

March 18, 2015

Dear Members,

When you receive this letter, we will be conducting our Church conference in San Diego, and following that, Michael Link and I will be traveling to Germany for the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, while Brian Gale will be conducting Passover services in San Diego, Rene Messier in Oregon and Dave Harris, Eric Rank and Robb Harris in Colorado. As in previous years, we will give our scattered brethren opportunity to participate live in Passover services, which we will broadcast from Colorado over the Internet.

When we partake of the Passover symbols of bread and wine, we think of Christ's death (1 Corinthians 11:26). We reflect on Christ's supreme Sacrifice—that He was willing to die for us so that we can live. And since we are justified by His death, but saved by His life in us (Romans 5:9-10), we continue with celebrating the Festival of the Days of Unleavened Bread for seven days, symbolizing our complete willingness to live a sinless life (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)—seven representing "completion" and "perfection," and leaven representing sin during this time period.

A word of caution is in order. We are commanded to take the Passover symbols of bread and wine, but we are also cautioned not to do so in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). We are not to think that we are without sin (1 John 1:8), but we must acknowledge sin, confess it to God and repent of it (1 John 1:9). On the other hand, our self-examination (2 Corinthians 13:5) should make obvious to us that, generally, we have lived in a way worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1-3). When we realize that this has not been the case, then it is high time to make changes in our life. You might want to look at passages such as Philippians 1:27 and Colossians 1:9-12.

We are asked to live holy lives (1 Peter 1:15). This is true for all people who have come to the knowledge of the truth, but it is especially applicable for baptized members of the Church of God who are about to partake of the Passover symbols.

During the last several weeks and months, we have been writing quite a bit about areas of self-examination and self-reflection.

In the Editorial for this week's Update, "Beware of Infections," Brian Gale wrote: "Satan, the god of this world (see 2 Corinthians 4:4), wants to infect us with as many of the works of the flesh as possible (see Galatians 5:19-21), and he does this in many ways. Often, he can work through others to cause as many problems as possible to those called by God... Human nature, being what it is, can push us to get involved and to take sides. Spiritual infection can spread and this can be unfortunate where others may be involved. The apostle Paul faced problems in the Corinthian Church where he writes about envy, strife and division (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Satan causes division (Revelation 12:10), and we must not adopt any such attitude that is not a Godly one."

In his recent Editorial, "Prepare Yourselves," Michael Link wrote: "We have to make sure that we are strong in the Church as well. There is a dangerous warning for those who take this lightly. Revelation 3:14-22 talks about the lukewarm Church, describing the works and attitudes of those who don't produce much fruit."

Robb Harris wrote in his Editorial, "Protecting Our Treasure": "Dwelling on the passing treasures of the world is like relying on the teachers Peter warned us about: 'These false teachers promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of immorality; whatever overpowers you, enslaves you' (2 Peter 2:19, Common English Bible). We are slaves to God."

Rene Messier stated this in his Editorial, "The Point of No Return": "Christ never passed the point of no return—for Him, it was never a close call. He never allowed desires to take hold of or conceive and settle in His mind, and He never allowed them to give birth to sin. Since He could overcome temptation, we can do likewise, when Christ lives in us, helping us to attain that state of being free from sinful behavior. Let us never lose sight of the fact that with Christ's help, we can overcome temptation and abort actions leading to sin, and if desires have conceived and have given birth to sin and death, we must quickly repent."

In his Editorial, "Selfies," Dave Harris wrote: "Self-righteous individuals are presumptuously arrogant along with being self-willed and right in their own eyes; they practice 'fixing' others while ignoring their own problems; they have a spirit of defiance and disrespect—stubbornly resisting guidance. Perhaps the most glaring shortfall of self-righteous people is that they are weak! Christians who hold onto and sustain the vanity of self-righteousness are blocking themselves from God."

In his Editorial, "The Work of Man," Eric Rank wrote: "If we have pride in our lives that elevates our opinions of ourselves above God, knowing that this is something that God will punish, what are we to do? We need to change our perspective to be spiritually minded and to walk in the Spirit."

This was just a brief portion of the many pieces of advice which we have published recently, including in our Q&As, booklets, sermons and StandingWatch programs. But all of this brings us to an important question. We have always emphasized that it is ultimately up to the individual member to decide, before God, whether or not he or she is able to partake of the Passover in a worthy manner. The same is true for other important decisions, such as baptism or marriage. After necessary counseling and preparation, the minister of God will baptize the person or officiate the marriage of two members, unless he sees very strong reasons for not doing so. He cannot look into the heart of a person, and sometimes, people are good at deceiving others and themselves, but they can never deceive God.

However, it is absolutely true that in time, God will reveal to His loyal ministers whether a baptism was valid; whether a marriage was bound by God; or whether a person has repented and is in a position and frame of mind that he or she can partake of the Passover in a worthy manner. When the minister is led by God to conclude that this is not the case, then this poses certain consequences for him. Regardless of what organization within the spiritual Body of Christ he might belong to, he will have to determine whether a marriage was bound by God when the question of divorce and remarriage is brought up, and he had better not make a superficial and quick decision just to please his organization, other ministers or the membership. He might have to approach the "baptized" person with the goal of counseling and advising regarding possible "re-baptism" after proper and genuine repentance, and he also has a duty from God NOT to allow a person, who did not really repent, to attend services to partake of the Passover, knowing that he or she would eat and drink judgment for himself or herself; and that this might lead to serious sickness and even premature death of the individual (compare again 1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

To take the Passover lightly is a foolish thing to do. To think that we can escape the judgment and condemnation of God by just fooling ourselves and others is futile and vain, because our (unrepented) sins will find us out (Numbers 32:23), and what we sow, that we will reap (Galatians 6:7).

God is merciful and forgiving, when we repent and ask for forgiveness and show through our conduct that we mean it. But self-righteousness, haughtiness, pride, arrogance; the conviction that we know it better than God or His loyal and proven ministers; the desire for strife and contention over words; and the spirit of rebellion manifest an unrepentant spirit. We might proclaim our repentance as long as we want, but if our deeds, words and the manifestation of our true self become clear as light, then God will not accept such "proclamations," and a minister of God is duty-bound to exclude a member with such an attitude from Passover services... with the hope that perhaps, he or she might be able to take it one month later during the "Second Passover," praying that by that time, true and genuine repentance and works worthy of repentance will have become manifest. After all, the Bible shows us that God gives His ministers the Spirit of discernment and that in time He will make it obvious to them whether or not someone has truly repented (John 20:21-23).

If you are in doubt, please counsel with God's true ministers, and don't just assume that the biblical admonitions do not apply to you. If there is unrepentant sin in your life, now is the time to get rid of it. At the same time, God knows about our weaknesses and He knows that we will never reach perfection in this life. But He expects from us a willing heart and obedience, as much as possible. Haughtiness and pride were the cause for Satan's downfall. We must never allow ourselves to give in to pride and self-righteousness. These are mortal poisons which will destroy us.

With brotherly love,



Norbert Link