things, (hopefully in a place we can remember where we wrote them down) to help us remember those things! Sticky notes on the refrigerator to do this or that, a grocery shopping list to make sure we get all the items, notes on our calendars of upcoming events, more sticky notes with passwords to this and passwords to that. We know that if we keep those things in front of us, we will have a better chance of remembering them.

But God also knew that we are inclined to forget certain things, and therefore instructed us to remember specific things for our success. What are some of those things we are instructed to remember? The word *remember* is used one hundred forty-eight times in the *King James Version*, each with purposeful application, and that subject could be an extended letter in and of itself. However, the experiences that you and I go through are for purpose, and remembering that helps us keep them in proper perspective. Here are a few examples:

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Remembering helps keep us from getting "too big for our britches," by reminding us from whom our blessings come: "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

We are encouraged to extend patience and forgiveness to others because we recall all the kindnesses of God, and all of the forgiveness that He has extended to us.

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your

Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven (Luke 6:35–37).

Every week we are reminded of God's plan of salvation and are encouraged to keep that "Big Picture" out in front of us through one of His Ten Commandments: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8).

Proper recall of past miracles when God has intervened in our lives is critical. As Mr. Cole stated, there is no future faith unless there is past faith. Those experiences when God has sustained us in the past are important in order to remember to be able to move forward through future experiences: "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands" (Psalm 143:5).

Recalling that two descriptions of God include *Almighty* and *Omnipotent* reminds us who is in charge, and should therefore strengthen us:

The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower (Psalm 18:2).

We are comforted and receive confidence when we remember His promises:

[F]or he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Hebrews 13:5–6).

By remembering God's Word, we are properly armed to engage in the battles of our minds:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

When we properly absorb the principle of remembering, it is like the gentle rains that come at the appropriate time to rinse off the plant and provide the needed irrigation to soak into the ground to sustain it.

Remembering, though critical, is still not enough unless we *do* something further with it.

The Purpose of Remembering

Now we come to the point that we should be able to see the purpose of the previous rungs of this ladder of success—where the rubber meets the road, as we say. Why does God want us to hear, retain and remember His Word? It is so that we can get real benefit by *doing* something with it. *Applying* what we remember can assist us in avoiding making the same mistakes over and over. Hearing that we need to make a change in our lives, accepting (retaining) that we need to make a change, and even remembering at the moment of temptation that we want to make a change, does little unless we have the will to push through that temptation to do something different than what we have done in the past.

Applying the principle is where the real work starts for many, and unfortunately is where many that hear, agree, and even remember, fail because they do not *do* anything. Doing something requires the expenditure of energy, and just like a healthy plant takes in the light of the sun, turns it into energy, and then uses it to grow, so also must we take in God's Word and apply it in order to grow.

What happens in nature with plants brings a question to mind. Sunlight affects plant growth because it is one of the vital ingredients for photosynthesis. Plants located in areas with insufficient sunlight tend to change their patterns of growth and bend toward the areas with sunlight in order to absorb more light. So the question is: Are you bending your plant more and more toward the sun in order to absorb more light? It is something that requires the *work* of doing. Here is one of the four places the word *apply* is used:

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom
(Psalm 90:12).

Those that apply what they have been taught are *doers*.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves
(James 1:22).

Are these not the ones whom God says are rightly handling that Word?
For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall
be justified (Romans 2:13).

The benefit of remembering and applying God's Word is that it quells the natural rumbles of fear:

Thou shalt not be afraid of them: but shalt well remember what the LORD thy
God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:18).

So we see that *doing* is important to God, but does He just want doers who are going through the motions? Are we among those who are just showing up at the "required times" out of fear, or because we "have to" be there? Beginning to obey out of fear for God in the initial stages of our conversion is OK, but God does not want us to stay there. He wants us to come to fully appreciate His plan, to come to value His Word, and to want to be in His coming Kingdom—more than anything else.

Every day the sun comes up and shines on the plants in our gardens for a limited amount of time. Are we using that time consistently to be productive, or do our lives seem more like a roller coaster? We need to address that topic later, but for now, it is good to consider how we are using that limited amount of time we each have been given. As we come out of the depth of winter into the spring Holy Day season, it should not only be a time when we see life bustling around us in nature, but it also should be a time when we are spiritually excited about once again rehearsing God's plan of life. It is the perfect time to become more spiritually awake, to shake off the winter dust of our minds, and to get about the ongoing task of tending our gardens so that we can with meekness receive the engrafted word (James 1:21–25). It is a great time to pray for God to assist us in restoring the *joy of thy salvation* (Psalm 51:12). And lastly, it is good to remember what we picture at this time of year. What a stark contrast there is in how God is working out *salvation* here on this earth versus what man is trying to do. We have been called to *true freedom* by willingly subjecting ourselves to His Way—a Way that brings every good thing. That way is in stark contrast to the way of *absolute bondage* from which we were called out. Yes, God gave us a beautiful example physically that reflects the spiritual plan, and it should give us *great confidence* moving forward that, as with everything God does, His perfect plan is right on time.

As we each come to be more thankful for the principles God intended for hearing, retaining, remembering, applying and fully appreciating His Word, we can all be well on our way toward successful gardening, producing many fold now, and qualifying to be those faithful servants in the near future. None of the above principles of success will ever work if we do not start with the foundational principle of hearing. That first principle is critical, and then building from there by maintaining that skill is how *God* will cause our gardens to flourish abundantly.

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full (Deuteronomy 11:13–15).

May we all be found walking worthily and pleasingly unto the Lord, being fruitful in every good work as we increase in the knowledge of God, and thereby have a most rewarding Spring Holy Day season (Colossians 1:10).

With much love and respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David F. Brandenburg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "D".

David F. Brandenburg