

# CHRISTIANS: AMBASSADORS FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

*Biblical instructions on living as a Christian.*



*Ambassador Auditorium*

**BOB THIEL, PH.D**

# **Christians: Ambassadors for the Kingdom of God**

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*Front Cover: Photograph of Ambassador Auditorium by Joyce Thiel. Bob and Joyce Thiel used to sometimes attend church services there to receive instruction on Christian living, prophecy, the work of God, and being ambassadors for Jesus.*

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# 1. Christians are to be Ambassadors for the Kingdom of God

The world and its media have various views about Christianity and how Christians are supposed to live.

But many of those views are NOT based upon the Bible or the practices of real Christians.

Do you know that Christians are supposed to be Ambassadors for the kingdom of God?

Do you know how a Christian is really supposed to live?

Can early Christian history give us any clues?

Can you accept biblical commands and instructions?

This book is filled with many scriptures in order that the sincere may better learn how God wants His people to live. A way very different than that lived by most who claim Christianity.

## Ambassadors for Christ

The Apostle Paul taught that Christians should be ambassadors for the gospel of God's coming kingdom:

<sup>20</sup> Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ ... (2 Corinthians 5:20; NKJV used throughout except where noted)

<sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; <sup>18</sup> praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints — <sup>19</sup> and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth **boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,** <sup>20</sup> **for which I am an ambassador** in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:17-20)

What is an ambassador? Here is what *Merriam-Webster* states:

### Definition of ambassador

1 : an official envoy; especially : a diplomatic agent of the highest rank accredited to a foreign government or sovereign as the resident representative of his or her own government or sovereign or appointed for a special and often temporary diplomatic assignment

2 a : an authorized representative or messenger

But as Christians we are not temporary, we are to be permanent representatives of God, His government, and His kingdom.

Although the Apostle Paul was a Jewish and Roman citizen (Acts 21:39; 22:3, 28), he wrote that Christians have their citizenship in heaven:

<sup>20</sup> For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (Philippians 3:20).

The Apostle Peter, while not specifically using the term ambassador, backs this up as he was inspired to write the following:

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup> who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Christians are part of a royal priesthood and a holy nation. They were not a recognized people, like other nations, but now are essentially ambassadors for the coming Kingdom of God.

Did you realize that about Christianity?

Along those lines, the late evangelist Dr. Herman Hoeh wrote:

### **The Church in Prophecy**

While most people today suppose that the true CHURCH was rapidly to grow BIG, to become a powerful organization, exerting powerful influence on the world, making this a better world, becoming the stabilizing influence of the world's civilization, actually Christ founded His Church for no such purpose! In His final prayer for His ONE Church, Jesus prayed: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world ... Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be ONE, as we are. ... I have given them thy word; and the world hateth them, because they are not OF the world, even as I am not OF the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not OF the world, even as I am not OF the world" (John 17:9-16 KJV).

Those of His Church are described as being strangers and foreigners in this world — AMBASSADORS for Christ — ambassadors representing HIS Kingdom which is foreign to this world — yet never being OF the world! (Hoeh H. Why So Many Denominations? Tomorrow's World, April 1972)

Christians live on this earth as representatives of that kingdom, obeying human governmental authority. When there is a conflict with the higher laws of God, Christians obey God (Acts 5:29), sometimes suffering for it (1 Peter 4:15-16), but they are not taking part in its politics.

That being said, ambassadors are not to be fearful, even if they are from a numerically-small country. Notice what Jesus told His people:

<sup>32</sup> "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)

Actual Christians are part of a "little flock", as also the Apostle Paul said only a remnant was being called in this age:

<sup>5</sup> Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. (Romans 11:5)

Real Christianity has been spoken against since the beginning. When he got to Rome, Paul was told:

<sup>22</sup> ... concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere. (Acts 28:22)

It should be no surprise that those who still hold to original Christianity are often spoken against these days—including by accusers of the brethren (Revelation 12:10) on the Internet.

God's people also are to be brave:

<sup>7</sup> He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. <sup>8</sup> But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Revelation 21:7-8)

The unbelieving are cowardly. Christians are to stand for the truth (Matthew 10:32-33).

## 2. How Should Christians Live?

If God has called you to be a Christian, how should you live? (If you are wondering about your calling please see our free online booklet *Is God Calling You?*)

How should Christians live? Real Christians.

This is a complex subject and perhaps it takes more than a human lifetime to truly know, but this booklet will try to address many, but by no means all, practical points for the how, and a few points as to why.

As Paul wrote, we are to live as ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

He also wrote that we are to imitate him as he imitated Christ:

<sup>11:1</sup> Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Christians should live as Jesus did (John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 John 2:6) and accept all He commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus encouraged people to live His way:

<sup>28</sup> Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

He also taught warnings that there would be difficulties, but He would bring peace:

<sup>33</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

In the New Testament, Christians were considered so different from the world they lived in, that their mode of life was referred to as "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9; 24:14, 22) and more derisively, "the Way they call a sect" (Acts 24:14) or "cult" (Acts 24:14, New Living Translation).

The world itself lives selfishly, under Satan's sway, in what has been called "the way of Cain" (Jude 11). Consider that the Bible teaches:

<sup>12</sup> There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)

There were two unique trees in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8). Eve picked the wrong one (Genesis 3:6), and humanity has suffered since (Genesis 3:14-19). There is a cause for every effect. God's ways are right.

Christians are ambassadors of the Kingdom of God and put our hope in the spiritual, not the physical, though we live in a physical world (Romans 8:5-8). Consider:

<sup>1</sup> Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

<sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:1-3)

Christians are the children of God and we place our hope in Jesus—the world does not really place hope in our Savior.

In His final prayer for His true Church, Jesus prayed:

<sup>12</sup> While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup> But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. <sup>14</sup> I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>15</sup> I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17:12-16)

Those of His Church are described as being strangers and foreigners in this world — AMBASSADORS for Christ — ambassadors representing HIS Kingdom which is foreign to this world — yet never being OF the world! We are to be set apart from the world by our actual adherence and obedience to the word of God. This makes us different from the world—including the many that claim to reverence scripture, but will not actually live by it.

The New Testament shows that God's people in the Old Testament:

<sup>13</sup> ... confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)

The Apostle Peter also calls Christians pilgrims and sojourners:

<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace be multiplied. (1 Peter 1:1-2)

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, <sup>12</sup> having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11-12)

Polycarp of Smyrna, ordained a Bishop/Pastor/Overseer by the apostles, started his Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians with the following:

Polycarp, and the presbyters with him, to the Church of God sojourning at Philippi (Polycarp's Letter to the Philippians)

So, he wrote that the Christians in the Church of God were sojourning at Philippi. The idea that Christians were to be sojourners and pilgrims was retained by him.

The Apostle Peter further wrote to Christians:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, <sup>2</sup> as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, <sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Peter 2:1-3)

Christians need the pure milk of the word, but many who profess Christ do not know much about what that means. Most who claim Christianity will not live as pilgrims and sojourners in this world as ambassadors for Jesus.

### **Who is a Real Christian?**

Real Christians are those who have the Spirit of God, believe the Bible, try to walk as Jesus walked, keep the commandments, and understand and practice love.

Real Christians have the Holy Spirit of God:

<sup>9</sup> But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. <sup>10</sup> And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you (Romans 8:9-11).

Without God's Spirit you are not a real Christian. Here is something the Apostle Peter taught about being given the Holy Spirit:

<sup>38</sup> "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:38-39)

Real Christians hear the gospel message, accept that they have sinned and need God, have repented of their sins (the transgression of the law—1 John 3:4, KJV), accept God's calling, declare and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, have been properly baptized, and possess God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:39; Romans 8:9-11).

This receipt of God's Holy Spirit makes true Christians the "temple of God" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) and Christians need to live accordingly.



God knows who His own are:

<sup>9</sup> But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God (Galatians 4:9)

<sup>3</sup> But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him (1 Corinthians 8:3).

<sup>11</sup> ... we are well known to God (2 Corinthians 5:11)

<sup>77</sup> To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins (Luke 1:77).

Thus, it is God who truly knows who the real Christians are.

Real Christians keep the commandments and strive to walk as Jesus Christ walked:

<sup>4</sup> He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup> But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. <sup>6</sup> He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (1 John 2:4-6).

<sup>16</sup> But the earth helped the woman, ... <sup>17</sup> ... the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 12:16-17)

<sup>12</sup> Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. (Revelation 14:12)

Most that profess Christ, however, chose to walk a different way than Jesus did. The Bible and records of church history show that Christians are to strive to keep God's Ten Commandments (see also our free online booklets *The Ten Commandments: The Decalogue, Christianity, and the Beast* and *Continuing History of the Church of God*).

Jesus also taught:

<sup>35</sup> By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35)

Most religions, however, that profess Christ choose to allow warfare and other activities that do not show love to one's neighbor.

As ambassadors, Christians do not participate in military warfare, secular juries, nor do we vote in worldly politics.

The Apostle James taught:

<sup>12</sup> But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment. (James 5:12)

Jesus taught that also in the Sermon of the Mount. Hence, real Christians do not swear oaths.

Love, not war, is what life is supposed to be all about.

Christians know the basic doctrines of the church as laid out in Hebrews 6:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Plus, they practice the Way that the apostles advocated (cf. Acts 24:14).

### **Christians are Subject to Difficulties**

Notice something that the prophet Jeremiah was told to record:

<sup>11</sup> For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive. (Jeremiah 29:11-14)

Notice that the plan was exile. To be a sojourner, a stranger, an ambassador. That is still the plan for Christians in this age.

Jeremiah also recorded:

<sup>28</sup> For he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, 'This captivity is long; build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their fruit. (Jeremiah 29:28)

Notice that those in exiles were to plant and build and produce fruit. Planting takes faith. Translating materials into multiple languages, including many that the church does not have supporters takes faith--but that is part of the work that we in the *Continuing* Church of God are part of. And just like the exiles, we are to produce fruit.

For living, loving, and producing fruit as Jesus taught, Christians will be hated and persecuted:

<sup>16</sup> You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. <sup>17</sup> These things I command you, that you love one another.

<sup>18</sup> "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. <sup>21</sup>

But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. <sup>22</sup> If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup> He who hates Me hates My Father also. <sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. <sup>25</sup> But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.' (John 15:16-25)

<sup>22</sup> ... "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22)

Not all the troubles will come from the broader 'world.' Family and friends could be problems as well. Notice that Jesus taught about family issues, followed by something by the Apostle Peter:

<sup>35</sup> For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law', <sup>36</sup> and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' <sup>37</sup> He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>38</sup> And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>39</sup> He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:35-39)

<sup>4</sup> In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. (1 Peter 4:4)

This does not mean you are not to honor your parents (cf. Matthew 15:4-6) or try to cause trouble—we are to strive "to live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). Jesus and Peter are basically saying that those who are converted may face difficulties with family and friends. Notice something else from Jesus and Peter, followed by something from the Apostle Paul:

<sup>16</sup> "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. <sup>17</sup> But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. (Matthew 10:16-17)

<sup>15</sup> But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:15-17)

<sup>15</sup> Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. <sup>16</sup> But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. (2 Timothy 2:15-16)

When dealing with those not in the church, as well as in it, Christians need to be wise and try not to harm. And Christians should study in order to answer questions others may ask. Not that we are to try to cram our religion down the throat of others, but that we humbly answer

those that are sincere. We, however, should try to avoid unnecessary arguments (Matthew 7:6; 1 Timothy 1:4).

Jesus also warned:

<sup>33</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

And doing what we are supposed to do as Christians shows that we have faith. And it is not easy.

<sup>22</sup> ... Have faith in God (Mark 11:22).

Apparently there were heretical people in the time of the apostles who did not believe that they had to do anything and that their faith was sufficient. But notice what James told them:

<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. <sup>25</sup> But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25)

<sup>14</sup> What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? <sup>17</sup> Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! <sup>20</sup> But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14-20)

Perhaps the above is why Martin Luther criticized this book.

### **So, How do Christians Live?**

Throughout history, there have been true Christians, just as Jesus prophesied (Matthew 16:18; Revelation 2 & 3).

They distanced themselves from the deceitful arguments of the mystery of iniquity (2 Thessalonians 2:7), but instead strove to keep the Ten Commandments.

Real Christians lived differently than most who professed Christ and they were often persecuted for it.

Real Christians understand Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*:

<sup>5:1</sup> And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. <sup>2</sup> Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. <sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

<sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

<sup>17</sup> "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. <sup>23</sup> Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

<sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and

cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

<sup>31</sup> “Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

<sup>33</sup> “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; <sup>35</sup> nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

<sup>38</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. <sup>40</sup> If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. <sup>41</sup> And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. <sup>42</sup> Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? <sup>48</sup> Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:1-48)

<sup>6:1</sup> “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup> Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. (Matthew 6:1-4)

This affects Christians at work, at school, at home, and all the time. They are not only Christians when they attend church services. They try not to live as hypocrites. Nor do they view pornography, engage in fornication or homosexuality, or live a life of hate. We are to

strive for perfection to be sons and daughters of God. What a massive potential we have as Christians.

Real Christians have the right priorities and seek first the Kingdom of God.

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?”

<sup>28</sup> “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; <sup>29</sup> and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”

<sup>31</sup> “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness**, and all these things shall be added to you. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:25-34)

Ambassadors work full time for their governments. Christians should be working for God’s government and His coming kingdom.

Seeking first the Kingdom of God also means that real Christians do not compromise God’s law for business, family, lust, or other purposes (see also the free online booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom of God* and *The Ten Commandments: The Decalogue, Christianity, and the Beast*).

Consider that the Apostle Paul wrote:

<sup>14</sup> Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup> And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.”

<sup>17</sup> Therefore

“Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” <sup>18</sup> ‘I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Real Christians are not to marry those who are not real Christians—meaning real Church of God Christians. Experience has also shown this does not work out well spiritually.

Paul's admonition is also a warning against various types of business and other partnerships. Plus it is a warning against improper ecumenism.

You are unique. Your life experiences, etc. make you one who can give love in a unique way. Jesus has a place specially prepared for you (John 14:2-3). But as a Christian, you also have talents now so:

<sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

<sup>10</sup> Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

<sup>31</sup> Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

<sup>32</sup> Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, <sup>33</sup> just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. (1 Corinthians 10:31-33)

As a Philadelphian Christian, despite struggles, you should have the desire to GIVE, to share with and to help this wretched world. You will want to put your whole heart into God's Work. You should be zealous for the truth (John 17:17-19; 1 Peter 3:15-16). You will want to completely dedicate yourself to having a part in warning the world of the dramatic events to occur just before the close of this age. You will realize that this physical world will not continue as it has been. God may very well use you in the coming end time persecution to give a powerful witness (Mark 13:9) that will help "instruct many" (Daniel 11:32-33).

Notice also the following:

<sup>17</sup> A wicked messenger falls into trouble, But a faithful ambassador brings health. (Proverbs 13:17)

Be a faithful ambassador to support teaching God's way of life and His coming Kingdom to this sick, Satanically-deceived, world.

Remember that real Christians are to pray and the Bible teaches this (Matthew 6:5-7). In modern times it has been suggested that Christians should strive to pray at least thirty minutes per day, although the Bible itself does not specify an amount of time. Yet when it teaches, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), this suggests some amount of regular prayer. Christians should pray (for more on prayer, see our booklet *Prayer: What Does the Bible Teach?*).

Christians should meditate on God's laws and His way of life (Psalm 19:7). The truth is that God is love (1 John 4:8, 15) and NOT selfish. God's laws show love towards God and our neighbor (Mark 12:29-31; James 2:8-11). The ways of the world are selfish and end in death (Romans 8:6). Christians realize keeping God's laws and commandments show love and they are not burdensome:



<sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:2-3)

Real Christians read the Bible (those who could read) and the more honorable ones daily (Acts 17:11; Ephesians 6:17). In modern times it has been suggested that Christians should strive to study at least thirty minutes per day. Although, again, the Bible itself does not specify.

The New Testament teaches, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches" (Galatians 6:6). Real Christians tithe (Matthew 23:23). And there are multiple tithes (Deuteronomy 14:22-29). As far as how to calculate tithes, basically they are on income. In my view, net income after taxes as the income recipient has essentially no choice but to pay the taxes, which is something else that Christians should do (Mark 12:14-17; Matthew 17:24-27). Christians also give offerings, including on the biblical holy days (Deuteronomy 16:16-17; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15).

True Christians will believe God that He will bless the tithe-payer (Malachi 3:8-10). While it takes faith to tithe when one is poor, one will often remain poor if one will not tithe. Do not be "a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25)

People who are not givers are not real Christians. Consider also, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). NOTE: Let me add here that I, Bob Thiel, do NOT take a salary from the *Continuing* Church of God, so I am NOT writing this to tell people to give so that I can have what is given. It is in one's spiritual best interest to give, and if one is not doing that, then one is not truly living as a Christian.

Jesus was approached by a wealthy one who claimed to be committed to Him, but his attachment to owning wealth was too strong for him (Matthew 19:16-22). But poor and middle class people have problems with this too. Many do not have the faith to believe:

<sup>9</sup> Honor the Lord with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; <sup>10</sup> So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine. (Proverbs 3:9-10)

<sup>27</sup> He who gives to the poor will not lack, But he who hides his eyes will have many curses. (Proverbs 28:27)

<sup>8</sup> "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?'

In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup> You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. <sup>10</sup> Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. (Malachi 3:8-10)

<sup>6</sup> Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. <sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. <sup>8</sup> For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. <sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:6-10)

Have faith and give as God wants His people to. Consider:

<sup>20</sup> If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (1 John 4:20-21)

Philadelphians do not hate their brethren. They show love through giving and supporting them physically and spiritually. They also love others by supporting the work to fulfil Matthew 24:14 and Matthew 28:19-20.

Jesus said His disciples would fast (Mark 2:20). And while all who can are basically required to fast once per year on the Day of Atonement, historically the Church of God has suggested that once per month is a good goal for fasting—though this frequency is not specified in scripture.

Real Christians do not go out and get tattoos (Leviticus 19:28).

Real Christians avoid eating biblically unclean meats (Leviticus 11:4-8, 10-20, 23-30; Deuteronomy 14:3, 7-8, 10, 12-19). Because of this, some have been killed by Greco-Romans who profess Christianity.

Speaking of foods, God tells His people to “eat what is good” (Isaiah 55:2), thus Christians should be careful about their diets and not eat that which is not good for them. Nor should Christians smoke cigarettes or cigars or pipes or marijuana.

Real Christians are not dishonest at work or school. They do not lie or cheat. They do not go along with sin in organizations. Christians do not read horoscopes, practice witchcraft, or see fortune tellers (Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:10). It should be pointed out that while many astrologers and those who follow astrology claim to be Christian, that is not true.

Real Christians do not have idols in their homes, carry “lucky charms,” etc.

Real Christians are not to have “filthy communications” come out of their mouths (Colossians 3:8; see also the free online booklet *The Ten Commandments: The Decalogue, Christianity, and the Beast*).

Real Christians understand the importance of God’s commandments and that He will judge them for their works:

13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.

14 For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

Christians are to properly teach and bring up their children (1 Thessalonians 2:11; Ephesians 6:1; 1 Timothy 3:4,12; 5:4,10,14; Titus 1:6; 2:4).

Christian women should not have short masculine hair styles and Christian men should not have long feminine hairstyles (1 Corinthians 11:14-15). Since pagan priests tended to totally shave their heads, this does not seem to be a proper regular practice for Christian men (Leviticus 19:27; 21:5).

Christians also are to not cross-dress (Deuteronomy 22:5) and should dress with proper propriety and modesty (1 Timothy 2:9).

Christians should treat other Christians with purity (1 Timothy 4:12, 5:1-2). Those who are single may also wish to read our free online book: *Dating: A Key to Success in Marriage, a practical dating guide for Christians*, available at [www.ccog.org](http://www.ccog.org). We also have a short animation at the CCOG Animations You Tube channel: *First Date: Worldly vs. Christian*.

Christians do not get drunk or participate in improper revelries, and this can make them unpopular with those who previously considered them to be friends as the Apostle Peter wrote:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, <sup>2</sup> that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. <sup>3</sup> For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. <sup>4</sup> In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. (1 Peter 4:1-4)

So, Christians are subject to be talked about badly for doing what is right. The Apostle Peter also wrote:

<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; <sup>13</sup> but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. <sup>14</sup> If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. (1 Peter 4:12-14)

Thus, negative consequences from the world for being a Christian is expected. Real Christians realize this, yet continue. They understand Jesus' admonition:

<sup>21</sup> “Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. <sup>22</sup> And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. <sup>23</sup> When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

<sup>24</sup> “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! <sup>26</sup> Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. (Matthew 10:21-26)

## **Holidays, Holy Days, and the Sabbath**

Should you observe God’s Holy Days or demonic holidays?

Most who profess Christ keep holidays with demonic ties.

Yet like the original Christians, Philadelphian Christians today do not observe religious pagan holidays (see our free online booklet *Should You Keep God’s Holy Days or Demonic Holidays?*) or generally (some may not know about this) birthdays.

This can make them unpopular with some of their neighbors, co-workers, employers, and/or families (cf. Matthew 10:34-39).

Real Christians observe the biblical holy days.

Consider something that the Apostle John wrote:

<sup>18</sup> Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:18-19)

One of the first changes in NOT following the practices of the Apostle John was by those who, unlike the Apostles, changed the date of Passover from the 14th of Nisan/Abib to a Sunday. This is despite it being known that the Apostles, like John and Philip, absolutely did keep Passover on the 14th and did not teach Sunday (the same is true of the Apostle Paul—see the free online book: *Continuing History of the Church of God*).

Observing Passover on the 14th as faithful Christians still do risked the death penalty as Roman (Catholic) Emperor Theodosius decreed in the late fourth century.

So can you handle verbal persecution? Pray that you can (we also have a free booklet *Prayer: What Does the Bible Teach?*). One of the reasons we have booklets available on topics such as *Is God’s Existence Logical?* and *Proof Jesus is the Messiah* (all of our booklets are free online

at [www.cog.org](http://www.cog.org)) is so you can know the certainty of the truth (cf. Luke 1:4) to handle the persecutions to come (cf. Daniel 7:25, 11:28-36).

Real Christians prepare for the Passover each year by examining themselves (2 Corinthians 13:5). They also remove leaven from their homes and eat unleavened bread for seven days each year while trying to totally avoid consuming any leaven during that time (see our free online booklet *Should You Keep God's Holy Days or Demonic Holidays?*).

Christians keep the Feast of Pentecost and Feast of Trumpets.

Christians observe the Day of Atonement (called "the Fast" is Acts 27:9) and those who can fast that day by completely abstaining from food and drink (those with health concerns, nursing mothers, small children, etc. normally do not). This is difficult for various ones as some get headaches and others have other issues with fasting. In terms of other difficulties, I was almost put in jail once because I was not going to go to work on the Day of Atonement (I was in the military at the time).

Christians observe the Feast of Tabernacles which normally involves traveling out of one's region. In the Book of Psalms it is referred to as "a pilgrim feast" (Psalm 42:4). This type of travel can cause problems for employees, business owners, students, and parents.

Christians keep the Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday each week:

<sup>3</sup> Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." <sup>5</sup> And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." <sup>6</sup> It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience...<sup>9</sup> There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; <sup>10</sup> for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. <sup>11</sup> Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:3-6, 9-11, NIV).

Christians are not to be disobedient to the Sabbath command. Yes, keeping the Sabbath has cost various people their job and sometimes resentment from co-workers. Keeping the Sabbath also means no regular shopping on that day. On the other hand, I do believe that the Bible allows for eating out when traveling or spending for some emergency (like going to a hospital), and there are other exceptions. But in some societies not being able to shop on Saturday is difficult as there are Sunday shopping restrictions in many places.

The Sabbath commandment also includes the command to work, and Christians understand that they are to work if they wish to eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12) and are not to be busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:11). It can also be fine to have more than one job (Ecclesiastes 11:16).

Now, because the time for sunset changes, especially in areas far from the equator, some of us have had to get off work early on Fridays in the Winter. Also, keeping the Sabbath means no participating in activities like sports on the Sabbath. The focus is to be on the things of God and not doing one's pleasure (cf. Isaiah 58:13-14).

While many of these seem difficult and some may be hard to understand (cf. 2 Peter 3:16), Christians truly accept:

<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)

Christians do so because they have faith, not only that God exists, but that His ways are best and will have the best results in the end:

<sup>6</sup> But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

This differentiates real Christians from demons and others who, while they believe God exists (James 2:19), they really will not live as He teaches.

There are two ways of life—God's and Satan's. God's way is the way of give.

So, we have now covered some of the 'milk of the word' (1 Peter 2:2) about being a real Christian.

### 3. Being a Christian Affects Your Whole Life

You may be thinking, this seems too much. Being a real Christian affects my whole life.

And that is true. Christians are to be living sacrifices, and not conformed to the world:

<sup>1</sup> I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

A dedicated ambassador will give his or her life for their government. A real ambassador will not conform to the ways of foreign governments which are contrary to his or her own. Christians should be willing to give up their lives for God and not be conformed to this world. The Apostle Paul essentially calls that a reasonable service.

God wants total dedication. That takes faith (see also the online booklet *Faith for Those God has Called and Chosen*).

The Apostle Paul wrote to “put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11). Notice what else he taught:

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

<sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:17)

Being crucified with Christ shows a total commitment. This is real faith. This is part of how real Christians differ from nominal ones.

The Apostle Paul also wrote:

<sup>28</sup> And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Christians have faith that the way of life that is laid out in the Bible will lead to what is best. Many who claim Christianity do not have faith to truly believe that all things are working together for good. If you are wondering whether or not God is calling you, check out our free online booklet: *Is God Calling You?* available at [www.ccog.org](http://www.ccog.org).

As Christians, we are now transitioning from the milk of the word to stronger meat:

<sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it (1 Corinthians 3:2)

Part of the reason that the Bible teaches baptism via total immersion is to help show that this is a total, not partial commitment.

Notice what Jesus taught:

<sup>27</sup> And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it — <sup>29</sup> lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' <sup>31</sup> Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. <sup>33</sup> So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:27-33)

People need to count the cost before becoming Christian and hopefully this book will help many realize some of that cost, but also that it is well worth it (cf. Romans 8:18).

Something that is very important, that most will not really do, and no one does perfectly, is:

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;  
<sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. <sup>7</sup> Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

This is NOT just an Old Testament concept. The Apostle Paul wrote:

<sup>9</sup> ... we should not trust in ourselves but in God (2 Corinthians 1:9).

<sup>19</sup> But I trust in the Lord Jesus ... <sup>24</sup> But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly. (Philippians 2:19,24)

<sup>10</sup> For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. (1 Timothy 4:10)

Most who claim God do not really trust Him. They do not want to labor much nor suffer serious reproach.

Christians need to trust God and pursue love:

<sup>13:13</sup> And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. <sup>14:1</sup> Pursue love (1 Corinthians 13:13-14:1)

Christians are to truly love God and their neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40) and that takes truly following Christ's way of life.

**Building Character with Love is What this Life is All About**



But you might say, all I have to do is believe. Well the demons believe (James 2:14-20) and Jesus said that just claiming Him was not enough:

<sup>21</sup> “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:21-23)

Many have claimed to be Christians, but refused to live as Christians. Jesus does not know them.

Faith is important (for more on faith, read our free online booklet *Faith for Those God has Called and Chosen*). But notice also what the Apostle Paul wrote:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

In the early 2nd century, Ignatius of Antioch taught about love, character, and Christ living His life in Christians:

... the believing have, in love, the character of God the Father by Jesus Christ, by whom, if we are not in readiness to die into His passion, His life is not in us. (Ignatius' Letter to the Magnesians, Chapter 5. Roberts & Donaldson, Anti-Nicene Fathers)

While the Bible mentions that developing character is important for Christians (Romans 5:4; Philippians 2:22), here is some of what Herbert Armstrong taught about it:

So mark well this super-vital truism - that perfect, holy and righteous character is the supreme feat of accomplishment possible for Almighty God the Creator - it is also the means to His ultimate supreme purpose. His final objective.

But how?...such perfect character must be *developed*. It requires the free choice and decision of the separate entity in whom it is to be created. But, further, even then it must be instilled by and from the Holy God who, only, has such righteous character to endow.

Perfect, holy and righteous character is the ability in such separate entity to come to discern the true and right way from the false, to make voluntarily a full and unconditional surrender to God and His perfect way - to yield to be conquered by God - to determine even against temptation or self-desire, to live and to do the right. And even then such holy character is the gift of God. It comes by yielding to God to instill His law (God's right way of life) within the entity who so decides and wills.

Actually, this perfect character comes only from God, as instilled within the entity of His creation, upon voluntary acquiescence, even after severe trial and test...

God made us in His image, after His likeness (form and shape), only composed of matter instead of Spirit. But God says, *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus* (Phil. 2:5). (Armstrong HW. *The Incredible Human Potential*, 1978, pp. 39-40, 52)

In other words, because those called of God will strive to live according to His law, they will have tests and trials that will build the type of "character" (Romans 5:1-4, NJB/NKJV) (δομική), which could be considered a type of "testimony of our conscience" (2 Corinthians 1:12, RNT), that God wants his children to possess.

Notice what else the late Herbert W. Armstrong wrote:

The human spirit of itself cannot see, hear, think or know. The only real LIFE, inherent and self-containing, lies in the Holy Spirit of God, united with the human spirit...At death, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). The spirit is the depository of memory and character. The spirit is like a mold. It retains even the human form and shape of the deceased, so that in the resurrection to judgment those who have died shall look as they did in life, retain whatever character they established in life, remember everything that was stored in their memory. But in the meantime, in death, there is no consciousness--they "know not any thing" (Eccl. 9:5)...

We shall inherit the kingdom at Christ's coming. The dead in Christ shall be resurrected, rising first--changed to Spirit immortality... (Armstrong HW. *Mystery of Ages*, 1985, pp. 110, 127, 344-345)

We go through the tests and trials in life to build character for the resurrection. The Apostle Paul wrote:

<sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. (1 Corinthians 15:13-14)

<sup>13</sup> But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. <sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Thus, Christians basically should be pitied for the way they are supposed to live if there is no resurrection. But since there is, we have comforting hope.

Polycarp of Smyrna, wrote the following in the 2nd century, related to Paul, love, faith, and hope:

These things, brethren, I write to you concerning righteousness, not because I take anything upon myself, but because you have invited me to do so. For neither I, nor any other such one, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. He, when among you, accurately and stedfastly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. And when absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you, and which, being followed by hope, and preceded by love towards God, and Christ, and our neighbour (Polycarp. Letter to the Philippians, chapter III).

Consider something else the Apostle Paul wrote:

<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

<sup>9</sup> "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

In other words, the Apostle Paul is teaching that living the Christian way of life is more than worth it.

A true Christian builds character now through the tests, opportunities, and trials in life (cf. Romans 5:1-4) which will help the Christian be able to personally contribute to the "better tomorrow."

By being obedient, having faith, practicing love, and enduring to the end, Christians will not only build character but make their own eternity better.

God made you to give love in your own unique way (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:20-13:10).

Christians, themselves, later will be changed and perfected at the first resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:50-54) in order to help give love and actually make eternity better (see also the free book, available online at [www.ccog.org](http://www.ccog.org), titled: *The MYSTERY of GOD's PLAN Why Did God Create Anything? Why did God make you?*).

The Apostle Paul referred to this change as "a mystery" (1 Corinthians 15:51).

Jesus promised to have a special place for each Christian and taught all would be rewarded according to their works, as did the Apostle Paul:

<sup>2</sup> In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2, NAS)

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in

exchange for his soul? <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. (Matthew 16:24-27)

<sup>8</sup>...each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor (1 Corinthians 3:8)

The Apostle Paul called Satan the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4, KJV) or more properly, “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4, NKJV). Jesus called Satan “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31). The world does not respect God’s laws, but goes the way of Satan.

Christians are to live a different way of life than the world.

The Bible also refers to this as “the Way” (Acts 24:14, 22) or “the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25). It is also called “the way of truth” (2 Peter 2:2) and “the way of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:21). Peter also wrote:

<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, (2 Peter 1:2)

<sup>17</sup> You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; <sup>18</sup> but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:17-18)

The Christian life is not static. We are to grow in grace and knowledge. Notice also:

<sup>14</sup> Wise people store up knowledge, (Proverbs 10:14)

<sup>23</sup> Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding. (Proverbs 23:23)

<sup>15</sup> See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. <sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies. <sup>21</sup> Test all things; hold fast what is good. <sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:15-22)

<sup>9</sup> For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; <sup>10</sup> that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; (Colossians 1:9-11)

Such knowledge comes from the word of God and sermons, etc. (Romans 10:14-17).

Change is not easy. It is often resisted. Some act like they are like a type of a spiritual stick-in-the-mud. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were not noted for their open-mindedness to

change themselves either. Jesus came bringing light and truth (John 12:46; 14:26, etc.), but most of the world of that day rejected the light. Even those who thought that they were God's people:

<sup>11</sup> He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. (John 1:11).

The religious leaders of Jesus' time were unable to accept the new understanding brought by Jesus from God the Father.

Jesus, in a sense, "rocked their boat."

Jesus was a disturber of the status quo. And while you may think that the Pharisees and Sadducees should have changed—and they should have—what about you? It has been claimed that "academically, the Pharisees were unable to resist the wisdom with which Christ spoke" and that "emotionally they resisted it to the point of crucifying Him!."

The spirit and attitude of the tradition-bound Pharisees lives on today in those professing Christians who resist change.

Do not be like them. A real Christian will change and submit to God:

<sup>7</sup> Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:7-10)

Christians are to be a NEW creation:

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Hence, the Christian life MUST be a change from before.

Furthermore, Christians are to know the Bible and the truth which sets us apart from the false Babylonian world system that Satan deceives (cf. Revelation 12:9):

<sup>31</sup> "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. <sup>32</sup> And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)

<sup>16</sup>...They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. (John 17:16-17)

Christians are granted the "love of the truth" so they will not be deceived as others will be (2 Thessalonians 2:7-14).

### **You Cannot Earn Your Salvation**

Some, especially those with a Protestant background may be thinking that all of this sounds like doing works to earn salvation.

But it is not.

No one can earn their own salvation:

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

But notice the next verse:

<sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

So, while no one can earn their salvation, Christians are expected to have the type of works that God requires.

And Christians are to be humble about this:

<sup>8</sup> He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

<sup>1</sup> I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, <sup>2</sup> with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. <sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Ephesians 4:1-7)

A true follower of God does justly and loves mercy. Christians are saved, not because of their works, but because of God's grace and mercy. Notice also:

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

It is through God's mercy that He sent His son to die for our sins.

### **Real Christians Understand that They Are Not to Choose to Disobey**

God expects His people to obey:

<sup>10</sup> Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup> for so an entrance will be supplied to

you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:10-11)

<sup>17</sup> For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17)

The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God (Acts 5:32). Christians are to fully obey God.

Yet, many believe that they can be partial Christians.

They think that as long as they believe and they do only parts of what God wants, that God will understand.

It is true that God will understand. He will understand that you do not really love Him as you should. Notice also the following:

<sup>37</sup>...“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Purposeful disobedience is condemned in the Bible:

<sup>26</sup> For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,<sup>27</sup> but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26-29)

Do not be a ‘cafeteria Christian’ picking and choosing which of God’s commands to obey.

Partial disobedience is also condemned:

<sup>8</sup> If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; <sup>9</sup> but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. <sup>11</sup> For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:8-13)

Christians strive to love God and their neighbor, try to not purposely disobey any of God’s commands, and are aware, however, of God’s mercy. Don’t be a hypocrite (cf. Matthew 6:5).

Do not see how close you can come to sin—try to avoid even the appearance of sin (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

This does not mean that Christians never sin as the following shows:

<sup>1:8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

<sup>2:1</sup> My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 1:8-2:1)

Sin should not be deliberate. When we sin, we should confess our sins to God as the above shows.

### **Christians are to be on God's Side**

Now is important for Christians to be on God's side.

The Apostle Paul said his way of living should be an example for us.:

<sup>16</sup> Therefore I urge you, imitate me. (1 Corinthians 4:16)

<sup>17</sup> Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. (Philippians 3:17)

Paul's example included keeping biblical customs (Acts 28:17), like the Holy Days (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Acts 18:21).

The Apostle James wrote that God's people need to endure:

<sup>9</sup> Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! <sup>10</sup> My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. <sup>11</sup> Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. (James 5:9-11)

Christians are to be examples, and sometimes will suffer for being Christian.

The Apostle Peter wrote:

<sup>19</sup> For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. <sup>20</sup> For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup> For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: <sup>22</sup> "Who committed no



sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;<sup>23</sup> who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;<sup>24</sup> who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed. (1 Peter 2:19-24)

Just as Christ set us an example to follow, our lives should serve as examples to others.

Notice something about the Christians in Thessalonica:

<sup>6</sup> And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,<sup>7</sup> so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

<sup>13</sup> For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. <sup>14</sup> For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, (1 Thessalonians 2:13-14)

Paul’s followers in Thessalonica followed the example of those in Judea and became an example for others through their suffering as Christians.

Jesus taught Christians were to be “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

This means we live differently than the world:

<sup>15</sup> Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. <sup>17</sup> And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

And while many think that they do not love the world, understand that God expects His people to truly be on His side:

<sup>13</sup> And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”

<sup>14</sup> So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.”

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?” (Joshua 5:13-14)

Joshua was clearly chosen by God (Numbers 27:18), but notice that even he had to be told he was to be on God's side. It is being on God's side, living His way, that puts God more on our side.

Christians are to be on God's side. Sometimes that causes problems with those in other faiths.

Does that mean to compromise then?

No.

The Apostle John wrote:

<sup>21</sup> I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. (1 John 2:21)

<sup>3</sup> For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. <sup>4</sup> I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (3 John 3-4)

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. (3 John 11)

No lie is of the truth. Those who do not really live as a Christian are NOT our spiritual brethren.

The Bible even has a warning for some of God's people in the end times:

<sup>2</sup> ... Babylon ... <sup>4</sup> ... Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. (Revelation 18:2, 4)

What should we do then?

In addition to not compromising with this world's false religions, recall that Jesus taught:

<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (Matthew 5:44)

Have the faith (see also our free online booklet: *Faith for Those God has Called and Chosen*) to live as a Christian and pray (see also our free online booklet: *Prayer: What Does the Bible Teach?*).

Notice some passages from the Old Testament:

<sup>13</sup> As a vessel of snow in a day of harvest, [So is] a faithful ambassador to those sending him, And the soul of his masters he refresheth. (Proverbs 25:13, Young's Literal Translation)

<sup>17</sup> A wicked messenger falls into trouble, But a faithful ambassador brings health.  
(Proverbs 13:17)

Consider also what the Apostle James was inspired to write:

<sup>26</sup> If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. <sup>27</sup> Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:26-27)

Self-control, doing good, and not compromising with the world is something that real Christians are to do. We need to help those we can:

<sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:9-10)

Real Christianity is not mainly self-focused.

## 4. Our Potential is Enormous Because God is On Our Side

The Bible teaches:

<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32)

We who are on God's side will win.

Jesus said:

<sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Matthew 24:12-13).

The Apostle Paul was inspired to write:

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, <sup>5</sup> for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; (Philippians 1:2-6).

<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." <sup>37</sup> Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

<sup>12</sup> Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:12-13)

Now, sometimes that may mean that you stop working on something and instead work on something else. That is a technique that can often help when you encounter difficulties and frustrations.

If you do not give up on God, He will not give up on you!

Your potential is enormous:

<sup>5</sup> For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. <sup>6</sup> But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him,

Or the son of man that You take care of him? <sup>7</sup> You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. <sup>8</sup> You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. <sup>9</sup> But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. <sup>10</sup> For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. <sup>11</sup> For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, <sup>12</sup> saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.” <sup>13</sup> And again: “I will put My trust in Him.” And again: “Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.” (Hebrews 2:5-13)

Christians are to be children of God to rule the universe in the Kingdom of God!

God “seeks godly offspring” (Malachi 2:15).

Jesus taught deification:

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “You are gods” ‘? <sup>35</sup> If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), <sup>36</sup> do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? (John 10:34-36)

Paul wrote that Jesus was to be the firstborn of many brethren:

<sup>29</sup> For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29).

Notice that there are to be MANY brethren.

Notice what happened with Jesus is supposed to happen to us:

<sup>20</sup> But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

<sup>18</sup> Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures (James 1:18).

<sup>4</sup> These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb (Revelation 14:4).

<sup>16</sup> For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches (Romans 11:16).

Christians are to be firstfruits like Christ. As a firstfruit, Christ is divine.

Notice something Jesus prayed:

<sup>10</sup> And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. (John 17:10-11)

Since both the Father and Son are divine beings, Jesus prayed for His followers to be one as He and the Father are—which means part of the God family. Lest anyone wish to interpret the above scripture to mean something else, Jesus continued His prayer and also prayed the following:

<sup>20</sup> “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; <sup>21</sup> that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. <sup>22</sup> And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. <sup>24</sup> “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. <sup>25</sup> O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. <sup>26</sup> And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:20-26)

Jesus prayed that His followers would become one in the same way He and His Father are one. And they are one divine family.

Furthermore, notice that the Bible does teach that there is a whole family which is named after God the Father, and that we are to know the love of Christ so that we can truly have the fullness of God:

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees to **the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,** <sup>15</sup> **from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,** <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that **you, being rooted and grounded in love,** <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — <sup>19</sup> **to know the love of Christ** which passes knowledge; **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.** (Ephesians 3:14-19).

If one is filled with “all the fullness of God” does not that suggest that they will be also God as part of the Family of God?

The Apostle John taught:

<sup>12</sup> But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).

<sup>1</sup> Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! <sup>2</sup> Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God (1 John 3:1-2a).

The children of people are people, the children of cows are cows. What are the children of God?

The Apostle Peter taught deification:

<sup>3</sup> His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, <sup>4</sup> by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, **that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature** (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Are not those that are “partakers of the divine nature” somehow deified? And fully partaking of this nature does not happen until after the resurrection (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

What God has planned for us is exceedingly wonderful:

<sup>9</sup> But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” <sup>10</sup> But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

It is so fantastic that it is beyond anything any human has ever seen or heard.

## 5. Christians Meet and Promote the Kingdom of God

Jesus had His followers teach the Kingdom of God:

<sup>1</sup> Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. <sup>2</sup> He sent them to preach the kingdom of God (Luke 9:1-2).

The Apostle Paul wrote about the Kingdom of God and Jesus:

<sup>8</sup> And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8).

<sup>25</sup> And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God (Acts 20:25).

<sup>23</sup> So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. ... <sup>31</sup> **preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ** with all confidence, no one forbidding him (Acts 28:23,31).

Notice that the Kingdom of God is not just about Jesus (though He is a major part of it), as Paul also taught about Jesus separately from what he taught about the Kingdom of God.

Paul also called it the gospel of God, but that was still the gospel of the Kingdom of God:

<sup>9</sup> ... we preached to you the gospel of God ... <sup>12</sup> that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:9,12)

Paul also called it the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16). The “good message” of Jesus, the message that He taught.

Consider that it was not simply a gospel about the person of Jesus Christ or just about personal salvation. Paul said the gospel of Christ included obeying Jesus, His return, and God’s judgment:

<sup>6</sup> ... God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, <sup>7</sup> and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, <sup>10</sup> when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

Ambassadors of the Kingdom of God support the message of preaching it.



## **Philadelphia Christians Love Others, Are Faithful to Doctrine, and Go Through Open Doors**

The Bible shows that there are different types of Christians in the end time (cf. Revelation 3). Here is what Jesus said to the Philadelphia Christians:

<sup>7</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”:<sup>8</sup> “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.<sup>9</sup> Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie — indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.<sup>10</sup> Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.<sup>11</sup> Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.<sup>12</sup> He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

<sup>13</sup> “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 3:7-13)

Philadelphia means “love of brethren” or “fond of brethren.” Philadelphians show this love by being concerned enough about others to work to fulfill proclamation and other scriptures.

Jesus said:

<sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

Jesus gave the Philadelphians an open door—this means a door to proclaim the gospel (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 16:8-9; Colossians 4:2-4). Proclaiming the gospel, working to fulfill Matthew 24:14, and being faithful are all characteristics of Philadelphian Christians.

Matthew 24:14 MUST PRIMARILY BE A REFERENCE TO PHILADELPHIAN Christians as God praises the works of the Philadelphians, yet condemns the works of the Laodiceans, which are the predominant Christians in the time immediately preceding the Great Tribulation.

Unlike other Christians, Jesus promises the Philadelphians physical protection from that “hour of trial” (Revelation 3:10), which we often call the Great Tribulation.

Sadly, most Christians in the end times are not actually willing to be ambassadors for the Philadelphian portion of the Church of God.

### **Scattered Brethren**

In the *Continuing* Church of God, we have scattered brethren throughout the USA and Canada, as well as in the Caribbean (like Trinidad & Tobago), Asia, Africa, South America, and elsewhere. We have supporters on all the inhabited continents of the earth as well as dozens of US states.

But for most parts of the world outside of Africa, we do not have congregations close by (to see our list of congregations go to [www.ccog.org](http://www.ccog.org)).

In time, we expect to have more congregations in more places, as we keep getting growth in membership every year. So, if there is no group or congregation in your area, do not give up—hang in there, faithfully of course, and perhaps in time, we will have a group/congregation near you. Maybe even one you might help form!

Jesus taught, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). Do not be one called who gives up because there is no group geographically close to you.

The Bible teaches:

<sup>4</sup> Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. <sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. <sup>6</sup> He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. <sup>7</sup> Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him (Psalm 37:4-7)

Sometimes Christians have to wait and trust God to establish congregations near them.

Remember, Jesus promised Philadelphian Christians that they would be “pillars” in the Temple of God (Revelation 3:12). Therefore in this age, sometimes being a foundational part of a new group, or standing alone in a separated area, could be part of your training for that reward.

Of course, we should fellowship on the Sabbaths when we can (Hebrews 10:24-25). God’s Holy Days, like the Feast of Tabernacles, are another opportunity for that (cf. Leviticus 23:2; Romans 12:1).

In the *Continuing* Church of God, we hold the Feast of Tabernacles in multiple places around the world. This festival is a time that God expects those that can to travel (cf. Psalm 42:4); far away if need be (cf. Deuteronomy 14:22-27). This festival also gives Philadelphian Christians an opportunity to fellowship together.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the early days of the old Radio Church of God, people often had to wait years for an opportunity to hear sermons or have contact with other like-minded Christians. To better serve our scattered brethren in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we put out a weekly email titled Letter to the Brethren. It has a suggested Sabbath service, as well as, when appropriate, Holy Day information. So, regular sermons, etc. are available for those who are willing.

Additionally, the weekly Letter has news of what is going on in the *Continuing Church of God* around the world. If you wish to receive it, simply contact Dr. Bob Thiel, email [cogwriter@aol.com](mailto:cogwriter@aol.com)

Pray and be patient, and trust that God (Proverbs 3:5-7) will call others that you can fellowship with.

As a pillar, you can be an ambassador for Philadelphian Christianity.

### **Christians Live God's Way of Life**

Christians live God's way of life on the earth. We are to live as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. A way of life that is best for us, best for humanity, and best for eternity.

Some of the details this booklet went through may seem difficult, and yes, they are at times. And yes, there are probably others that should have been included, but hopefully this overview will help those who read this.

While God has rules and laws for our good, understand that His ways are all about love. Love towards us and others.

The reality is that real Christians are to live differently than the world does. This helps them build character so that God will use them later in His kingdom. Christians will be rewarded according to their works (Matthew 16:27; 1 Corinthians 3:8).

A true Christian builds character now through the tests, opportunities, and trials in life (cf. Romans 5:1-4) which will help the Christian be able to personally contribute to the "better tomorrow" in the Kingdom of God.

By being obedient, having faith, practicing love, and enduring to the end, Christians will not only build character but make their own eternity better—and Christians will contribute to making eternity better for all who will later accept God's call.

Christians are prophesied to reign with Jesus:

<sup>9</sup> ... You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10)

<sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6)

<sup>4</sup> They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:4-5)

And the good news is that Jesus will return and will usher in a time that ultimately will result:

<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4)

And that is part of the good news of being a Christian as we reign with Christ in that Kingdom.

Will you truly live this way of life?

To live as a Christian, you are living as an ambassador to the coming Kingdom of God.

# *Continuing Church of God*

The USA office of the *Continuing Church of God* is located at: 1036 W. Grand Avenue, Grover Beach, California, 93433 USA. We have supporters all around the world, and in all inhabited continents (all continents, except Antarctica).

## **Continuing Church of God Website Information**

**CCOG.ORG** The main website for the *Continuing Church of God*.  
**CCOG.ASIA** Asian-focused website, with multiple Asian languages.  
**CCOG.IN** India-focused website, with some Indian languages.  
**CCOG.EU** European-focused website, with multiple European languages.  
**CCOG.NZ** Website targeted towards New Zealand.  
**CCOGAFRICA.ORG** Website targeted towards Africa.  
**CCOGCANADA.CA** Website targeted towards Canada.  
**CDLIDD.ES** This is a totally Spanish language website.  
**PNIND.PH** Philippines-focused website, with some Tagalog.

## **Radio & YouTube Video Channels**

**BIBLENEWSPROPHECY.NET** Bible News Prophecy online radio.  
**Bible News Prophecy** channel. YouTube sermonettes.  
**CCOGAfrica** channel. YouTube video messages from Africa.  
**CCOG Animations** Animated messages on YouTube.  
**CDLIDDsermones** channel. YouTube messages in Spanish.  
**ContinuingCOG** channel. YouTube video sermons.

## **News and History Websites**

**CHURCHHISTORYBOOK.COM** Church history website.  
**COGWRITER.COM** News, history, and prophecy website.