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Spring/Summer 2022



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How You Can Have and Keep the
Holy Spirit

Follow God

Is a Prophet a Messenger of God?

MESSENGER

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What is the value of receiving the Holy Spirit? How is the Spirit of God manifested? What are its fruits? What does it take to receive the Holy Spirit? And once received, can it be lost? In this edition, learn how you can have and keep the Holy Spirit. We all make choices in whom and what to follow. The leader or leaders you choose to follow can have far reaching consequences on your own welfare. So whom should you follow? Should human beings decide for themselves what is right and wrong? Or should we trust God to tell us what is right and wrong in his sight? And is a prophet a messenger of God? Find answers in this edition.

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Editor: Rod Reynolds

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How You Can Have and Keep the Holy Spirit

By Rod Reynolds

As recorded in Scripture, the Holy Spirit was given to the Church of God on the day of Pentecost following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues [languages, as each listener heard the message in his own language, verse 6], as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).

This was obviously a special manifestation of the Holy Spirit, as the phenomena mentioned is not typical of the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Later that day, preaching to a crowd gathered for the Feast, Peter said: “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” (Acts 2:38).

Then it says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (Acts 2:41).

There's no indication here that when these people were baptized and received the Holy Spirit the same type of phenomena occurred as is described in the first few verses of Acts 2. Although on occasion the giving of the Holy Spirit **may be** accompanied by unusual signs, such as speaking or hearing someone

speak in a foreign language, **that is not normally the case.**

However, the Holy Spirit does effect a change in character, in one's mind and heart, when it is granted as a down payment of eternal life. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of **power and of love and of a sound mind**" (2 Timothy 1:7).

With the help of the Holy Spirit, one can begin to overcome the fleshly nature and live according to the righteous requirements of God's laws. "For what the law [i.e., Old Covenant] could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, **that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For **to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace**" (Romans 8:3-6).

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are not manifested in eccentric behavior, losing control of oneself, fainting, weird dancing, speaking unintelligible gibberish, or other nonsense. "But the **fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.** Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-25).

"...for the **fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth**" (Ephesians 5:9).

In other words, the Holy Spirit can help you overcome the lusts of the flesh, and live in accordance with God's standards of behavior, as defined in his word (cf. Romans 12:21). "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:7; cf. Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 25; 3:5, 12, 21).

What does it take to receive the Holy Spirit? And once received, can it be lost? In this article we examine the question of how you can have and keep the Holy Spirit.

(1) Repent.

A necessary condition for receiving the Holy Spirit is repentance. Repentance in this context means to turn from rebellion and disobedience to God, and humble yourself before God and his law, and begin to obey. "...sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). Only those who come to understand what sin is, and who determine to strive to rid their lives of sin with God's help,

may receive the Holy Spirit in the sense of becoming new creature, undergoing a life changing reformation that leads to growing into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, **'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'**" (Acts 2:37-38).

Genuine repentance requires a change of mind and heart, and turning from sinful conduct to that which is righteous, that is, lawful according to God's word (Ezekiel 18:1-32; 33:7-20; 2 Peter 2:21).

(2) Set your goal and pursue it.

As a Christian, your number one goal ought to be the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

When you repent and are baptized, you are entering into a covenant relationship with God. Typified by the Old Covenant with Israel, entering into this covenant implies faith toward God and obedience to his laws.

Through Moses, God told the people of Israel after he brought them out of Egypt: "Now therefore, **if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant**, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And **you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel" (Exodus 19:5-6).

After speaking the words of the ten commandments from Mt. Sinai, God gave further details of his law to Moses, and Moses recited the law of the covenant to the people. And the people, having heard, responded: "**All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient**" (Exodus 24:7).

However, the physical people of Israel failed to remain faithful to the covenant. On the whole, they persistently refused to obey God as they had promised, although there were notable exceptions. So God rejected them eventually, and they were sent into captivity (Nehemiah 9:13-37; 2 Kings 17:15-20).

Similar but **better promises** are granted to spiritual Israel—the Church of God—under the New Covenant, of which the Old Covenant was a type. "But now He [Jesus Christ] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a **better covenant, which was established on better promises.** For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because **finding fault with them**, He says: 'Behold, the

days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because **they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them**, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will **put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people**” (Hebrews 8:6-10). Writing to the Church Peter wrote: “You also, as living stones, are **being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2: 5).

But the Church, the individual members and the body as a whole, also must remain faithful to their commitment, in order to remain under God's grace. “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, **if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off**” (Romans 11:22).

Keeping your commitments, keeping your word, is one of the most important lessons you can learn in life. And this is especially true of the commitment you make or made to God at the time of your conversion and baptism.

Speaking in a parable to some of the Jewish leaders who opposed him, Jesus said, “A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, “Son, go, work today in my vineyard.” He answered and said, “I will not,” but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, “I go, sir,” but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said to Him, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you’” (Matthew 21:28-31).

When we said “yes” to the terms of the covenant with God that leads to salvation, we agreed to put God first in our lives, to put seeking his kingdom first, seeking his righteousness first, ahead of all other considerations.

That then, ought to be your number one goal in life. Every day, every hour, every minute, that goal ought to be, if not in the forefront of your mind, at least in the back of your mind, and it ought to be the number one force and motivation for how you live your life.

That leads us to the next point:

(3) Seek God daily.

In order to have a meaningful and productive relationship with God you must commune with him on a daily basis. You do that largely through Bible study,

prayer, fasting, and striving to put into practice the principles of God's word.

The words of God themselves are a manifestation of his Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). By daily Bible study you may drink in of God's Spirit. Peter wrote, "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, **desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby**" (1 Peter 2:1-2).

Jesus promised that he and the Father would dwell in those who keep his word. You must know God's word and be mindful of it if you are to keep it. "If anyone loves Me," said Jesus, "**he will keep My word**; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14:23-24).

Berea was a city in Macedonia about 45 miles west of Thessalonica. It is said of those who heard Paul preach the gospel there, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and **searched the Scriptures daily** to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

David wrote, "Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; **But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night**" (Psalms 1:1-2).

David also wrote, "Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice" (Psalms 55:17).

Paul wrote, "Pray without ceasing," meaning daily (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Paul wrote to Timothy, "...without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day" (2 Timothy 1:3).

We need to be mindful continually of our need for ongoing repentance, striving to overcome the flesh and the world, and make a habit of seeking God in daily Bible study, and prayer. Also, we should set aside time on occasion to humble ourselves to God in fasting. These tools are very important to maintaining the Spirit of God and growing spiritually.

(4) Walk in faith.

We've already touched on faith and being faithful. But the importance of faith to having and retaining the Holy Spirit is difficult to over emphasize. Repentance, faith, and the other points we are covering in this article all go hand-in-hand.

Paul summed up his work in Asia (Asia Minor) in the following words, as he spoke of himself, "Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, **repentance toward**

God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

Faith is a fundamental aspect of godly character. Without faith, godly faith, you cannot please God. “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).

The people of the physical nation of Israel failed in fulfilling their calling because they, most of them, lacked faith. Speaking of the Israelites of old, Paul wrote: “For indeed **the gospel was preached to us as well as to them**; but the word which they heard did not profit them, **not being mixed with faith in those who heard it**” (Hebrews 4:2).

Jude reminds us that the people who fell in the wilderness, not having received the promised land, met destruction because they lacked faith. “But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe” (Jude 1:5). The word translated “believe” is πιστεύω (*pisteúō*), which means to have faith, or to believe. Faith is a firm belief. We must believe the testimony of God's word if we are to please God and if we are to have and maintain the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God is given us through faith. Without faith we are dead in our sins, under the curse of the law, which requires the penalty of death for our sins. But we can be forgiven and receive the promise of the Spirit of God through faith, that is, a firm and committed belief in God and his Word.

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:13-14).

The promise of God's kingdom is to those who are of faith. “Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” (Romans 4:16).

Faith and the Holy Spirit go hand in hand. Faith comes by hearing the word of God with a believing heart. “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10). “... **faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**” (Romans 10:17).

Read and study God's word daily, let it inspire, motivate and guide you. Practice living by the Word of God in believing faith.

If we fail to have or maintain godly faith, we also are in danger of losing out on the promises of the Kingdom of God, just as those who fell in the wilderness not having received the promise.

Paul wrote to Timothy: “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example

to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in **faith**, in purity. **Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.** [The gift includes the Holy Spirit, as well as the office in the ministry to which Timothy was ordained.] Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. **Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you**" (1 Timothy 4:12-16).

(5) Obey God.

Many deceivers have come teaching that faith and obedience are somehow antithetical to one another. That if you have faith, you need not concern yourself with obedience.

But in fact, faith and obedience go hand in hand. You can have the Holy Spirit only if you believe God, as we've seen, and only if your faith is a genuine faith which is manifested in how you live your life, in other words, in your obedience to God's commandments.

When Paul testified of his work before King Agrippa, in defense of himself against some Jewish accusers, he said: "But [I] declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, **that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance**" (Acts 26:20).

John the Baptist said to some who had come to be baptized, "Therefore **bear fruits worthy of repentance**, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:8-10). The Bible in Basic English translation renders verse 8 as follows: "Let your change of heart be seen in your works." And God's Word to the Nations translation: "Do those things that prove you have turned to God and have changed the way you think and act" (Matthew 3:8). John Gill comments on the verse as follows: "If you have a proper sense of sin, and true repentance for it, do such works as are suitable to it, and will show the genuineness of it" (*John Gill's Expositor*).

Disobedience to God is a manifestation of a lack of faith, and an unfaithful spirit: "Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a

testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; That the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, That they may **set their hope in God**, And not forget the works of God, But **keep His commandments; And may not be like their fathers, A stubborn and rebellious generation, A generation that did not set its heart aright, And whose spirit was not faithful to God**" (Psalm 78:1-8).

The Spirit of God is called the "Spirit of truth," which abides with those who keep the commandments of God.

Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom [which] the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him [it] nor knows Him [it]; but you know Him [it], for He [or it] dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:15-17; the pronouns in verse 17 in the original referring to the Holy Spirit are all neuter, see our articles, "What Is the Holy Spirit," and "Origins of the Trinity," for more on these subjects).

God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit as a down payment on eternal life, only to those who obey him. The apostles testified to their persecutors: "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom [which] God has given to **those who obey Him**" (Acts 5:32).

"Has given" is translated from an aorist form of the Greek word δίδωμι (*didōmi*), which should be translated in this case "gives." God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey him. In the Concordant version this verse is translated, "We are witnesses to these declarations, as well as the holy spirit which God **gives** to those yielding to him."

One who willfully disobeys God's laws is placing a barrier between himself and God, and may not receive, or may not retain indefinitely, the Holy Spirit.

(6) Stir up the Spirit.

We are warned, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

There are various ways in which one might "quench" the Spirit, that is suppress it or lose it entirely.

One way is simple neglect, failing to do the things we've been talking about that cultivate, nurture and strengthen the Spirit of God dwelling in us.

We've already read the Scripture in 1 Timothy 4:14, "**Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.**"

Jesus said, "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were

wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for **our lamps are going out.**' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:1-13). Oil is one of the symbols used in Scripture for the Holy Spirit (cf. Exodus 28:41; Psalm 89:20; 133:2; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38).

In Hebrews we read: "Therefore **we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.** For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,** God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?" (Hebrews 2:1-4).

Hence Paul wrote to Timothy: "Therefore I remind you to **stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind**" (2 Timothy 1: 6-7).

Jesus Christ warned the Ephesian Church, and this same warning can apply to us: "Nevertheless I have this against you, that **you have left your first love.** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; **repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent**" (Revelation 2:4-5).

And to the Laodiceans, and this warning is for us as well, Jesus said: "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As

many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:14-22).

(7) Never quit.

When we entered into the covenant with God when we were baptized, it was a lifetime agreement, likened to a marriage covenant in the Scriptures.

“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another--to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:1-6).

If we turn from the commandments to a life of sin and rebellion, we will lose the Holy Spirit, and come under condemnation.

Speaking of those who, once converted, turn aside, Peter wrote: “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Peter 2:20-22).

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25).

“See that you do not refuse Him who speaks [Jesus Christ]. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven” (Hebrews 12:25).

“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of **endurance**, so **that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise**: For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But **we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul**” (Hebrews 10:35-39).

If we remain faithful to our commitment to God, we can retain the Holy Spirit, and we can reap the rewards of the faithful in God's Kingdom.

Follow God

By Rod Reynolds



Since the year 1789, when the government of the United States began to operate under the newly adopted Constitution, there have been periodic elections to select a President as head of the executive branch of the Federal government, and representatives to serve in the Legislative branch.

Political parties emerged, led by influential politicians. Implied in this system of government is an appeal by the various office holders or would-be office holders to “follow me.”

Those chosen write the laws, set the policies, and administer the government in line with their ideas of how the nation should be governed. Fortunately, the framers of the Constitution had the wisdom to limit the powers of government, ostensibly guaranteeing certain rights to the citizens that the

government could not impinge on, such as freedom of speech, freedom of worship, etc.

At times those rights have been respected, but on other occasions they have been violated. Under slavery those enslaved had no rights to speak of. Since slavery was outlawed, theoretically everyone is to have equal rights under the law, including individual freedoms recognized by the Constitution.

Today, in the year 2022 as this article is appearing in our magazine, we live in a time when those who wield power over the country seek more and more aggressively to impose their views on its citizens with or against their will. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and other individual rights have rarely been less secure on a national scale in the United States than they are today, because of the leaders the people, at least many of them, have chosen to follow.

Government oppression in the United States and some other western nations has not yet reached the level prevailing in many other nations, but it is headed in that direction. Oppression has been the rule among the governments of mankind throughout history.

Human beings are by nature social creatures. In any organized society there have to be leaders, and there have to be those who follow. Most of us function in some way as leaders in certain situations, and as followers in other respects.

We all make choices in whom to follow, and what to follow. The leader or leaders you choose to follow can have far reaching consequences on your own welfare. So, whom should you follow?

The Bible has a lot to say about leading and following. And the Bible is very specific in telling us whom to follow. We are to follow God. Any other choices about this question are subordinate to that choice. Either we are following God, or we are not. And the choices we make determine the answer to that question.

The title of this article is "Follow God." And we will explore briefly what the Bible has to say about this subject.

Human beings in some ways are like sheep. Humans have an inborn herd instinct, somewhat like sheep. But we also have minds to think with. We are given responsibilities and decisions to make in how we will behave.

Even so, human beings often follow a particular path simply because other people are going along in that path. Peer pressure, societal pressure, not infrequently is decisive in determining human behavior, the choices people make in whom or what to follow. Yet, the excuse, "everybody's doing it," is no excuse, as far as God is concerned. And when following a crowd leads to disaster, the fact that "everyone did it," won't save you.

As I mentioned, people are in some ways like sheep. Indeed, the Bible often uses "sheep" as a metaphor for people, human beings. Domesticated sheep

need a shepherd, one who will lead them in the right path, because without a faithful shepherd, they will wander away, get lost, fall prey to predators, or other ills. Even when they have been led to green pasture and good water, they will tend to wander away if not guided by a shepherd.

In an article I read about sheep, is related a case where evidently the shepherds were inattentive, and one of the sheep wandered over to a cliff, being followed by other sheep. The lead sheep walked over the cliff and fell fifteen meters to his death. The others followed, fifteen hundred in all. Many of them, almost a third, were killed.

While we humans are likened in the Bible to sheep, we are given warning that we are not to blindly follow other human beings. We are forbidden by God to just follow the crowd in a path of destruction.

"You **shall not follow a crowd to do evil**; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice" (Exodus 23:2).

"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**'" (Matthew 16:24).

In effect God said the same thing to Israel in the wilderness. He entered into a covenant with them, in which they agreed to follow him, to obey his laws, and in turn they would be blessed (Exodus 19:3-8; Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

But it wasn't long before they wandered off the path. Moses was called up into the mountain to receive the instructions—the laws—God had prepared for Israel to follow.

"Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, 'Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him'" (Exodus 32:1).

"Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. **They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them.** They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"' (Exodus 32:6-8).

God was ready at that time to destroy the nation, but Moses appealed to him and God relented. Even so, thousands were punished with death for their rebellion (Exodus 32:9-14, 26-28). Of those who remained, not one of the transgressors was allowed to enter the promised inheritance, not only because of this sin of indulging in idolatry, but other sins of rebellion that they committed along the way, as discussed below. And God sent a plague on them for good measure (Exodus 32:33-35).

Aaron, Moses' brother, who was in a leadership position, was weak. He did

not have the fortitude at that time to take a stand against the mob spirit of rebellion which had spread among the congregation.

All too often, those who are supposed to be leaders, those with some office or title, are more followers than they are leaders. Some ministers are people pleasers. They are more interested in pleasing people than pleasing God, so they teach what they think will be pleasing and popular with the people (cf. II Chronicles 18:9-17; Isaiah 30:9-10; Jeremiah 5:31). Actually, many ministers, and many Churches that call themselves Christian, are that way. They may attract a large following, but they are false shepherds. They really are tools of Satan, and wolves in sheep's clothing.

Those willing to teach and follow the right path, those willing to truly follow God, are few and far between. "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:13-15).

"... Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (II Corinthians 11:14-15).

Joshua was a faithful follower of God. He was up on the mountain when the people persuaded Aaron to make an idol to worship. Later, he was sent along with others to survey the land God was leading the Israelites to. Only he and Caleb brought back a positive report. The others lacked faith that God could give them the land he had promised them.

Moses reminded the Israelites of this forty years later, as they were about to enter the land. The nation had been punished for their disobedience and lack of faith by wandering in the wilderness for forty years. All of that generation died in the wilderness, except Joshua and Caleb.

Moses spoke the following to them: "Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God, who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day. And the Lord heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying, 'Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he **wholly followed the Lord.**' The Lord was also angry with me for your sakes, saying, 'Even you shall not go in there; Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it'" (Deuteronomy 1:32-38).

Often as you read through the Bible you find that when there were strong

and faithful leaders who followed God, the people followed along with them. But as soon as a weak or corrupt leader came along, the people, most of them, turned to idols.

“So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. **When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.** And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so. And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, **when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.** Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, ‘Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not.’ Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua” (Judges 2:7-23).

Years ago, the Worldwide Church of God had grown to include nearly 150,000 members, and millions of others who read the Church's magazine, called "*The Plain Truth*." The Church's leader, Herbert W. Armstrong, died, and within a few years the corrupt leaders who succeeded him had cast off many of the Biblically sound teachings of the Church and replaced them with false teachings more popular with the world. Some ninety percent of the members followed along with the corruption, and abandoned the true worship they had ostensibly committed themselves to.

Mr. Armstrong probably would not have been surprised at this.

Following is a commentary about this that I received by e-mail years ago. It was written dated March 21, 1996 by a man named Ken Burrell. I've corrected some of the punctuation and typographical errors in the e-mail quoted below, and added emphasis in a few places, otherwise, it stands as written:

Mr. Burrell introduced the transcript of a portion of a radio broadcast by Mr. Armstrong: "The following is an excerpt from a sermon HWA gave some time in the early 1960's while doing a series on the World Tomorrow radio program on the book of Hebrews. It touches on the subject of apostasy within the church, and why it happens, and what we should do about it. Food for thought.

"This is verbatim, from the audio tape":

[Mr. Armstrong's radio broadcast] "Next I wanted you to turn over here to Exodus 32 now, and first four verses.

""When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount..."

"Now this is after the Old Covenant had been made, and Moses is up getting some of the laws from God on the mount. He was up there 40 days and 40 nights. And what did the people do while Moses was away from them 40 days?

"Just let God send a leader. People will follow the leader. They want to follow a man instead of following God. And they'll follow the man. And if a man is a man of God they're following God because they follow the man.

"But just let that man go away about 40 days and the people forget all about him. And they get back into their own ways, again. My friends, most of you are like that. That's human nature.

"And my friends, listen. That's the thing you were put on this earth to overcome. That's the thing you were put here to eradicate out of your nature. Why don't you begin to **really** follow God?

"Now, 'Moses delayed to come down....'

"Yes, God kept him up there for 40 days.

"Then, 'The people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, "Up, make us gods...."'

"Make some idol gods, in other words.

""...make us gods, which shall go before us; and as for this Moses, the man

that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.'

"You know, my friends, in my personal experience I have learned that's exactly the way people will act. I've had a little flock that had been raised up. People had been brought to God, which God had brought to Him through my efforts. I hadn't done it. God had done it; but He had used me.

"But, the people looked to me. And as soon as the Work began to expand, and I was taken to Hollywood and New York and Chicago and different places in order to get the Work of God going on radio stations coast-to-coast and all over the nation, I only needed to be gone about 40 days and the people say, 'Oh, as for this Herbert W. Armstrong, we wot not what's become of him. Let's go off into some other doctrines, and let's get off into other.... Let's throw away this truth!'

"I have seen it happen. What kind of human beings are we anyhow?

"And I found they'd only been looking to a **man** in the first place. My friends, I'm not trying to get you to look at me. I'm trying to get you to look at Jesus Christ. He's your Savior! He's on the throne of grace and He's there night and day! And you can go direct to Him anytime. Don't you know that? He **is** there.

"I'm merely a—just another human being to sort of help you a little, that's all. But God is the One that does it. I haven't any power. I just have a little faith, and God has given me faith. And I know He hears" [end of recorded remarks].

Ken Burrell comments: "It makes you wonder about those who take Paul's statement, 'follow me as I follow Christ' as if it meant 'follow me' instead of 'follow Christ'. Or, who boast, 'I am a Jesus Christ **man**,' directing the attention to themselves. Those who criticize HWA [Herbert Armstrong] for teaching a gospel about himself never got the message. The message has always been the same, 'Don't believe me, believe your Bible,' and yet I have actually heard WCG [Worldwide Church of God] ministers say that it only applied to unconverted people. It seems that after all, they were truly only following God because they followed a man. I think I understand now why so many have accepted the new WCG doctrines without so much as cracking open a Bible, after years and years of professing another doctrinal stance."

Yes, there have been ministers in the Church—the Church of God—who've claimed that certain laws and principles apply only to unconverted people. Why would the admonition repeated frequently by Mr. Armstrong, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible," apply only to unconverted people, who, by the very fact they aren't converted, don't believe the Bible, as opposed to those who claim to be converted, and who thus ostensibly do believe the Bible?

God's word applies to everyone, and it especially applies to those who are a part of his Church. If we don't believe the Bible, and if we are not really following the Bible, but simply the dictates of men apart from the Bible, we aren't really following God and any claim to be converted is hollow.

As quoted above, "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**" (Matthew 16:24).

Jesus also appointed shepherds to assist him in taking care of the sheep, as Joshua was appointed to assist Moses in the wilderness.

Paul was appointed as an apostle to take the gospel to the world and to administer Churches under his supervision. Others were also appointed as helpers to shepherd the flock. Paul spoke to a group of them at Miletus near the coast in Asia Minor on his way to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. He said to them:

"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure **savage wolves** will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also **from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves**" (Acts 20:26-30).

In another analogy Jesus likened himself to the **door** to the sheepfold, an enclosure where the sheep were cared for.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the **sheep follow him**, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.' Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. Then Jesus said to them again, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me [making bold claims to draw followers to themselves, cf. Acts 5:35-37] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. **I am the door**. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be

one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:1-16).

God has given us clear instructions in his word, and told us to follow him, which means follow his instructions (cf. Exodus 15:26; 20:6; Leviticus 26:1-46; Matthew 19:17; James 1:22; 2:8-12; John 14:15; 15:10; Revelation 12:17; 14:12; et al). We are to do the will of God, as expressed in his word, properly understood. Ministers who claim to be ministers of God are required to faithfully teach God's word (II Timothy 2:15; 4:2; I Peter 1:22-25). But each of us must put them to the test. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (I John 4:1).

“For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord’” (Jeremiah 29:8-9).

“The simple believes every word, But the prudent considers well his steps” (Proverbs 14:15).

“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’--which you have not known-- ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. **You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him**” (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As in the day of trial in the wilderness."
(Psalms 95:6-8)

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. (John 10:27)

Right and Wrong



Who Decides?

by Rod Reynolds

When Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as President of the United States on March 4, 1861, seven states in the South had already declared their secession from the Union. Despite what you may have heard or read to the contrary, the reason for secession was the question of slavery. Lincoln stated it in his inaugural address: "One section of our country believes slavery is *right*, and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is *wrong*, and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute."

While whether slavery should be extended or not was the immediate political issue of the moment, the contention actually went deeper. There were many abolitionists who felt that slavery such as it existed in the United States at the time was a moral wrong, an evil that should be not just limited but abolished. Many abolitionists had in fact supported the proposition in the 1840's that states favoring the abolition of slavery should separate from the South (en.wikipedia.org, "Secession in the United States," retrieved July 17, 2020).

There were two starkly different views, as Lincoln said, of right and wrong. Who is to decide what is right and wrong?

In the Bible is a law against adultery, and supplementary laws regulating sexual conduct. Under these laws sexual intercourse with anyone to whom one is not married is forbidden. Also, sexual intercourse with someone of the same sex is forbidden, as is cross dressing. Yet these laws are flagrantly violated on a massive scale in today's world, with about forty percent of children born in the United States, and more than fifty percent in some other countries, being born out of wedlock. Venereal diseases and many other problems related to adulterous liaisons are rampant in the world's society.

The rebellion against God's rules concerning sexual behavior is being led by people and institutions at the highest levels of society. An article in the *Washington Times* asks, "...why are we allowing America's public schools to groom our children to be sexualized?" ("How public schools groom kids for sexual predators like Epstein and Maxwell," Rebecca Friedrichs, July 15, 2020).

The article goes on to say, "Leading this despicable charge are unions posing as teachers and the deceptively named Healthy Teen Network, a coalition of over 180 sexual and reproductive-health justice organizations, including the CDC, Planned Parenthood and SIECUS [Sexual Information and Education Council of the United States] whose motto is 'Sex Ed for social change.' Their collective call to action demands funding and legislation for their brand of sex education, which they assert is a 'human right.'"

This coalition of powerful organizations, including tax supported organizations, are distributing materials through the public school system aimed at encouraging children to engage in all sorts of sexual experimentation, which I won't go into detail in describing, except to say it encourages children to engage in premarital sex and homosexual behavior. This is being done in the name of "health," as though it's good for children, and therefore it must be "right." Others, think it's dead wrong.

Friedrichs comments, "Though healthy adults know that sexualizing children leads to heightened sexual activity and even abuse by predators..., the 'experts,' nonetheless, have a stronghold in America's schools thanks to government unions. Unions have woven a tangled web of well-funded organizations, governmental agencies, corrupt politicians and activists who deceive Americans into looking the other way while they sexually molest our kids."

So who is to decide what is right or wrong, government bureaucrats encouraging sexual promiscuity, is it individual human beings, or is it God?

From the earliest time in the history of mankind, the time of the first human parents, human beings decided that they would decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong.

When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit God had forbidden them, they made themselves the arbiters of right and wrong. They rejected God's rules, and had determined to follow their own ideas of right and wrong.

But was this the right decision? Was it the best decision for Adam and Eve, and for mankind? Should human beings today be deciding for themselves what is right and wrong, or should God be trusted to decide and tell us what is right and wrong in his sight?

Consider our origin. Where did human beings come from in the first place?

In 1859 was published "On the Origin of Species," by Charles Darwin, that popularized the idea that all life forms arose gradually through a process of "evolution." The upshot of this idea is that human beings were not created, but "evolved" from dead matter through a process of chemical evolution.

But the idea of such evolution is purely speculative, and is a logical and scientific fallacy, with no real evidence to back it up. Many scientists, including some prominent evolutionists, admit as much.

Chandra Wickramasinghe, Professor and Head of the Department of Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at University College, Cardiff, U.K., was a colleague of noted astronomer Fred Hoyle before the latter's death, and has authored or co-authored several books and scientific papers dealing with cosmic microbiology and evolutionary theories.

In 1981 Wickramasinghe testified in a court trial in Arkansas concerning the constitutionality of a state law mandating balanced treatment of creation-science and evolution-science in public schools.

Wickramasinghe is not necessarily a believer in God, but in his testimony he stated:

"It is believed by neo-Darwinists that the full spectrum of life as we see it today as well as in the past is accounted for by the steady accumulation of copying errors and the consequent development of variety as a primitive living system is copied billions upon billions of times. It is stated according to the theory that the accumulation of copying errors, sorted out by the process of natural selection, the survival of the fittest, could account both for the rich diversity of life and for the steady upward progression from bacterium to Man.

"In our recent book Sir Fred Hoyle and I have argued strongly against this proposition. **We agree that successive copying would accumulate errors, but such errors on the average would lead to a steady degradation of information. It is ridiculous to suppose that the information provided by one single primitive bacterium can be upgraded by copying to produce a man, and all other living things that inhabit our planet. This conventional wisdom, as it is called, is similar to the proposition that the first page of Genesis copied billion[s] upon billions of time[s] would eventually accumulate enough copying errors and hence enough variety to produce not merely the**

entire Bible but all the holding[s] of all the major libraries of the world. The two statements are equally ridiculous. The processes of mutation and natural selection can only produce very minor effects in life as a kind of fine tuning of the whole evolutionary process. There is above all an absolute need for a **continual addition of information for life**, an addition that extends in time throughout the entire period for the geological record.”

He goes on with more scientific arguments refuting Darwinian evolution, and concludes as follows: **“Life could not be an accident, not just on the Earth alone, but anywhere, anywhere at all in the Universe.”** And further, “In the present state of our knowledge about life and about the Universe, an emphatic denial of some form of creation as an explanation for the origin of life implies a blindness to fact and an arrogance that cannot be condoned.”

The Bible supplies answers to the question of the origin of life that man cannot discover on his own. Not only that, but the Bible is the source of many other questions of vital concern to human beings.

According to the Bible, which **emphatically claims to be God’s revealed word**, human beings were created by God, the supreme, Divine Being, uncreated and Eternal. “Know that the Lord [*Yahweh*, the Eternal, or self-existing], He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Psalms 100:3).

According to the Bible, we are God’s creatures and we belong to him.

The creation, with its **brilliantly designed life forms**, its glory and majesty, **is a testimony to God’s wisdom**. “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, The Lord has made them both” (Proverbs 20:12). “Does the hawk fly by your wisdom, And spread its wings toward the south?” (Job 39:26). “O Lord, how manifold are Your works! **In wisdom You have made them all**. The earth is full of Your possessions—This great and wide sea, In which are innumerable teeming things, Living things both small and great” (Psalms 104:24-25). “Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever: To Him who alone does great wonders, For His mercy endures forever; To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, For His mercy endures forever” (Psalms 136:3-5). “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens” (Proverbs 3:19).

The depth and power of God’s wisdom and understanding are beyond human ability to fully measure or comprehend. “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?’ ‘Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?’” (Romans 11:33-35).

By contrast, man’s wisdom, apart from God, is foolishness. “For the

wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile'" (I Corinthians 3:19-20).

In their foolishness men have turned to vanity, to the worship of stones and wooden images. Casting aside God's counsel, human beings are brutish and their ways are the ways of destruction and death.

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

"Inasmuch as there is none like You, O Lord (You are great, and Your name is great in might), Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due. For among all the wise men of the nations, And in all their kingdoms, There is none like You. But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish; A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine. Silver is beaten into plates; It is brought from Tarshish, And gold from Uphaz, The work of the craftsman And of the hands of the metalsmith; Blue and purple are their clothing; They are all the work of skillful men. But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. **At His wrath the earth will tremble, And the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.** Thus you shall say to them: 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens.' He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, And has stretched out the heavens at His discretion. When He utters His voice, There is a multitude of waters in the heavens: 'And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasures.' Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge; Every metalsmith is put to shame by an image; For his molded image is falsehood, And there is no breath in them. They are futile, a work of errors; In the time of their punishment they shall perish" (Jeremiah 10:6-15).

Human beings are incapable of knowing the right path of conduct apart from God's guidance. "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

There's no getting around the fact that injustice exists in our society, and always has. Often movements have arisen, Nazism, Marxism and Communism for example, ostensibly to correct perceived injustices. But all too often, the solutions proposed by human beings to perceived injustice are not really solutions at all, but comprise a path that is destructive and evil.

In today's world, popular movements have sprung up to completely disrupt society, to destroy the nuclear family (man, wife, children in a stable home). To engender lawlessness, to oppose every vestige of Biblical morality.

Rebellion against God's laws is not a pathway to greater justice or peace or prosperity. Rather, it is a pathway to confusion and destruction, to suffering, oppression, disease and death.

“The wicked prowl on every side, When vileness is exalted among the sons of men” (Psalms 12:8).

Our moral compass, regardless of nationality, race or sex, should be the Bible, God’s word. God intends the Bible to be our guide to life. It is the Maker’s manual for human behavior.

Manufactured machines usually come with a manual written by the manufacturer to explain how the machine operates and how it can be maintained in good order. The Bible is God’s manual for for what kind of behavior works for the benefit of human beings and what is destructive and harmful to us.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path” (Psalms 119:105).

“For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Proverbs 6:23).

Unfortunately, most human beings don’t like to be reproved for their evil deeds.

Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

For improvement in every aspect of society, for true justice, for peace, joy, and fulfillment of every human being’s potential, we need to look to God, to his word, his laws, for guidance, not the flawed reasoning of human beings who hate God and his counsel.

God knows what is best. The Maker’s manual shows us the path to understanding what is right, and what is wrong. It teaches us what works to achieve ultimate human happiness, and what doesn’t work.

God told the people of Israel, through Moses, as they were about to enter the land of promise: “You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes” (Deuteronomy 12:8).

It is opposite of wisdom to refuse God’s counsel and follow our lusts and the folly of rebellion against God “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise” (Proverbs 12:15).

God claims the right to decide what is right and wrong, and he expects us to abide by his decisions.

“There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (James 4:12).

God’s laws are transcendent. They are not the product of ignorant, primitive nomads blindly developing for themselves a “god” and a set of laws and rituals of their own devising, as so-called “scholars” have speculated. God’s laws are an expression of eternal principles applying to all people and all times.

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into

judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

God warns us over and over in the Bible that curses will ensue if we do not keep his commandments. "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

Nations and peoples, such as Britain and the United States, and other related peoples, who have known unprecedented prosperity for the past several centuries are just now seeing the beginning of curses that will ultimately result in humiliation and ruin. Rulers, governments, nations, and individuals, who reject God's laws and turn aside from his word will pay the price.

This is illustrated by God's rebuke of the house of David, after Solomon failed to remain faithful to God and allowed rebellion and idolatrous worship to proliferate and flourish in the ancient nation of Israel.

God took most of the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave ten tribes to Solomon's former servant, Jereboam. "Now it happened at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite met him on the way; and he had clothed himself with a new garment, and the two were alone in the field. Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, 'Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: "Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to you" (but he shall have one tribe for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), "because they have forsaken Me, and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the people of Ammon, and have not walked in My ways to do what is right in My eyes and keep My statutes and My judgments, as did his father David. However I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, because I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of My servant David, whom I chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and give it to you—ten tribes"" (I Kings 11:29-35).

God promises that if we, as individuals, nations and as a world, do not turn from our rebellion and evil ways, curses and calamities will befall us. But we can avoid such punishment for doing evil if we turn from our sins and seek God in humility and repentance.

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (I Peter 3:12).

"Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let

the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:6-9).

God told the people of Israel in the wilderness: "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you **life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life**, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

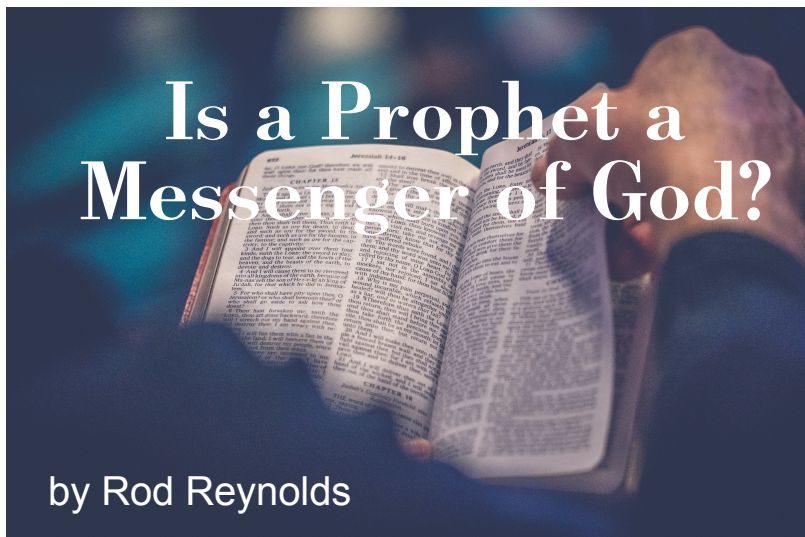
"Now behold, one came and said to Him [Jesus Christ], 'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' So He said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments'" (Matthew 19:16-17).

Sooner or later, every one of us will give account to God for our deeds. "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10-12).

Our nations are on a path to disaster, but it could all be avoided if we would repent, and acknowledge God as lawgiver, and the arbiter of good and evil.

Even if your nation as a whole does not now repent, however, each individual has that option. "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but **now commands all men everywhere to repent**, because **He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world** in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

***For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light;
Reproofs of instruction are the way of life — Proverbs 6:23
There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the
way of death — Proverbs 14:12***



A reader asks, "Is a prophet a messenger of God?" What does the Bible say?

The Hebrew word commonly translated "prophet" in English translations of the "Old Testament" of the Bible is נָבִיא (*nabi*), from a root word meaning to utter, or speak.

The English word "prophet" is from the Greek προφήτης (*prophētēs*), meaning "one who speaks forth" (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*). A true prophet "declares the mind (message) of God, which sometimes predicts the future (foretelling) – and more commonly, speaks forth His message for a particular situation" (*HELPS Word-studies*).

True prophets speak under God's direction, being given his word through the inspiration of the Spirit of God (Jeremiah 1:9; Isaiah 51:16; Ezekiel 1:3). "Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21, NET; compare 2 Timothy 3:16).

The word spoken, or written, by such prophets is a message from God, and hence, they are messengers of God (Isaiah 44:26; Haggai 1:1, 13; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 11:9-10).

In a sense, anyone who speaks, or sings, or writes, under the guidance or inspiration of God's Spirit is "prophesying" (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29; 1 Chronicles 25:1-3; Exodus 15:20-21; Judges 4:4-7; Revelation 1:1-3, 19; 22:18-19). However, in the Bible we read of individuals given the office of a "prophet," who were recognized as having been designated as spokesmen for God with a specific responsibility to act in that capacity (1 Kings 1:8; 16:7; Ezra 5:1; Isaiah 37:2; Jeremiah 1:5; Ezekiel 2:3-5; Acts 11:27-28; 13:1-5; 21:10; 26:22-23;

Romans 1:2).

Yet many among the people of ancient Israel and Judah who claimed to be prophets were not faithful, and were false prophets, who spoke lies (Isaiah 9:15-16; Jeremiah 2:8; 5:13, 31; 6:13; 14:14-15; Zephaniah 3:4; Zechariah 13:2-3; Acts 13:6-10). Though looked to as “prophets,” they were not God’s messengers, but deceivers.

In the same way, many who claim to be “apostles,” or “ministers” of God, entrusted with God’s word, are not faithful, but are deceivers (1 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Peter 2:1-3). We are warned in Scripture many times to beware of those claiming falsely to be “prophets,” or claiming title to other offices as spokesmen for God, but teaching deception (Deuteronomy 13:1-4; 18:20-22; Matthew 7:15; 16:12; 24:11; Mark 12:38-40; Colossians 2:8; 1 John 4:1; Jude 1:3-4).

We are to test by the standard of God’s word, the Bible, the claims of would-be prophets, apostles, ministers or others who claim to speak for God (1 Thessalonians 5:21; Revelation 2:2).

If they would lead you to worship another god, including themselves, they are to be rejected (Deuteronomy 13:2-3; Acts 20:28-30; 1 Corinthians 3:7, 21; 4:6; 2 Corinthians 11:18-20; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; 2 Corinthians 4:5).

If they teach lawlessness, contrary to the commandments of God, they are to be rejected (Deuteronomy 13:4; Jeremiah 23:14-17; Matthew 7:13-27; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8; Jude 1:4; 2 Peter 2:18-22; Revelation 2:14-15, 20-23).

If they substitute their own commandments for the commandments of God, they are to be rejected (Isaiah 29:13; Mark 7:5-13).

If they teach lies, fables, the imagination of their own hearts, they are to be rejected (Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 14:14-16; 23:30-32; 1 Timothy 1:3-4; 4:1-2, 7; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; Titus 1:13-14).

If they pervert or misuse the word of God, they are to be rejected (Matthew 23:13-33; Acts 13:10; 2 Corinthians 4:2-4; 11:3-4; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:14-15; 2 Peter 3:16-17; Jude 1:4).

If they do not faithfully teach the word of God, the holy Scriptures, they are to be rejected (Isaiah 8:20; Jeremiah 23:25-28; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 4:15; 2 Timothy 2:15-16; 4:1-4; 2 John 1:5-11).

Scripture makes clear that it is the responsibility of each individual to test, by the standards listed above, those who claim to speak for God or who claim to be teachers or ministers of God’s word. Failing this, even those sincerely desiring to have a meaningful relationship with God may be misled, and deceived. You must choose whether you will hear and believe the truth in accordance with God’s word, or something else.

In This Issue

How You Can Have and Keep the Holy Spirit

What does it take to receive the Holy Spirit? And once received, can it be lost? What does the Bible say about these questions regarding the Holy Spirit?

Follow God

Either we are following God, or we are not. And the choices we make determine the answer to that question.

Right and Wrong — Who Decides?

Should human beings today be deciding for themselves what is right and wrong, or should God be trusted to decide and tell us what is right and wrong in his sight?

Is a Prophet a Messenger of God?

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