

December 2022

Dear Brethren:

Much of what is seen today can create feelings of despair and uncertainty. There are troubling signs of weakness in the economy. Supply chain issues are creating sporadic shortages of items that previously were readily available. Gasoline and diesel prices have risen. Inflation is constantly in the news as a topic of concern, but the real problem is seen at the check-out counter and the bill for groceries is much higher for the same items. Wars and conflicts around the globe are purported to be a causative factor for the uncertainty of energy supplies resulting in expectations that it may become very expensive to heat our homes this winter. What does that mean for us financially?

More violence and crime are seen and reported. Aggression and the beginning stages of violence perpetrated against those of the "wrong" political affiliation or *group-think* are increasing. It feels as if society is breaking down. Traditional religious values are mocked to a higher degree. What was once called normal is now called hateful. What was abhorrent to prior generations is now venerated. How far has it gone? When teenage students are criticized and called hateful because they want to use a bathroom—or change clothes in a locker-room—only with those of the same sex and not include those who "identify" as that gender (because there are only two God-ordained biological sexes), you know the abominations in God's eyes are plentiful. When "family friendly" events in small towns across the nation not only include Drag Queen performances, but are supported by average people, you know evil has spread widely. Sadly, these types of things will only become more pervasive and worse. Now more than ever are the prophet Isaiah's words understandable:

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20)

Perhaps a new political administration will institute changes and fix some of the current problems, thereby restoring better times. After all, is that not what is being promised? Of course it is, but there is no fix while pursuing man's objectives. There is no solution with man's wisdom. There is no desire at large to change the course of this world for the betterment of society. It is reserved for the few "elite" that want to be served by the masses. This world will continue down its wretched path and only change at the return of Jesus Christ.

For the called of God there should be no despair or uncertainty because of the confidence that they have, knowing that God's Master Plan of salvation will end with eternal peace and happiness. Regardless of the uncertainty of world events, they are part of the process of bringing His Kingdom to Earth. Knowing this, and believing, should provide confidence and hope that otherwise would not exist.

The Hope of Salvation

This is the hope of salvation. God created mankind for a purpose: to qualify by a conversion process to become like Him and to be added to the God Family. A change is required because God created man a physical being with a nature that is opposite to His character, and that cannot exist in His spiritual Family. But a way to change that fleshly, carnal character into spiritual character exists through a conversion process. Requiring each person to fight for that change, and endure much suffering and effort along the way, is the means of proving to God that we do want His character and not just the idea of eternal life.

God does not want robots; He wants beings of character. That means each person must choose to obey the Truth wholeheartedly. When each person has the intelligence, understanding and power of God's mind, each must will to be faithful to His Way of Life. But if man cannot change himself by his own efforts, how can this be? God promised that He would provide the means to change man's fleshly, carnal mind into a spiritual mind that can obey the Truth.

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jeremiah 31:33).

A promise has been made that not only will a spiritual understanding of the Truth be given, but also the ability, or power, to live it by the Holy Spirit. Righteous change is therefore offered, and possible. The question becomes: with understanding and power, what does one do? The answer will determine qualification or failure. Eternal life or the lake of fire.

But be ye doers of the word [because you have the power to live it], and not hearers only [because you have been given the ability to understand its spiritual intent], deceiving your own selves [thinking that you are changing as God told you to do when you are not] (James 1:22).

Who Will Not Make the Required Change?

Every person created will at their appointed time have their minds opened to the Truth and an equal opportunity to effect personal mastery with the potential to be deemed worthy to become part of the God Family. No one will be denied an opportunity. But not everyone will take advantage of it. In fact, many will turn their backs on God and strive for something else. What does "many" mean? For insight, consider what God inspired the Apostle John to write in the book of Revelation about a time after the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ when all things will have been restored and made perfect, but before all is turned over to God the Father.

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: *the number of whom is as the sand of the sea*. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them (Revelation 20:8–9, emphasis mine).

Does the sand of the sea represent millions or even billions? Whatever it is, the number is massive. Even though large numbers of people will reject God and fight against Him, many will still try to qualify for the Kingdom.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat (Matthew 7:13).

Does this mean that the majority who try will qualify and become part of the God Family? Perhaps. But we also need to continue Christ's statement:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13–14).

Everyone will know the way that leads to eternal life because God will give everyone the knowledge of which way to go and provide equal opportunity to get there. There will be no confusion. But, many will choose the way that leads to destruction. Jesus Christ told us that only a few will choose the way that leads to life and actually find it. The word "few" is the Greek word *oligos* and the meaning is "few, little, small." This implies a smaller number will gain eternal life than those who end up in the lake of fire. Whatever is the actual percentage of those who find eternal life (small or large), we will be well-served if we presume it is a smaller number proportionally than those who do not. Our admonition is to think it is harder, not easier, to be judged worthy and to qualify. Why? Because our

deceptive carnal natures can easily cause us to overestimate the quality of our work of conversion, leaving us insufficient when we are judged by Jesus Christ. Keeping this in mind should provide the incentive not to grow complacent, but to be focused upon putting maximum effort into our conversion until the very end! Remember, your name is written in the Book of Life. God wants you there, and it is achievable! Why, then, will so many fail to find it?

Broad Categories of Rejection Today

To help determine where we stand in our conversion, let us focus on a couple of the many categories of rejection by which the called—of whom we are—can fail. First, there will be those who outright reject the Truth and everything that it represents. God will call them, they will understand the Truth and the plan of salvation, but they will choose to reject it. Living their lives on their terms is more important, and they will set God aside.

A second category involves those who valued God's Way of Life to some degree along with the concept of eternal life and being part of the God Family. They observed the weekly Sabbath, annual Holy Days and adhered to other fundamental doctrines. The problem is that they chose to adhere to perverted doctrine. Regardless of when and where they learned fundamental doctrines, at some point God made known to them that doctrinal errors existed. He allowed them to understand what was required for salvation—what was revealed doctrine versus what was not. From there a choice had to be made to either continue in doctrinal error or to completely accept God's Way of Life.

What is an example? Perhaps some were affiliated with an organization that had roots in the Worldwide Church of God, learned God's Master Plan of salvation and certain fundamental doctrines correctly, but were taught the falsehood that God works through the modern medical system for healing. Their understanding of Divine Healing was all wrong. Therefore, at the right time God opened their minds to understand the true doctrine of Divine Healing. We know this happens because many times we have seen individuals come to understand more Truths over time, and then embrace them. Unfortunately, some respond by rejecting it and hold to incorrect doctrine for any number of personal reasons or desires. The result is knowingly holding on to a mixture of Truth and error. God is the ultimate Judge and the only One who knows the hearts and minds of those in this category. The key here is that these people chose to hold to incorrect doctrine, even after God enlightened them. Conversion is all about choice. The result in this case was that their choice did not agree with God's requirement to love Him completely:

And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? (Deuteronomy 10:12–13)

Following the paths of these two categories is following the way of destruction. God gave everyone in these categories equal opportunity to prove that they loved Him, and they knowingly chose something else. Many may have soothed their consciences in order to feel good about their decision and to convince themselves that they were in good standing with God or else still had another opportunity in the future. Whatever the rationalization, a choice was made, and God was fair to them.

Who Will Follow the Path to Life?

If you are not in the two categories above, are you safe? How do you know if you are on the right path? Those who are called, agree with revealed Truth fully, and are effecting personal mastery with the desire for eternal life, are on the correct path. Who are these people, and what are several identifying factors?

Those walking on the path to life will exhibit these traits. You will see good spiritual fruit in those in whom the Holy Spirit is active. What will they be doing?

1. They will be crucifying the old self by working diligently to remove carnal traits that will not exist in God's Kingdom. Colossians 3:8–9 and Galatians 5:19–21.

2. They will be working to develop righteous character in the image of Christ. Those truly convicted in their calling will be creating, diligently and thoughtfully—by the power of the Holy Spirit—a new person and image. Colossians 3:12–17.

They know it is not sufficient to destroy the old self. Equal to the removal of carnal traits is the requirement to add the spiritual. The new *must* be created. It is a requirement for success.

3. They will fear and honor God in obedience. They willingly accept God's Law and Way of Life, do not argue with Him or His ways, love that Law and obey His statutes and judgments. They seek the will of God and not the ways of their own carnal minds.

4. They will be developing a willing, teachable, humble, and self-sacrificing attitude. The tough, rigid, accusatory, self-centered carnal mind will be shrinking while the mind of Christ will be growing and becoming more evident daily. Philippians 2:1–5 and Matthew 20:20–28.

A child of God adhering to these four traits is most likely walking on the path that leads to life. Not perfectly by any means, but with resolution and desire to be faithful to God.

Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth

Do you think the above list describes you? If so, do you feel that you are in good standing with God and that your conversion is on track? Even if you answer yes, you still are at risk of hearing these words:

But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out (Luke 13:27–28).

Whoa! How can these verses apply to you if you are not in one of the categories of rejection? The criteria listed above describes you, so you must be on the path to life. Yes, the assumption is that you are on that path. And if all four traits apply fully to you, then this condemnation should not apply. But the danger that any of us face is when we are not *fully* exhibiting all four traits *as God expects of us individually*. We see ourselves fully living by these principles because we want to see it that way. We agree with revealed doctrine and are working on personal mastery through sacrifice and by enduring hardships. As such, our personal assessment is that we are accomplishing what God expects of us. And yet it still can be deficient? Yes, and that is why there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth by those who stand in front of Jesus Christ and are shocked by His judgment.

They may say to Christ: "I believed you. I trusted you. I followed you. I sacrificed for you. I did what you asked me to do. What do you mean I am a worker of iniquity, and that you don't know me?" And His response may be something like: "Yes, you understood and did things, but not what I asked of you. When I look at you, I do not see a reflection of me, and that was what you were supposed to become, and you had every opportunity to do so."

None of us will be a perfect reflection because we are carnal, weak, make constant mistakes and fall far short in character. But a reflection should exist to some extent that Christ expects, in spite of our faults, flaws, weaknesses, and struggles to overcome. Below are two examples of how our images may not reflect Christ, but instead our carnal selves—putting us in jeopardy.

Not Sufficiently Adding God's Character

Tremendous focus is given to the need for removing carnal traits, and rightly so. Each called of God knows this is required or he will not be part of the Kingdom.

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds (Colossians 3:8–9).

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).

We have read these texts so many times. Have they begun to lose some meaning and sound like, "Blah, blah, blah, I know, tell me something I don't know"? Then, let us summarize carnal nature by translating these verses into current-day speech. If you conduct a basic internet search, this is what will surface when searching for "top toxic traits of people"—meaning raw carnal nature and that is primed for Satan's attacks and influence: 1) Complaining. 2) Criticizing. 3) Being negative. 4) Making excuses. 5) Gossiping. Do these describe you? They encapsulate and are at the root of many of the carnal traits listed in Colossians and Galatians.

With this knowledge our work is to change so that our images, who we are, cannot be described by these traits. Here is the catch: How are you assessing whether or not you have accomplished this task? Most often, is it not by your own standards—because upon self-examination you do not feel like this describes you? That is a good start, and may be accurate, but how does God view you?

Do you know that the only way these traits can successfully be removed is when godly traits replace them? In a carnal sense they may feel removed. In a godly sense, they may have only been reduced, but not enough. The determining factor, then, is to assess ourselves by God's character. After all, is not our desire to be like God? His character is this:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law (Galatians 5:22–23).

To develop righteous character in the image of Christ means that we will reflect these traits. When Jesus Christ looks at each of us, He will judge our conversion on how much of these traits we have put on.

God is love and we are to develop godly love. If we had the love of Christ, we would never get offended. But we do! So that means we have more work to do. Are you constantly offended? Do you typically find offense in something or someone, and then complain or criticize or assume motives? Or is it occasionally due to human weakness? When Christ looks at you, does He see someone who is constantly reacting with the carnal mind, or mostly with His mind, and only sporadic failures? What about peace (of mind) and joy? Do you most often have them or not? Not because of the absence of problems, but because of how we handle them. It is required that we have peace and joy in our lives. If we do not, there could be trouble. In our interactions with people, are we mostly gentle and longsuffering, or only occasionally? Perhaps only with certain people. Do you have complete faith in God and His Plan, and do you embrace His work in your life? Or, are you unsatisfied because you do not have what you want? We need growth in all these traits. Is it happening?

Not that we have attained perfection, but what are we mostly like, in most situations, and what are we working on the most? If adding these traits is not a top priority every day, we may not be adding them in the way Christ expects of us. Even if we obey many other rules and doctrines, yet fail to add Christ's character, will we pass the test when He said that our full-time job is to develop His character? Have we only worked on it on a part-time basis? We each need to evaluate how we spend our time to determine if our efforts are full-time, or part-time. How could any of those who agree with the Faith Once Delivered and who sacrifice to live this Way of Life hear those fateful words? Because they will have lived by their carnal minds too much, and without enough development of God's mind and character.

Not Taking the Law Seriously Enough

If we do not take God's law seriously enough, or value it enough, what do you think our judgment will be? Sure, it is important to us, but where does it rank when compared to our everyday desires and wants? Many people will fall somewhere in between those who

trust in the carnal mind totally and those who relentlessly crucify the old mind and strive to allow only the mind of Christ to dominate them and to give direction to their lives. Those who are in between do not reject the idea of God and revealed Truth, they are working on personal mastery to some degree, but are enticed by, and more often fall prey, to the ways of the carnal mind. *They live to the responses and desires of their carnal minds too much of the time.* And that is a serious danger! It is not that personal mastery is not worked on at all; it is that it is a secondary effort.

The Sabbath is important and we observe it, but have we become relaxed with it and focus on God less than we should because we do not see immediate penalties? We know and follow the health laws, but are we quick to enjoy a "treat" of bad food because in the end we do not think it really matters that much and say it is only physical and cannot affect my salvation? Do we get frustrated with the course of this world and denigrate those in office? We can agree with the Plan of Salvation and our roles in it, but do we slip into our carnal selves too much of the time because our fear of God is not as strong as it should be? Could it be that we do that because we do not take the Law as seriously as we should?

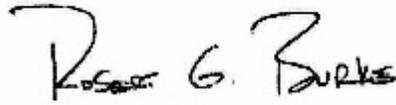
Let us contemplate the fate of those called but who, due to the strong pulls of the carnal mind that *are not resisted enough of the time*, fall victim to living by their carnal minds. The sad result of their choice is stated by Solomon.

Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil (Proverbs 1:24–33).

The behavior of the called must reflect the character of God. Too many may rationalize the limited efforts they make as being sufficient until it is too late. There is a point of no return and all of us must remain aware of this possibility. Eternal life is offered and available to each of us. We can have it. Our admonition is not to be complacent with our conversion efforts and to be focused upon adding God's character. If any of us fail to

do that, there may be weeping and gnashing of teeth. If we sufficiently add God's character into our lives now, we most assuredly can look forward to eternal peace and happiness.

Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert G. Burke". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large initial 'R' and 'B'.

Robert G. Burke