

“And this Gospel” shall be preached... Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

Are You Ready for Spiritual Graduation?

In the academic world, when you're going for your Ph.D., academicians call the final exam you have to take your comprehensive. And to pass you've got to prepare day and night, week after week, because you'll be asked everything you've learned about the subject you're studying.

In a sense, our Christian education is like preparing for a comprehensive. When Christ comes back to this earth, we're going to go through our comprehensives! He's going to quiz us extensively. And He's going to want to know what we're made of, and whether or not we have prepared to receive our degree (eternal life).

But along the way toward the comprehensives or the final exam, you have what's called midterms. Today I have some midterm questions that I hope will help us see whether or not we have the fruits of God's Spirit and are growing in those fruits. I think that's really what we want to know.

Question one

Are we still able to repent or still able to change? In Acts 2:38 Peter commanded the Jews to repent. Now we all know that before baptism one must have that initial experience of repentance. But repentance is not a one-time experience, but something that we must do daily. It is a way of life. Repentance and change today should be easier for us than it was last year.

God wants us all to repent because He has appointed a day when Jesus is going to judge us (Acts 17:30-31).

Let's look at II Corinthians 7 about this matter of repentance. Verses 9 and 10: "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry," says Paul to the church at Corinth, "but that ye sorrowed to repentance." He is saying, "I was really happy [the main reason I rejoiced] not because you were sorry or because you were mournful; but because that mourning and that sorrow brought forth repentance and change.

"For ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death." In other words, a physical sorrow — being unhappy about something, sad about something — doesn't lead to anything profitable. But if you're sorry to the point where you change — where your life takes on a new direction, new scope, new heading — that, Paul says, will lead to salvation.

In I Corinthians 13:11, Paul also writes: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." In other words: "When I was a child I acted and reasoned as a child; but when I grew up, when I repented and received God's Spirit, I put away childish things. I took on a new way of life, and I didn't return to childhood."

We have to grow to become perfect. Most of us have a lot of problems. Most of us have a lot of things that we want to overcome. And that's good, because the person who doesn't have anything to overcome is in serious trouble.

We have to continually examine ourselves "Till we all come into the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). We ought to look at Christ's righteous character and stack our character up against His. That's a good way to measure yourself for a midterm exam. Compare yourself with Christ. We must not compare ourselves among ourselves because that sets the standard considerably lower than it ought to be.

Question two

Can we accept and cope with trials and frustrations?
Romans 12:1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren,

by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." The first thing we begin to see, then, is that we are bought and paid for. We are sacrifices, living sacrifices. We have said, "God, You do with us what You want." We no longer are our own beings to do as we please whenever we want. But we must always strive to do everything in the context of what God's will is.

Verse 2: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." So we've got to have a changed way of thinking — seeking the thoughts and ways of God rather than our own natural patterns of thought and action (Isaiah 55:7-8, Proverbs 3:5-7).

This theme is repeated in I Corinthians 6:19: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [Spirit] which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." So everything about us belongs to God. And if He allows a trial or a test to come upon us, it's for our good. We are His children!

Let's take a look at I Peter 5. There's a way to always be prepared when a trial comes along. In verses 6-9: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Contrary to that, of course, are those who exalt themselves in this life. Their promise is that they're going to be humbled and abased. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Satan just loves to see us down and frustrated, unhappy, sad and gloomy. Discouragement is one of Satan's chief tools; and he would love for all of us to be discouraged. He would love for all of us to lose faith. He's just about got you in the palm of his hand if you do.

"Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." If you have a real trial or a real test, well, you're not the only one who has that. You're not the only one who suffers frustrations and worry. We all face the same problems, believe me.

I Corinthians 2 gives us another key on how to be able to cope with these trials that come along, without giving up. Verse 9: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." When trials come, we must think about that tremendous reward that God has for us. He's got something prepared for us that is so far above these puny trials and tests that they're really nothing by comparison (Romans 8:18).

God says all things do work together for good (Romans 8:28). And in my years of experience in the ministry and as a Christian, I've seen it always work out if you just be patient and wait. My wife keeps telling me, "Be patient. Things will work out." I tell her the same thing. And sure enough, over the years things do work out. All things do work together for good — in the long run — for those who are called of God according to His promise.

James 1:2-4, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers [different] temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." In a sense it says: Let

patience develop; let it grow; let it mature. And then it can be plucked off the tree as a whole piece of fruit — something that God is well pleased with.

I Corinthians 10:13, to wrap up this point: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." He doesn't say He's going to prevent the temptations from coming upon us, but He says that along with the trial and the test, He's going to provide a way of escape that we might be able to bear it.

Christ is the author of our salvation, and He is the finisher. So He's going to be there to help us; and He's going to help us build that character and withstand the trials.

Question three

Do we find more satisfaction today in giving than getting? In other words, is it easier and more enjoyable to give today than it was last year? Is it easier to give of our time, or do we find that we're a little bit more possessive in this regard? What I want to stress is the matter of giving of time or service. "It's more blessed to serve others than to be served," is what Jesus is saying in Acts 20:35.

Let's take a look at what God has given us so that we can get the proper perspective on this question. In Matthew 10:8, Christ said (talking to the disciples here, but it applies to all of us): "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers . . . cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." There's not a one of us who has paid for God's truth, paid to receive it. We were given it freely.

God's truth came into our minds, and He opened our minds to understand it. Now God says, "You have that knowledge; you share it with others." And of course the way we share that fruit with others is to support God's Work; be behind it and promulgate the Gospel through *The Plain Truth*, through *The World Tomorrow* program and all the articles and other publications. "Freely you have received; freely give."

Jesus said, "Whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." And a part of bearing that cross is the giving of our time — that means in prayer and Bible study and in serving, helping others who are in need — instead of having a spirit of get or covetousness that we see in this world today. We must have a spirit of giving.

Question four

Do you have a greater capacity to love today than a year ago?

I John 2:15, 16 shows us very plainly that we are to love the people of the world but not love the world or its society. "Love not the world [the society], neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

And in I John 3:1: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." What kind of love does God have for us that we should be called the begotten sons of God?

God loved us so much that He was willing to give His only Son for us. Verse 16 of that same chapter: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." How well are we doing on this point?

I John 3:17-18: "But whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother have need, and shuts up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the

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Graduation

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love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." In other words, it isn't enough to say we love our fellow-man. We have to be *doers* of love. We must be willing to help others in need, not just wish them well.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born (begotten) of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation of our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:7-11).

So love is of God; God is love. 1 John 5:1-3:
"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born [begotten] of God: and everyone that loveth him that

shuns gossip or evil imaginings. Love is dependable, hopes for the best for others, rejoices in truth.

Jesus went on to explain more about love in action in the parable about the Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. Here love is portrayed as the criterion of judgment, the attribute that produces good works and is the basis for our judgment when we stand before Christ. Read these verses carefully because one day each of us will have to give account to Christ for the love we showed or failed to show to others.

Love is the most important element of all. Without it we are empty noisemakers (1 Corinthians 13:1). Any one can talk religion. We have to practice and have *real* love.

Frankly, when I review these points myself, I have to ask myself, "Am I ready for my comprehensives?" And I'm not sure. I need a little more time. And I think we all feel that way too. So the thing is, if our lives are our time, then we'd better use that time profitably. We had better do something with it.

And then each of us can positively answer in the affirmative, "I am ready for the Kingdom of God."

begat loves him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments [contrary to many today who say otherwise] are not grievous."

The Commandments of God tell us how to love God and our fellowman. The first four of the Ten Commandments tell us how to love God; the last six how to love our neighbors. Love must be a motivating force in our lives.

1 John 5, 6: "Now I beseech thee, lady [a reference to the Church], not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it."

I think most of us understand about love. We see attributes of love defined in 1 Corinthians 13, the "love chapter." Charity is an old English word for love. Love is patient, humble, thinks the best about others,