

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

**Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God**

## **Checklist for Christian Growth**

By Joseph Tkach

If you are unable to drive an automobile properly, you had better stay out from behind the wheel. Otherwise, you are going to create a great hazard for other motorists in addition to needlessly endangering your own life. You'll break the rules that make driving helpful and enjoyable—and reap the consequences for breaking those rules.

But what kind of a driver are you spiritually? Are you prone to break God's laws that produce happiness and good? How many spiritual traffic signs do you violate? How many spiritual citations have you had?

### **The Spiritual Stakes**

In our Christian lives, we are dealing with even more serious issues than the driver of an automobile going down the road. But just as physical drivers can ignore traffic laws and take their own skills for granted, we can begin to overlook the flaws in our spiritual development and thus create deadly hazards for ourselves on our way to eternal life.

God only gives us one chance for salvation. That doesn't leave us any room to gamble. It's better to obey God's rules and submit to His purpose (Rom. 8:28) than to take a chance on failing to fulfill our incredible human potential.

We have just passed that time of year when, as Christians, we should have examined ourselves spiritually and rededicated ourselves to eradicating

any imperfections from our character. But that process, pictured by the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, must go on constantly.

When you sow a thought, you reap an act. When you sow an act, you reap a habit. And when you sow a habit, you reap the whirlwind. That is where the biggest problem lies in trying to develop spiritual character—when people refuse to see the error of their ways.

The biggest stumbling block in your path is not a *what*—it's a *who*—you. You need to stand in front of the mirror of God's perfect law, see your shortcomings and work on them. We all need to be wrestling to bring ourselves into control.

How many times have you reviewed the book of Jude? There (verse 3) we're admonished to never lose the original faith—the gift of God—that will lead to salvation by grace (Eph. 2:8).

### **A Sure Foundation**

For those who have legitimately been called by God, converted and given the faith to achieve salvation, there is only one chance. Unless we succeed with this only opportunity we will ever have for salvation (and the bonus of rulership with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God), we will be like a driver who is seriously injured in a car crash for which he is at fault. That driver may find himself crying out to God for one more chance.

But we in God's Church are being judged now (I Pet. 4:17). If we do not now answer the great calling God has given us—if we choose to return to the hopeless condition from which God called us—we will not have another opportunity: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26-27).

Thus it behooves us to build our spiritual lives on a structure that the trials of this life will only purify and not destroy (I Cor. 3:12-15). What building materials are we using? What goals have we set for ourselves? We are living in a physical world that seems to crowd any awareness of God out of our minds. It seems our main interest and confidence are in material, and not spiritual, things.

Christ showed us how to build a sure foundation, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Matt. 6:19). When we amass material things, we feel we have to guard them rather than invest them, spiritually speaking, with wisdom. But we needn't be that concerned. Christ said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (verses 20-21).

So the emphasis should be on spiritual buildings—individually and collectively. We must be concerned with our Christian reputations as future sons of God.

Are we going to victimize ourselves by careless driving—take a wrong turn and slide down into the imminent destruction into which this world is hurling itself? The crown of righteousness is the most precious thing we can obtain in this life. We're admonished to hold fast to that crown and let no one steal it from us (Rev. 3:11). Using Jesus Christ as our standard, here are four fundamental concepts we should never forget. If we do, we are in big trouble.

#### **Four Concepts to Remember**

(1) We must never forget our need for God. When we lose our awareness of our helpless condition—when we no longer feel we need God's pro-

tection or guidance—we have exceeded our position and will run into difficulty.

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt totally helpless? Imagine how the people who were aboard the DC-10 that crashed at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport last year must have felt. When you're sitting in a plane, you have to rely on the pilot. You place confidence in his ability, his experience and his flying record. You trust the airline. You relax and enjoy the flight. But, you see, when this plane took off and the pilot became aware that something had gone haywire, all confidence in those physical things was lost. The question became, "God, where are you?"

Although officials said there wasn't very much panic on that plane, I'm sure it must have been present in the minds of the individuals aboard. I think this and other similar incidents define what a helpless condition really is. When we feel satisfied, self-sufficient, like we don't need anything, we are setting ourselves up for a great fall.

Generally, it was some kind of an emergency that first made us seek God at all. God probably used some crisis to bring us to our senses, make us examine ourselves and see the fruits of our lives and grant us the power of repentance.

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:11-12). We were far away from God and had no way of reaching Him when He first called us (John 6:44).

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). We shouldn't ever allow this attitude to slip from our minds—that God reached out and, through no merit of our own, lifted us from the far-off position we were in and brought us into fellowship with Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. We continually need the presence and help of God, for we are nothing without Him.

(2) God loves us personally. We can know beyond a shadow of a doubt the extent that God loves us individually. Notice God's depth of concern for us, "God so loved the world, that he gave

his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

How do we know personally that God has such great love for us? We can understand heroic deeds that take place like when a home is on fire. A person may become so excited because of the children in a burning building that he just unconsciously runs into the home and saves their lives. These things are done spontaneously—they happen immediately. On many occasions if we had time to think about what we were doing, we would not do it.

But you see, God planned all His actions. He planned the act described in John 3:16 from the beginning of the world. Jesus Christ knew, when He was still with God, what He was going to have to go through. And then, as a physical human being living His life out from birth to age 33, He had to look forward to the fateful day He knew was going to come. It wasn't just a spontaneous act—something done on an impulse—but it was real love. And that is the kind of personal love God has for us, individually and collectively. Can we understand it?

God removed the heavy burden we bore as a result of being under the penalty of sin and He gave us rest (Matt. 11:28-30). He helps us handle our Christian responsibilities now. No matter how great the trial might be, He is there when we call on Him. We need to retain these points in our minds to keep from slipping. Otherwise we are losing sight of God, His purpose and His plan.

What Christ suffered reveals the tremendous love He has for us. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son” (Heb. 1:1-5).

We are called God's sons. God looks at future things as though they already existed. We are His children if we have His Spirit residing in our minds. That Spirit acts as a catalyst to help us perform all

that is required of us as His sons.

“And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto thy Son he saith, Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom” (verses 5-8).

This is what God is offering us as He looks upon us as His sons. We are playing for large stakes indeed—so we shouldn't take chances. It should be a sure thing. We have a definite guarantee—with His Spirit—unless we abort ourselves.

Notice Christ's assurance, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

(3) *We need to have faith in God and His power to see us through to the end.* The apostle Paul said that God will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5), but what does that mean? The minute we find ourselves in a trial of some sort, we feel like we're all alone—deserted. But we should have the confidence that God will deliver us.

Read the Old Testament example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They said, in effect, “Okay, if God allows us to die, then so be it. Go ahead and throw us in the fiery furnace.” That is real confidence in God. Yet many people can read that example and not apply it personally.

I remember when I was teaching my daughter to swim. She had never been in deep water before in her life or even in shallow water, for that matter, except the bathtub.

I had to build up her confidence that I would be there to insure her safety. I had to reassure her that I would bring her to the side of the pool if she would only slide down the slide into the deep water. As a result she had enough faith and confidence in her father to go down the slide.

She thought she couldn't swim a lick, but the second she hit the water, even though I was there, she began flailing her arms and legs and found out that she didn't need me—and she made it to the side of the pool. And lo and behold, years later she broke a number of swimming records in grade school and high school.

Review Psalm 91 and see the confidence we can

have in God. Dwelling on this concept will bring us God's protection and blessing. He will fulfill His promise to make us God as He is God.

(4) We must have unity. No one in the Church is an island to himself. We have been begotten into the Family of God. A family consists of several members, so no one can be a loner. If you still selfishly feel that you would rather be alone, some faults do exist in your nature.

As the saying goes, blood is thicker than water, but it should not be thicker than God's Spirit. God's Spirit should be an adhesive that binds us together more strongly than anything else that knits people together. We should be concerned for one another. We need warmth and a sense of pulling together, especially when there are trials and hardships. We need real family love.

Paul admonishes us to live in the service of God: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).

God is not the author of confusion. Neither is Christ divided. In verse 4 Paul says, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." God hasn't sent part of His Family off somewhere else to start up another Work. He says, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (verses 5-6).

If you don't experience this warmth, fellowship and unity, you must feel like you're on the outside—that you're not a part of the Body. If so, you need to come to grips with the problem.

Christ expressed the need for us to be unified as a family. In praying to the Father He said: "And now I am no more in the world, but these [Christians] are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (John 17:11). Christ prayed that we might have the unity necessary to accomplish the mission we have as the Body of Christ. "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (verse 21).

This kind of unity has far-reaching effects in the

eyes of everyone we meet. When they see this kind of harmony—the kind of concern we show as the Family of God—it convinces them that Jesus Christ did come, sent by the Father.

Verses 22-23: "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

We should be one in mind, purpose, will and deed—in everything. That kind of unity makes us willing to come to the aid of others. The presence of that unity, through God's Spirit, shows God's Church truly exists.

### Growth Our Responsibility

When Esau became careless about his relationship with God, he became willing to trade his rights as the eldest son of Isaac for a meal. And afterwards, when he wanted those rights back, it was too late. "For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. 12:17). Esau had wasted his only opportunity.

We need to build into ourselves solid character on a solid foundation, looking to God for help, and grow in grace and knowledge into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (II Pet. 3:18, Eph. 4:13). Then our spiritual driving record will be perfectly clean, and we can avoid the ultimate result of infidelity to the loving God who has called us out of this world and offered us eternal, abundantly happy life: "For if these things [the attributes of Christian character Peter listed in verses 5-7] be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (II Pet. 1:8-9).

Remember again the four points in the checklist for Christian growth and the warning in Hebrews 10:26-27, "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."