

July 2022

Greetings Brethren:

Think back to the time you were called. Do you remember how amazed you were that the Creator God opened your mind to His Truth and allowed you to understand things that to many sound like a science fiction story? A plan where humans have the opportunity to become God by being born into the God Family. It was truly amazing and energizing to learn. Without a doubt you had a new purpose and resolve in life: to overcome the self through personal mastery and to qualify for *eternal life*. It became your life's mission.

A Pearl of Great Price

Your life changed because you recognized the Truth as something special and more valuable than anything else. It had so much value that you were willing to change everything about your life in order to follow God's ways. Your life changed when you began observing the Sabbath. Your life changed when you began to avoid eating unclean foods. Your life changed when you were commanded to assemble with people very different than your previous friends and were instructed to love them as family. Life was no longer about just finding those people you were naturally compatible with but learning to see your new spiritual family as priceless, potential children of God. You did this with energy and excitement.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it (Matthew 13:45–46).

You found that pearl of great price. You sold all that you had (your previous life and lifestyle) and bought that one pearl of great price (God's Truth and Way of Life) at your baptism. The sale was final and had no return policy. Do you remember the terms of that sale and what you agreed to do? You repented of your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You devoted yourself to God in action and in mind, and by doing so agreed to love Him and His Way of Life.

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods (1 Corinthians 6:20).

After the many months, years or even decades since your baptism, how do you view that great pearl? Are you happy with your purchase? Is it still shiny and beautiful and a great

pearl above and beyond all others? Or, has the shine and sparkle begun to fade with other pearls beginning to look attractive? Our attitudes and actions will provide the true answer, because it is not always what we claim.

The Faith Once Delivered

Another way to say *the pearl of great price is the faith once delivered*—those spiritual truths delivered through an end-time servant. First, do you know and agree with the basic, fundamental doctrines like the doctrines of divorce and remarriage, Holy Day observance, tithing, and the nature of God? Second, as you learn more details and nuances of the Truth, are you still in agreement and do you accept what you are being taught? You are in the midst of hearing a long sermon series that is confirming, and elaborating upon, the faith once delivered. Are you beginning to disagree with things that are stated as being part of the faith once delivered? Accepting it is not limited to following a few key, fundamental doctrines and then living your life according to personal desires and preferences which resemble the world. It is living by all of them, completely changing your lifestyle, and wanting to do so because you love God's Way. You cannot only like the concept of *eternal life*, you must like God's Way of Life and His way of thinking, because that is Him. If you do not, why would God want you in His Kingdom?

Of course, you know the Truth. The question is, do you still accept and view the confirmed faith once delivered as that pearl of great price? Because the purchase of that pearl, your baptism, means a lifetime of sacrifice and hardship. Yes, blessings and peace of mind and happiness are part of it too. God wants you to be blessed and have many good things. But God will purposefully allow hardships to determine what kind of purchase you actually made. He will prove you and make you confirm, even admit to yourself, whether or not you are still happy with your purchase, and view it as shiny, beautiful, and more valuable than anything else. The problem is that many have become sorrowful with their purchase, but do not, or will not, admit that fact. There may exist a respect for it, and there may exist a fear of curses for violating it. There may be a desire to follow the rules, to some degree. But the most important aspect of loving it with all of your heart and all of your soul, has faded. Has it for you?

Was It an Impulse Purchase?

There is a reason that stores put certain items on end caps, display them at the checkout counter, or flag them with a large "Sale" arrow to indicate a special deal. These are strategically done to encourage an impulse purchase, and it works because it capitalizes upon

human nature. Often, we see something, are enticed by it, and immediately react. We see that it is on sale and quickly determine it is too good of a deal to pass up, so we must buy it. In our minds we see the value of how much money we saved and can justify why the purchase should be made. At that moment we are thrilled by it. But with many of these purchases it does not take long before we realize the purchase did not need to be made. Yes, it was on sale, but we really did not need to spend the money. Or, the item was gimmicky and novel, but we just did not end up using it, so it sits on a shelf or in a drawer. Can you think of any time you did that?

That is why you should remember your initial love of the Truth. Remember the excitement you had for learning how God thinks, how His laws work, what you needed to change, and the amount of time and energy you devoted to learning about God and personal mastery. Is that dedication the same, or even greater, now? Has it begun to fade? Has learning God's Way through sermons, monthly letters and articles become a little more habit and routine than joyfulness? It is something you do, maybe even often, because you are supposed to. But, there is no longer much excitement in it. It has become your routine, a habit of "checking the box" when the task is complete. At the beginning it was different. What happened, why is it different now? Did you make an impulse purchase, or have you become lukewarm?

Counting the Cost

No one wants to admit that he made an impulse purchase, or became lukewarm, because that would be an admission that what was once seen as priceless has become tarnished and faded. You still have possession of it, but it is not that special anymore. That is exactly what happens with an impulse purchase because it is made from initial excitement without weighing and analyzing the long-term cost. Before you made your spiritual purchase, did you count the cost?

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish (Luke 14:27–30).

We all committed to laying our lives down and following Christ. We understood some of the changes we had to make in our lives and the sacrifices that would need to be made, but others we were not able to understand or foresee. However, we agreed to the concept of laying down whatever was needed, known and unknown.

Listed below are a few areas in life where sacrifices are made that affect many of those working to overcome their carnal nature. The key for any one of us is to admit whether the needed sacrifices in these areas are still worth it, because these are the types of things that can tarnish that great pearl. You said the sacrifice was worth it then. How about now after the reality of it has set in and the real work is ever present? Has the continued sacrifice in these areas become too great, causing you to compromise or put less effort into your conversion? Has the continued sacrifice to live this Way of Life caused you to lose the excitement and joy, and to become lukewarm? Effort is made continually, but is limited and without your whole heart and soul.

1. **Family.** What happens when unconverted family members, or a spouse, cause continual difficulties and hardships? Do you make concessions on Sabbath observances, holidays, diet, or entertainment to soothe an agitated spouse or family member who resents your restrictive religion? Whatever the problems are, is it just easier to compromise and keep the peace? Has the continual pressure caused you to lose some of your love for it?
2. **Income.** What happens when your standard of living seems to be lower than you would like because of tithing? Are you resentful that you cannot do more "fun" things in life because there is not much money left after tithing? Do you ever think your life would be better without the Truth and tithing? Does not having certain physical things cause your love to diminish?
3. **Friends.** When you have limited friends because brethren are not in close proximity, do you choose local friends that do not mix well with living the Truth? Do they cause you to lose interest in spiritual things and corrupt your mind? Are you a different person around them than you are around brethren—using language, humor or other conversation that you would not otherwise? Does that cause you to live a double life, church and non-church? Remember, God knows every day what you do, and what you really enjoy. There may be no immediate penalty because He is testing and proving you to see where your love truly lies, and what you will endure.
4. **Ailments.** When an ongoing physical or mental ailment forces you to wait patiently for God's intervention, do you begin to question the goodness of God, or resent the fact that your good times in life have been taken away? Is the ailment causing you to grow closer to God, or away from Him? Does the ailment make you value the Truth more, or less? It will be one or the other. Which is it for you? God expects you to grow closer to Him and value His Truth more.
5. **Boredom.** Now that you know the Truth, is it boring? Do you need to hear something new doctrinally or technically to keep your interest? You cannot love it, above everything else, if you are also searching elsewhere for fulfillment.

Fading Love

We love the concept of *eternal life* and being born into the God Family. Having *eternal* joy, peace, love and happiness is something we wholeheartedly desire. These are some of the things that cause our great pearl to shine. But the sacrifices we must make to achieve *eternal* life can become difficult. They are hard and may last a lifetime. What is your view and attitude toward these sacrifices? Do they wear you down to the point that you put less effort into your conversion?

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3).

Our perspective will determine if the sacrifices we make are grievous or not. If we love this Way of Life more than anything else, then the difficult sacrifices will be worth it, and we will have a positive attitude overall. But, if we do not love this Way of Life more than anything else, then the sacrifices we make will be grievous. The desire to make sacrifices may fade somewhat. We can be sacrificing in our personal lives, but perhaps a little grudgingly. Perhaps with a little less effort than what we used to make. Perhaps with a few compromises to reduce the severity of the sacrifice in order to make living this Way of Life more tolerable.

What "little" compromises might we make, not out of weakness, but because we want relief from our burdens? Violating the Sabbath to attend a graduation or special anniversary because it is only a once-in-a-lifetime event, and you do not want to offend family with another crazy church rule. Using second tithe to buy something "for the Feast," when in reality it is something you want but cannot afford due to tithing. Simply put, you do not like having a lower standard of living. Choosing as entertainment certain music and movies filled with foul language and sexually suggestive content—enjoying the things God calls abomination—because too much Bible time is boring and you cannot find any good entertainment alternatives. Or, you just like that entertainment and do not want to let it go. Only engaging in some type of Bible study on the Sabbath, but nothing during the week because you are too busy. With these examples, or anything else, is your effort half-hearted, or your very best?

Half-hearted and inconsistent effort may demonstrate an impulse purchase. You may say: "Oh yes, I want eternal life. I observe a Monday Pentecost, I won't eat pork or shellfish, I do not celebrate birthdays, so I am right on it." But what happens if you do not give up the worldly things that naturally appeal to a carnal mind, and that fall under God's abomination category? You see, the desire to change your lifestyle may be half-hearted, so you end up living a church lifestyle and a worldly lifestyle. It all depends on where you are and who you are with. Jesus Christ has some strong words to describe this:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth (Revelation 3:15–16).

Conversion is a lifestyle change, physically and mentally. If the only lifestyle change we make is by physical Sabbath observance, and avoiding unclean foods, then we are in serious danger of being lukewarm because of the avoidance of our most important duty: changing our carnal minds.

Never Give Up

Conversion is not easy. Besides having many successes, there will be countless failures. The important thing to remember is that you must never give up. God has told you to keep fighting for your salvation and to keep overcoming all obstacles no matter what they are.

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved (Matthew 10:22).

There is no sin too great to cause the loss of your salvation. If you acknowledge it and repent, Christ is ever willing to forgive. Satan will work hard to wear you down, make you compromise, or make you think the effort is not worth the reward. He will try to influence your thinking and make you believe you have failed too many times and that you will never qualify.

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

Make no mistake about it, his intent is to devour you. If he can get you to believe false doctrine, he will. If he can get you to give up, he will. If he can get you to value other things more, and diminish your love for the Truth, he will. If he can distract you to the point that you do not properly focus on spiritual growth, causing you to slowly separate from God, he will. These are some of his tactics. The most insidious way he will devour you is to slowly, over time, make you to believe that only basic physical observance of the Law is sufficient for qualification and cause you to avoid proper focus on personal mastery. And why is he often successful with this tactic? Because many do not want to continue making the needed sacrifices. Living this Way of Life is thought to be too hard, or not rewarding enough, so many give in and stop the spiritual sacrifices that prove our real love.

Colonel Sanders

Many of you will be familiar with the Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurants. As you drive around town, or watch a television commercial, you may see this name and the image of its founder, Colonel Harlan Sanders. No, it is not food we should be eating. But the life story of Harlan Sanders contains elements that can help us in our conversion. He did not have a privileged life; he let his carnal impulses rule over him at times; he faced an enormous amount of failure, but through it all he never gave up until he accomplished his goal. He would not let anyone or anything defeat him. He did this with carnal willpower. What do you think we can achieve with God supporting us through the power of the Holy Spirit? Much greater things, but the will to never quit must exist.

Harlan Sanders was born in Henryville, Indiana, in 1890. At six years old his father died, forcing his mother to find work. Often, she would be away from home for several days at a time which meant that he had to cook and take care of his siblings. In the seventh grade he dropped out of school and went to work as a farmhand. At sixteen he falsified his age and joined the United States Army but was honorably discharged a year later. Fortunately for him, he was soon hired as a railroad laborer. While working for the railroad he began studying the law in order to provide more opportunities for himself. Unfortunately, he got fired for fighting with a railroad co-worker. He found other employment opportunities afterward, but with no real success.

Later, he was able to start his legal career. Unfortunately, that ended soon after he got into a fight with his own client during a court case. At age thirty, he founded a ferry boat company. The construction of a nearby bridge nearly put him out of business, so he sold out and created a lamp manufacturing company. The problem was that there was another company that sold a better version of his lamp, so that venture failed likewise.

By age forty he opened a Shell gas station where he also sold chicken dishes to travelers. He decided to advertise in order to expand sales, but soon an argument arose when a competitor from a Standard Oil station kept painting over Harlan's billboard advertisements. Harlan and two Shell Oil managers confronted the competitor, Matt Stewart. Stewart then pulled out a gun, shot and killed one of the Shell Oil managers. Harlan took the dead man's gun and fired back at Stewart, wounding him.

With the competition removed, his business found some success. Four years later, he bought a motel to expand his business enterprises, but the motel and gas station burned to the ground. So he rebuilt it, but had to close it due to World War II. After the war, he started his restaurant business again and found some success. But, by the 1950s tragedy struck again. The highway junction directly in front of his restaurant was moved, effectively eliminating all of his traveling customers. Then, a new highway was to be built on a location

seven miles away from his restaurant, further reducing the travelers who would visit his restaurant.

Sanders decided to sell his restaurant and lost money on the deal. He was back to the beginning again. His next idea was to franchise his restaurant by offering his special chicken recipe. He began his search for franchisees and was rejected 1,009 times before anyone accepted it. In 1952, at age sixty-two, he found his first franchisee. At age sixty-five, Harlan Sanders began to travel all over the country to expand his franchise business and over time, he did so.

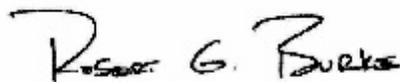
What can we learn from this? Harlan Sanders did not have an easy life, with much of it stemming from his personal weaknesses and failures despite his good intentions and efforts. He was fired from multiple jobs, ruined his legal career due to lack of self-control, was set back by the Great Depression, fires and World War II, yet he ultimately found success (his pearl of great price) because he never gave up and kept working to achieve that goal. He endured and sacrificed a lot for the better part of a lifetime, just for this temporary, physical goal. All the sacrifices and heartaches were worth it to him.

Are You Willing?

To live this Way of Life requires much sacrifice. But if your desire for *eternal life* is the most important thing to you, then enduring the sacrifices is worth it. If you are overwhelmed by rejection or discouraged by many failures, remember the lesson of Colonel Harlan Sanders: never give up. If he accomplished what he did without God's help, imagine what you can do with it!

God has called you and written your name in the Book of Life. That is proof that He wants you in His Kingdom and is helping you to get there. If you value His Way of Life, and love it more than anything else, are you willing to fight for it and never give up? Because if you do, God will be there, supporting you, every step of the way.

Your friend in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert G. Burke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Robert G. Burke