

# **ON TO MATURITY**

Sergio Valori



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## Introduction

According to my title, the material in this booklet appears not to be in line with the familiar and popular themes of today. Why write on such a theme?

I write not to present my views, impart some head knowledge or obtain followers. The reason for my writing rests on higher ground than that.

The first and foremost reason for presenting this booklet is to obey the Holy Spirit's prodding. At my age and at this time in my life, the Spirit is saying I must share those things which He has deposited in my life. I am now 83 years of age and because of that, I am sure my inspiration to write is due, in part, to that fact.

I write also because of my awareness of a great need in the Body of Christ. I have observed a growing trend toward settling for the foundational doctrines and experiences of the gospel. The popular testimony of many has become, "*I am thankful that I am saved and going to heaven.*" There appears not to be much hunger to discover and understand God's purpose for saving us. Such an elementary and childish mentality is contrary to the charge given us in Hebrews 6:1, the charge to leave the foundations and go on to maturity.

I also write because I feel I have been entrusted with a vision, the impartation of which I am partially responsible. As a young pastor and newcomer to ministry many years ago, I had a passion to become a successful healing evangelist. However, God sovereignly stepped in and changed the course of my life. He clearly indicated I was to be a teacher of His word with the objective of bringing growth and maturity to His people.

And finally, my passion and pursuit of such ministry has become a sort of *travail*. This is a term Paul used in Galatians 4:19: “*My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.*” Travail here has to do with the labor, pain and pangs of childbirth. Travail arrives after the inward formation and growth of something which has to be released or brought forth. I am sure Paul’s travail was of much greater quality than mine, but I must say I have experienced the formation of certain avenues of truth and revelation which have grown to the point of needing to be released.

To everyone who picks up this booklet with a desire to read, I say, may God bless you richly with its contents and I welcome you as a potential companion on this glorious path of spiritual maturity.

Sergio Valori  
(September 2014)

# **An Urgent Need – Spiritual Maturity**

## **An Urgent Need—Spiritual Maturity**

In an hour when the powers of darkness are encroaching upon every last vestige of right and godliness, it is sad to observe that the Church's condition is one of shallowness and spiritual immaturity. Yet, a tree is known by its fruit and if worldliness, levity and dubious morals repeatedly surface, it must be concluded that something is wrong with the tree.

Religious leaders tend to observe the demands of the people. Leaders like Aaron, Saul and Jeroboam all had an ear for the people's requests and 'needs' but by complying, only led them into spiritual degeneration. Today's dominant spiritual climate is similar. Leaders tend to satisfy the people's whims and fancies rather than uphold God's standards for holiness and mature Christian stature.

### **God's Design for Adam**

Although the first Adam was created perfect, he was in a state of immaturity. In order to achieve his ordained destiny as ruler of this planet, he had to pass a series of tests designed to establish obedience and a proper relationship with God. We could say Adam needed to grow from a state of innocence to a state of holiness. Only then would he be fit to govern.

### **Progression in Israel**

*"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."* (Hosea 11:1) In the story of Israel, we have a revelation of God's love and tender care. His relationship to them in the early years, much like that of a parent with child, was basically one of provision and protection. Then followed their appointed time in the wilderness, of which the Lord said, *"...as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God (was*

*chastening, Amp.) thee.”* (Deuteronomy 8:5) This time of chastening—child training, instruction and discipline—was designed to prepare them for rulership in the land of Canaan. God’s way with any people is always that of growth and development unto maturity before His full purpose can be realized. Can positions of rulership in the Kingdom be granted to spiritual babes? (See Malachi. 20:20-23; Revelation 2:26, 27; 3:21)

### **Jesus’ Mission**

As we move from the Old Testament into the age of grace and the Church, we find that God’s purpose remains the same. There’s a sense in which the New Testament is merely a continuation of the Old, for that which had been hidden in type and shadow, now becomes spiritual reality and fulfillment. Although popular Christianity makes the theme *‘getting saved and going to heaven’* the main focus, Jesus’ mission was far greater than that. His mission is summed up in Hebrews 2:10 in the phrase, *“bringing many sons unto glory...”* This is not fulfilled merely by the birth of spiritual babes, but by the growth and development of believers unto maturity. The goal must ever remain, *“...the unity of the faith...the (full) knowledge of the Son of God...a perfect (full-grown) man...the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”* (Ephesians 4:13)

God’s law of sowing and reaping guarantees that every seed will produce after its kind. This law is constantly in evidence in both the plant and animal kingdom. It is likewise true spiritually. Jesus, as the seed which fell into the ground in death, will surely produce a harvest of *mature sons*. He did not die as a baby. But He who is the captain of our salvation passed every test of obedience, was made perfect through sufferings, and went to the cross as a *mature son*. (See

*Hebrews 2:10; 5:8)* Since the seed that was planted was a *mature son*, the harvest will also be that of *mature sons*.

It is time that the church stop focusing on feeling good, partying, having fun, and being entertained, and get down to the serious matter of providing the meat of the word which will promote spiritual growth and maturity. Kindergartens and playpens must be turned into serious holy environments. Human programs must be replaced by the pure workings of the Holy Spirit. The music and methods of the world need to be thrown out so that God's awesome presence can return to His temple. Church leaders whose drive is to have church auditoriums full of people (often for selfish motives), must begin placing a premium on quality rather than quantity. We declare repeatedly, *the Heavenly Father will never be satisfied with millions of babies in heaven!*

### **The Father's Yearning**

*"Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until (it) receive the early and the latter rain."* (James 5:7) What kind of fruit is spoken of here? What is the Father really yearning for? The 'early rains' were required for the proper sowing and sprouting of the seed, but the 'latter rains' were required for the maturity of the grain. Although a farmer could rejoice in seeing the sprouting of seed and growth of plants, his ultimate joy would come by reaping a bountiful harvest. Likewise, our Heavenly Father's deep yearning is for the fruit of '*mature sons*,' fashioned after the likeness of His first lovely Son, the Lord Jesus.

While we rejoice over the pure fruits of evangelism—O, yes, let thousands upon thousands be saved—yet, we long for the day when evangelism is followed by true shepherding unto maturity. The milk of the word should be followed by the meat

of the word. Initial salvation should be followed by an immersion in the Holy Spirit. Ministry gifts should be imparted and believers should begin to assume responsibility in the house of God.

In order for new converts to become established and to stand in the fury of the 'evil day,' they must be exposed to the 'five-fold ministry' of Ephesians 4:11. A 'one-man band' ministry will not mature the saints. We must seek out and open our hearts to God's ordained apostles and prophets and arrange for the saints to become recipients of their ministries.

### **The Burden of the Holy Spirit**

*"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation..."* (Hebrews 6:1) Although foundations are extremely important, there comes a time in a believer's life and in the Church's history when going beyond the foundations is of the essence. The burden of the Spirit in the above verse is for '*perfection*,' meaning spiritual maturity, completeness in Christ and fulfillment of God's ultimate purpose.

Two undesirable conditions are much in evidence today: (1) Spiritual retardation and stagnation coming from the repetitive preaching of foundational doctrines, such as outlined in Hebrews 6:1-2. (2) A lack of spiritual substance and stability in many believers, the result of empty and frivolous 'ministry' given the saints by their leaders. (See 1 Corinthians 3:10-15) We note the abounding use of drama, choreographic dancing, banner waving, highly emotional environments, counterfeit 'revivals' and an endless number of religious gimmicks. The spirit, methods and philosophy of the world are today pervading many segments of the church.

## Paul's Travail

Those close to the heart of God and carrying a genuine burden have always lamented when apostasy has set in. Moses groaned at the gold calf. Samuel mourned over Saul. Jeremiah became a weeping prophet. The remnant in Ezekiel's day sighed and cried over conditions.

Among the many ways the Apostle Paul has inspired us, we mention here his comprehension of and commitment to God's full purpose for His church. He did not stop with evangelism or the founding of churches, but continued to carry a burden for the maturity of the saints. In Colossians 1:28, we hear a man striving *'to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.'* To the Galatians, he declares, *"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be (Gr: fully) formed in you."* (Galatians 4:19)

To the wavering Hebrews he chides, *"For (by this time) ye ought to be teachers, but ye have need that one teach you again (the first principles)."* [Hebrews 5:12, Revised Version in parenthesis.]

It is my observation that far worse conditions prevail today in the ranks of the *'saved.'* The multiplied incidents of *'spiritual birth defects'*—due to conversions without repentance—and *'spiritual retardation'*—due to the lack of proper nutrition—are producing an anemic, weak, and powerless church. In view of the approaching final conflict, such conditions should drive us all to *'weep between the porch and the altar'* and to cry *'spare thy people, O, Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach.'* (Joel 2:17)

## The Groan of Creation

Meanwhile, all creation groans in a sort of universal travail. It somehow knows that its deliverance from the curse is linked to the manifestation of the sons of God—not babes but mature sons. Phillips, in his translation, depicts *‘all creation as standing on tiptoe to see God’s sons coming into their own.’* Their hope for deliverance from the *‘tyranny of change and decay’* lies in the Church coming unto full stature and being ready for that hour of glorious *‘manifestation.’* (See Romans 8:18-21, Phillips’ Letters to Young Churches) Indeed, the foregoing scripture promises that *‘all creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the (liberty of the glory) of the children of God.’* It is to this end that creation presently groans and travails, awaiting the coming of this new order. (See Romans 8:22)

Where are we spiritually and what are we doing? Are we mired in dead religious form and ritual? Or deceived by man-made hype which is labeled *‘revival?’* Have we settled for the gift of eternal life and now content to go to heaven one day? Are we focusing on material and natural prosperity while growing lean spiritually?

I trust that the number of believers *“pressing on toward the mark for the prize”* will increase more and more.



# **The Full Corn**

## The Full Corn

*“For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.”* (Mark 4:28, KJV) [*“...the mature grain in the head...”* (NAS)]

Quite often the Lord Jesus used the symbolism of agriculture to impart spiritual principles and teach the ways of His Kingdom. Such terms as “sower,” “field,” “corn of wheat,” “harvest” and others are repeatedly found in His teachings.

Our text refers to one of the most important progressions in His Kingdom—that of growth and development unto maturity. In all of what we call “nature,” we see this principle at work. Seeds are sown and watered. Plants sprout and grow, and ultimately, harvest time arrives.

The farmer labors long and patiently in hope that the process of fertilizing, sowing and watering will bring him a satisfying result. It is also thus with our Heavenly Father. He, along with His servants, sows, waters and works in various ways. Then the Lord patiently awaits the harvest. As with all farmers, our Lord waits in expectation for a bountiful harvest, not a skimpy or average one. The 100-fold harvest obviously would please Him the most.

In the scriptures’ terminology of spiritual growth and development, three basic words are used.

First is the term **“babes,”** coming most often from the two Greek words, *“brephos”* and *“nepios.”* This term refers to the newly-born, whose most prominent characteristic is the lack of intelligent expression. The babe abounds with life but lacks meaningful expression.

The newly-born usually brings great joy and excitement into any household. All heaven also rejoices when a sinner repents. In that period of life, babes can even play a significant role in God's economy. Their praise and worship is usually of an exuberant quality that pleases the Lord. (Matthew 21:15, 16) Also, in this early stage of development, they have a marvelous capacity for receiving revelation. (Matthew 11:25) I have been much blessed by observing the joy in a new convert's face when he "sees" something new in the scriptures.

From our back window, we can see a farmer's field, usually planted with corn. In about 10 days or so after planting, my wife or I will look out and exclaim, "Look, the corn has sprouted!" Indeed, there is something joyous in seeing the "*blade*" appear in the earth.

But after the excitement of new life subsides, then begins the patient process of waiting for the plant and the "ear" to develop. In the church, this process is sometimes slow. The writer to the Hebrews chided them, not only for their slow progress, but also for their reversion to a "baby" stage where they needed the milk of the word again. (Hebrews 5:12, 13) Also, in 1 Corinthians 3:1, Paul laments that church's carnality, declaring, "*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual (grown and developed) but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*"

Such is the case in a large segment of the church world today. We grieve at the evidence of much shallowness and immaturity in many places. Not only are many believers satisfied to remain babes—spoon-fed, cared-for and even entertained—but their leaders seem to "*love to have it so.*" Their endless offerings of human activities and programs create a false sense of spirituality among the people and keep them in an infantile state. In some places, the preaching of the

word is replaced totally by concerts, dramas and other forms of soulish activity. In contrast, the Apostle Paul exhorted new believers to **“...desire the sincere (pure) milk of the word that ye may grow thereby...”** (1 Peter 2:2)

In the normal process of growth, babes gradually become **“children.”** “The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the *children* of God!” (Romans 8:16) How wonderful! “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the (*children*, Gr.) of God...!” (1 John 3:1)

In the Greek, the word is *“teknion,”* meaning *“adolescents, half-grown, immature.”* The key word characterizing this stage of life is *“development.”* Seeing children properly develop their faculties of mind and body brings a special joy to parents. It is a delight to see sober, God-fearing children adopt good attitudes toward life, formulate proper goals and make strides toward becoming responsible mature adults.

On the other hand, it is very grievous to watch children remain immature, underdeveloped, interested mostly in play, pleasure and partying—children at a standstill, only drifting, falling far short of their potential.

Likewise in the Spirit, we need to grow. Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and became a pattern for all of us to follow. The goal is to become a **“son,”** in the Greek, *“huios,”* a term for a full-grown, mature adult. In the growth process, the ultimate is neither the *“blade”* nor the *“ear,”* but the **“full corn in the ear.”** All the other stages are needful and good to behold, but what the farmer anxiously awaits is a good crop, a 100-fold harvest. This is his greatest delight!

It is the same with our heavenly Father. Let us be clear as to His desire, His plan, His purpose. Romans 8:29 holds the vision for us: *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed (made like unto) the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren!”*

Think about it. We are to be made *like* unto our Father’s firstborn Son, Jesus! This likeness will be reflected in our character and in our relationship with the Father. The likeness is nothing outward, but inward, in the heart, yet affecting the whole man in a way all can see.

In the previous verse we are told that *all things are working together for good*. What *good*? The highest good for us is that we be made like His Son! Our Father is a master-potter who can weave everything we experience into a pattern for our ultimate good—the good of being made like unto His Son. It means we are to be made *“sons”* like He is a Son, full grown, mature, in His likeness!

In this awesome process, our Father God is forming for Himself a family. Ah, yes, He has always desired a family, a many-membered instrument that can give expression of Himself in the earth. He had told Adam and Eve that they should be fruitful and multiply. Had they done so in their sinless state, they could have produced a vast family in the earth, all in the likeness of God! Thus, the whole earth could have been *“filled with His glory.”* We know of their failure and of the repeated failures of God’s chosen people down through history, but God has not given up on His desire to have a vast family of *“sons.”* Neither has His purpose changed. The whole earth will indeed be filled with his glory!

Let us note two highly significant scriptures. In John 12:24, we find, “...Except a *corn (grain) of wheat* fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

Two questions: Who was the “*corn of wheat?*” and who or what is the “*fruit?*”

The context clearly shows that when Jesus spoke about the “*corn of wheat*” falling into the ground, He was speaking about Himself. Thus, the fruit must be connected with His falling into the ground. Then, the law of reproduction reveals an amazing and glorious fact. The law of reproduction never fails to produce the same fruit as that which was sown. Beans produce beans and corn produces corn. Spiritually, it is the same. **The sowing of a “*mature son*” will ultimately produce “*mature sons!*”** The fruit which comprises the Lord’s harvest (mature sons) will be exactly the same as the seed (Jesus, a mature Son) that was sown into the ground!!

I agree this is totally overwhelming to all logic and to all powers of the reasoning mind. It can only be appropriated by *faith*. As we proceed along this line of teaching, we must absolutely stay totally with the scriptures and be very clear as to what the scriptures say. We cannot deviate. We cannot add and neither can we subtract. We must allow the scriptures to form the parameters of possibility, not our own mind. The natural mind cannot comprehend the things of God and will always limit God’s workings.

**O, for the “*full corn in the ear!*”**

**The Father waits for it.**

*"...Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until (it) receive the early and the latter rain."* (James 5:7)

Again, what is the fruit? What is the text speaking about? Is it merely a harvest of saved souls? No, the text does not lend itself to that conclusion. The *"early rain"* was needed after the seed was sown to facilitate its sprouting. The *"latter rain"* needed to come before the time of *"earring"* so the harvest could come to maturity and bear fruit! Both are needed for the full process. The blade must spring forth first. Then there must be the growth of the plant unto formation of the *"ear."* But the ultimate is the *"full corn in the ear."*

### **All creation waits for it.**

In translating Romans 8:18-25, the translator J. B. Phillips gives us a most vivid and marvelous picture. Please let us read it slowly and absorb its wonder and glory.

*"In my opinion,  
whatever we may have to go through now  
is less than nothing  
compared with the magnificent future God has planned for us.  
The whole creation is on tiptoe  
to see the wonderful sight  
of God's sons coming into their own.  
The world of creation cannot as yet see Reality  
not because it chooses to be blind,  
but because in God's purpose  
it has been so limited—  
yet it has been given hope.  
And the hope is, that in the end  
the whole of created life will be rescued  
from the tyranny of change and decay,*

*and have its share in that magnificent liberty  
which can only belong to the children of God!*

*It is plain to anyone with eyes to see  
that at the present time  
all created life groans in a sort of universal travail.  
And it is plain, too,  
that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit  
are in a state of painful tension  
while we wait for that redemption of our bodies  
which will mean that at last  
we have realized our full sonship in Him.  
We were saved by this hope,  
but in our moments of impatience  
let us remember that hope always means waiting  
for something we haven't yet got.  
But if we hope for something we cannot see,  
then we must settle down  
to wait for it in patience."*

## **Epilogue**

Any word sown will bear similar results to what Jesus described in Matthew 13 in the well-known "*parable of the sower*." Some will fall by the wayside and the word will quickly be plucked out of the heart. Others will fall in rocky places and fail to form root, perhaps because of the persecution or tribulation which follows acceptance of the word. A third portion of recipients will continue to pursue the natural life with its cares, riches and pleasures and will experience the "*choking out*" of the word. But, thank God, a portion of the word falls on "*good ground*" and produces the intended fruit.

**What type of soil will God's word find in your heart?**

We can boldly declare one guarantee:

There will be a people  
that will advance in their spiritual walk  
to a place of mature sonship.

Jesus' fall into the ground *will not* have been in vain. His purpose of "*bringing many sons to glory*" *will* stand. The scriptures of Romans 8:18-25 will indeed find fulfillment in a people.

As with any message that is heard which represents an overwhelming challenge, the natural first reaction will be, "*What shall we do?*" Various classes of people asked John the Baptist this question. (See Luke 3:10-14) Also, after Peter's message on the day of Pentecost, the Jews asked, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:37)

You may have been a serious reader of the above message and may also be saying in your heart, "*I believe this message represents God's word for me. What shall I do?*"

There are many ways the Holy Spirit will guide us if we are honest and sincere. The following is a list of things you should do.

1. **Accept the Word in Your Heart** – God's way of salvation and establishment of His full purpose in our life is first on the basis of His WORD. We are born again by an incorruptible seed and we grow and proceed to His objectives on the basis of His word. When the virgin Mary was told by the angel that she would give birth to the Son of God, she was at first overwhelmed, but then declared,

*"...Behold the handmaiden of the Lord*

(in other words, “here I am, I abandon myself”)  
*be it unto me according to thy word.”*  
(Luke 1:38)

This abandonment to the WORD made it possible for her to become overshadowed by the Holy Ghost and bring forth God’s Son. It is interesting to note that the word “overshadowed” means “to release creative energy!”

2. **Keep the Vision** – God said to Habakkuk,

*“Write the vision  
and make it plain upon the tables  
...it is yet for an appointed time  
...at the end it shall speak  
...though it tarry, wait for it  
...it will surely come...”*  
(Read in full, Habakkuk 2:1-4)

We must retain the vision and not allow devil, man, or circumstances of life to steal it from us. “Buy the truth and sell it not” ...Pay a price for it and pay a price to retain it. Don’t sell it (trade it for something else).

To help you retain the vision, read and review periodically the following scriptures: Romans 8:18-25; John 12:24; Hebrews 2:4-10; James 5:7; Colossians 1:28. There are many others the Spirit will lead you into.

3. **Have an Ear to Hear** – I pray that I shall ever have an ear to hear more of the Father’s plans and purposes. It is possible (like the Hebrews in 5:11) to become “dull of hearing.” According to Mark 4:23-25, we must have an “ear to hear” in order to keep receiving more spiritual substance from the Lord. It is fearful to think of those who will lose rather

than gain. Only the hearing ear can bring about a spiritual gain in our lives. Israel was forced to go into captivity because they could not and would not hear the “*voice of the prophets.*”

4. **Accept Chastening** – Read about God’s way with Israel in Deuteronomy 8:1-5. After their salvation from Egypt, they were exposed to a period of “*chastening*” which was designed for their spiritual maturity. The older generation rebelled and rejected the chastening and did not make it in to the promised land. The younger generation learned obedience and qualified to cross over Jordan.

It is imperative that you read Hebrews 12 in its entirety. Pay very close attention to the message given us in verses 1-17. Then, let us watch for those circumstances, experiences, words from the Lord, etc....that represent His chastening. When chastening is upon us, may we submit (verse 9) and allow the Lord to do His work. Trust Him. He is in the business of producing “*sons.*” Praise the Lord!

5. **Receive and Submit Yourself in Humility to the “5-fold” Ministry in the Body of Christ** – You will not become a “*son*” living in a monastery or living the life of a “*lone ranger.*” God, in His infinite wisdom, has chosen to bring *ministry gifts* into our lives to equip us, feed us, discipline us and prepare us to fulfill our calling. (Please see Ephesians 4:1-16, especially verses 11-13.)

Practically, if you really want to grow and mature unto sonship, you need to find a church where you are fed the meat of the word and which has a vision for maturity. Many churches today have become nurseries for babies or playgrounds for children or social institutions. They can never bring us into the reality of God’s full purpose.

If you are serious about going on with God in the above growth process, God will show you what all you need to do. He never ignores the honest seeking heart. Do remember the following realities. God will have a people...

***who will become mature sons;  
who will be part of His glorious, holy Church;  
who will rule with Him in the Kingdom.***

May you find a positive response to this word and pursue it. Look at the awesome promise given us in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Isn't that overwhelming? Yes, but always remember verse 24:

***“Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.”***

# **Why He Came**

## Why He Came

*“...For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection  
the world to come,  
but one in a certain place testified, saying,  
‘What is man that thou art mindful of him?  
or the son of man that thou visitest him?’  
...thou didst set him over the works of thy hands.  
Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet...  
But now we see not yet all things put under him.  
But we see Jesus,  
made a little lower than the angels...  
because of His suffering of death,  
crowned with glory and honor...  
For it became Him, for whom are all things  
and by whom are all things,  
**in bringing many sons unto glory**  
to make the captain of their salvation  
perfect through sufferings.”*  
(Hebrews 2:5-10)

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*“To him that overcometh  
will I grant to sit with me in my throne,  
even as I also overcame  
and am set down with my Father in His throne.”*  
(Revelation 3:21)

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Each year the Christianized world celebrates or in some way commemorates a season called Christmas. The majority, who live without understanding or illumination, welcome it as a holiday during which they can get time off work, visit family and friends, receive gifts and enjoy parties abounding with food and drink. They have little or no knowledge about the

significance of the holiday. It is a season that fits well into the world's philosophy of eating, drinking and being merry.

This philosophy of a darkened world is increasingly impacting even the ranks of Christianity, in its diabolical efforts to remove God from our society. Witness to this was a recent churchyard scene of a huge balloon of Frosty the Snowman with a sign in front of it: "Happy Holidays." Though I am not certain, this church might be numbered among those whose *'advanced'* and modernized theology now substitutes the word *'woman'* for *'virgin'* in the story of Jesus' birth.

We can step out of the darkness into somewhat of a twilight zone and find a dimension of Christianity where a few rays of light still linger. In such arenas, salvation is preached and the stories of Jesus' birth as told by the writers Matthew and Luke are solemnly revered. Here, the season is characterized by sermons on Jesus' birth, the beautiful songs of Christmas, candlelight services, the traditional Christmas tree, special lighting, cantatas, church dinners and many other special functions.

In contrast with the world, a degree of commendation must be given, for in this realm there is evidence of a strong determination to *"keep Christ in Christmas,"* to explain *"the reason for the season"* and to align with the story of Christ's birth as given in scripture. Message emphasized in this season is vital to the objective of *'saving souls'* and getting people ready for heaven. What can we say? We can at least align ourselves with Paul's heart in Philippians 1:18 as he rejoiced in the preaching of Christ, regardless of the mode, intent or objective.

But for those who hunger for the whole truth and who are intent on pursuing God's full purpose, some questions must be

asked. Why did Jesus come? What was God's intention in allowing His son to suffer and die? What was really on His heart? Was the main purpose really to take people to heaven?

Our text from Hebrews indicates that God's purpose for sending Jesus was to *"bring many sons unto glory."* Let me quickly say that this is not equivalent with bringing many newborn babes to heaven. The context from Hebrews 2 speaks nothing of the popular themes of living in a mansion or walking on streets of gold but goes far deeper than that. In a few short, yet powerful phrases, we are given a broad panoramic view of God's full purpose for man, ranging from the time of the creation to the grand climax of *"the world to come."*

Let us examine the context of Hebrews 2:1-10, point by point.

First is given a charge of carefulness against the possibility of drifting away from God's message. *"We ought to give the more earnest heed..."*

The message spoken is not to be treated lightly or casually. It must be received so as to grip us strongly and hold us fast as an anchor of our souls. From my experiences in fishing, I can attest how easily one can drift with the incoming tide. In a matter of minutes, one can be carried many yards off course, often without realizing it. We are warned against allowing His word to *"slip away from us,"* for every disregard or disobedience to the word brings with it a dimension of divine judgment.

Secondly, the matter of *neglect* is addressed. *"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...?"* The word *'neglect'* does not mean to totally ignore something but to *'treat it lightly.'* The same meaning is found in the reaction of the

guests invited to the wedding of the King's son: "...they made light of it." (Matthew 22:5) I am reminded of the way I sort mail. I have two stacks, one for important things that will require serious processing and one for matters that will receive but a fleeting glance. May I ask, how seriously do we treat the awesome call of God to His full purpose?

It is indeed a matter of *the awesome call*. The matter of the huge magnitude of man's call and destiny comes with great force. In my own words, it says to me,

*"Remember God's plan.  
He has not placed the world to come  
in charge of angels, but in charge of man.  
Your calling is to prepare you  
to rule and reign with Christ  
in the world to come!"*

Ah, yes, this is the point of reference. This text is not a long discourse, not by any means, but with a few short statements, God conveys a powerful picture of man's calling and destiny. To him who has an ear to hear, the statements strike deep within the heart to give notice and to spark attention.

First, "*what is man?*" We have all asked it. Who am I? What am I here for? What is life all about? As God asks this question, all ears should be wide open, for we should all be earnestly wanting and awaiting an answer.

The second question quickly follows the first: "*...why are you mindful of him?*" This means, "*Why do you pay so much attention to him?*" or "*Why do you extend so much care to him?*" If we have not asked this, we should have. Why has he placed us on a planet so conducive to the sustaining of human life? Why are the sunshine and the rain given so that man can

be nourished by both plant and animal life? By now, our attention should have become aroused to want to hear the answers.

The answer is not given until the matter of our weak and frail human makeup is interjected. *“Thou madest him a little lower than the angels.”* Do we, who are daily and keenly aware of the full gamut of human futility, need reminding? Yes, for we are shortly to be introduced to a divine one who allowed himself to become human and who, in spite of monumental human limitations, made it back to the glory He laid down.

The person who first reads the statement that follows must surely be stunned by a bolt of disbelief, awe, wonder, curiosity or a vast combination of many emotions, for who would have imagined it? Who would ever have thought that sinful, base, weak and lowly man would have such a majestic, awesome and glorious calling.

But there it is: *“...thou crownest him with glory and honor and didst set him over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.”* (v. 7, 8) Let us make no mistake. This statement is indeed for man—man redeemed and made fit by the grace found in Jesus Christ.

This statement takes us back all the way to the creation in Genesis 1 and links us with God’s declaration of purpose stated in verses 26-28: *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let them have dominion...and God said, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it...”* From this, it is clear that God’s original purpose was to have in man an instrument that could be entrusted with the governing of His Kingdom. He was to bear God’s image, be clothed with His glory and share in His authority. Let us be assured that this has

always been God's purpose for man and that He has never deviated from it.

Then comes a statement of fact which surprises no one and over which no one will argue: *"But now we see not yet all things put under him."* (v. 8b) It is easy to agree that man, in his present condition of sin, and wretchedness, is unfit to govern God's righteous Kingdom. But we must go on to include also Christianized or "religious" man who chooses to remain in a carnal, immature, worldly and unholy condition. I will be so bold as to say that this description embraces the vast majority of the church. We say this because a large portion of the church is today in a Laodician state, lukewarm, worldly, immature, devoid of His glory, wretched, spiritually poor, blind and naked. It is badly infected with the spirit of the world.

Is there any hope?

The next statement is like a sudden burst of light which causes our head to turn up from the dark downward spiral we have been painting: ***"But we see Jesus...!!"***

We see Him! We see Him! Jesus comes into view at a critical point! He comes into the picture to give man hope of fulfilling his awesome calling!

But how do we see Him? Do we try to form an image in our minds? Just what is the meaning of the statement, *"We see Jesus?"* It is imperative here that we see *Jesus*, a reference to the Son of Man, not Christ the anointed one. We see the one who had *emptied Himself* of all the glory and position He held with the Father and took on Him the nature of the seed of Abraham.

It must be emphasized that Jesus did not rely on His divinity or His deity in the process of maturing or overcoming! If that were the case, none of us would have hope of making it back to glory. We must see Him as a man, relying totally of the grace of God. The same grace that Jesus appropriated is available to us in our quest of making it unto *glory*.

In Jesus, we see a purely *human* baby lying in a manger, a totally *human* boy reading the scriptures and learning, just as we can. At age 12, His parents had lost track of Him on a trip to Jerusalem. Where was He found? We see Him in the temple, discussing the scriptures with the doctors of the law, who were amazed at His understanding and answers. As a human, He was gaining knowledge and understanding of God's ways and plan, just as we can. When found, He declared to His dumbfounded parents, "...*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" (Luke 1:49) Even at age 12, we see a life seeking the Father's will and aligning Himself totally with the Father's purpose.

*But we see Jesus!*

We see Him growing.  
We see Him developing.  
We see Him maturing.

He increased in wisdom and (spiritual) stature and in favor with God and man. By the time He was thirty years of age, He was a full-grown Son, ready for ministry. Before He had done any miracle or preached any message, the Father's voice came out of heaven at John's baptism and declared, "*Thou art my beloved Son. In thee I am well pleased.*" (Luke 3:22)

What do we see in much of the church scene today? Shallowness and immaturity. We see babies being fed the milk

of the word and kept happy in an environment of hype and entertainment. At the same time, all creation is waiting for sons to come to maturity and to bring deliverance from the bondage of corruption! (Romans 8:19-20) The main theme of much of Christendom today is *'being saved and going to heaven,'* but beloved, this is not the meaning of God *'bringing many sons to glory.'* God's desire is to have a family of sons just like His first-born, Jesus. May God give us this vision and this hope!

What else do we see in Jesus? A human life of suffering and perfect obedience.

*"Though He were a Son,  
yet learned He obedience  
by the things which He suffered."* (Hebrews 5:8)

Every human instrument chosen of God for His purposes will be exposed to the test of suffering in order to learn obedience. Jesus showed us that a man governed by the Holy Ghost can live a life of obedience and that there is the potential of immense gain in our exposure to human suffering. He showed that *man* exposed to the full gamut of human trial and experience can be made perfect, or be brought to full spiritual stature. O, the hope and encouragement that this brings to the human dilemma!

Hebrews 2:10 can be amplified this way:

*"It was fitting and proper of God,  
by whom are all things  
and for whom are all things,  
in His plan to bring many sons unto glory,  
to make the captain (or author) of their salvation  
perfect through suffering."*

It was so right, so proper—if God had purposed that man regain his lost glory and dominion—that He should bring mankind hope by sending Jesus, not only to redeem but, *as a man*, to walk a pathway that would enable Him to regain the glory He laid aside.

*Let us fix our eyes on Him.  
Because He grew and attained to full stature,  
we can too. (Galatians 4:19; Colossians 1:28)  
Because He overcame  
and was granted a position in His Father’s throne,  
we can also make it as overcomers  
and be given the same privilege. (Revelation 3:21)*

To the natural mind, it all sounds too high and unattainable.

So did the angel’s message to the virgin Mary. But her response to it was,

*“...be it unto me according to thy word...”*

She believed the word and abandoned her life to it. When Elizabeth saw her, she prophesied to her and said,

*“...blessed is she that **believed**  
for there shall be a **performance**  
of those things which were told her from the Lord.”  
(Luke 1:45)*

The angel had also said, ***“For with God nothing shall be impossible.”*** (Luke 1:37)

# **A Prophetic Message for the End-Time**

A study from the book of Malachi  
addressing the present end-time  
condition of the church.

## A Prophetic Message for the End-Time

*“...believe in the Lord your God,  
so shall ye be established;  
Believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.”  
(2 Chronicles 20:20b)*

The time from Moses to John the Baptist has been labeled the time of ‘the law and the prophets.’ Whereas the law was a means of revealing God’s standard and ways to his people, the prophets were raised up in times of spiritual degeneration. The prophet’s main work was not to teach the law, but to point out deviations from the Lord’s way and call for a return to the Lord. Israel’s status before the Lord depended on their relationship to both the law and the prophets. In Daniel’s intercessory prayer, he confessed that God’s people had not only departed from the law, but he added this: “...neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets.” (Daniel 9:6)

Upon considering the overall condition of the church today, it is quite evident that we need to hear and respond to the true prophetic voice. I use that term because there are many who label themselves prophets, yet fail to carry a true prophetic message. As is usually the case, the majority, being false prophets, are proclaiming that ‘all is well.’ They herald that a time of ‘spiritual revival’ is upon us. In referring to the false prophets, Jeremiah said,

*“...if they had stood in my counsel  
and had caused my people  
to hear my words,  
then they should have turned them  
from their evil way.”  
(Jeremiah 23:24)*

But, thank God, another prophetic voice (*not a single prominent ministry or personality, but a plurality of unknown oracles*) is beginning to surface across the earth. Basically, this voice is an alarm calling the church to repentance. It is saying that, though we have true spiritual awakening in some parts of the globe, the major part of the church can be labeled '*Laodicean*.' It is lukewarm, increased with material goods, spiritually poor, blind and naked. The true '*kabod*' or glory of God has departed and been replaced by human programs, methods, activity and hype. And the worst aspect of this Laodicean church is that *she does not know her condition*. (Revelation 3:17)

I groan in my spirit. We may evangelize, teach good doctrines, maintain our regular church programs and increase in numbers. But have we heard the prophetic voice? Are we paying any attention to what the Lord is saying about us?

### **Malachi's Prophecy**

Most of us know that Malachi's prophecy represents the Lord's '*last call*' to his people Israel. Their rejection of this plea would be followed by nearly 400 years of silence, until God would give them one last opportunity through his Son. The scenario in this book represents not only something historical, but something indicative of an end-time situation. The evidence that an end-time condition is upon us is overwhelming. God's message through Malachi is very similar to that of his prophetic message to the church today.

Let us look at some of the conditions and some aspects of the prophetic message.

## Loss of Covenant Consciousness

*"I have loved you, saith the Lord.*

*Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?..."* (Malachi 1:2)

The people of Israel were to be a special people unto the Lord. Their fathers were sovereignly apprehended of God and brought into a glorious and far-reaching covenant relationship. In the outworking of this covenant, the ends of the earth would be blessed and ultimately come under God's governmental control. Its grand climax would be the establishment of a universal kingdom.

This covenant was first revealed to Abraham, passed on to his descendants and kept alive in a collective sense as long as Israel walked with God. Furthermore, God's covenant promises to David underscored the vision of dominion, the rulership of God through a chosen people. Such terms as *'David's throne'* and *'David's kingdom'* were not only reminders of Israel's glorious destiny, but were to apply ultimately to both Christ and His Church.

Yet, in spite of this awesome spiritual heritage, the people in Malachi's day had lost all sense of both their identity and destiny. In total ignorance of the great covenant and glorious promises, they could say to the Lord, *"Wherein hast thou loved us?"* These people had established their own form of religious practice but had become disconnected from both God and his covenant.

A great majority in the church world today are in a similar ignorance to the solemn implications of our covenant relationship in Christ. We have an abundance of religious activity which has become almost totally *'man-centered.'* The typical mentality asks, *"What's in it for me?"* rather than *"What*

*is God after?”* Nominal churches are still involved in dead formalism (empty forms and ritual) which offers nothing to God and fails to address man’s sinful condition. Others are involved in a simplistic elementary gospel that goes no further than *‘being saved, blessed and going to heaven.’* This realm focuses on man and his needs and falls far short of involving a people with God’s ultimate purposes.

Then there are others who carry the ‘man-centered’ gospel a little further by focusing on divine healing, miracles and deliverance of all sorts. The gospel of faith and prosperity is one example of an imbalanced doctrine which has lost touch with the weightier matters of the New Covenant. Its emphasis is on learning to use faith to have earthly riches and comforts which enhance the quality of our natural life.

Still others—who claim to be liberated—are obsessed with man-made hype, a highly charged emotional atmosphere involving entertainment, drama, supernatural signs and wonders and carnal manifestations in both body and soul. This realm is highly dependent on charismatic leaders, human talent, crowd control and other forms of worldly methodology. Its unspoken goals are to make people ‘feel good’ and enable leaders to build kingdoms for themselves.

In this end-time scenario, we, the church, have lost our covenant consciousness. We are not aware that the covenants of Abraham and David are still in effect today in Christ. We are basically ignorant of our calling to be made kings and priests unto God and to rule and reign in His coming Kingdom. We are unaware of our need to repent, pursue righteousness, be made holy, establish Godly character and become spiritually mature. We are not hearing the groan of all creation which awaits the manifestation of the sons of God! We are like children playing

with spiritual toys, focused on our own wants and grieving the heart of God.

### **Perverted Worship**

*“...ye brought in that which was torn,  
and the lame and the sick;  
thus ye brought an offering.  
Should I accept this at your hand?  
But cursed be the deceiver which  
...sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing...”*  
(Malachi 1:13, 14)

*“...Yet ye have robbed me  
...**In tithes and offerings...**”* (Malachi 3:8)

The prophet Malachi attempted to show God’s people their grave departure from God’s requirement concerning offerings. The basic principle they were violating had been established long ago by the Mosaic law—*God must be approached with a proper offering*. Their law said the offering must be *‘the first of the flock...without blemish.’* In other words, the best was to be for God and the remainder was for them.

But, after many years of spiritual degeneration, the selfish, man-centered mentality had become well established. They were now offering to the Lord the lean, the blind and the crippled of the flock. The fattest and best were kept for themselves. Thus, throughout Malachi’s prophecy we hear a provoked and angry God saying He would no longer tolerate this condition. Rather than a sweet fragrance, such offerings had become a stench in his nostrils! In fact, in Malachi 1:10, he says (paraphrasing),

*“Oh, that there were one among you  
who would shut the doors (of my temple)  
so that I would not have to see  
such polluted offerings!”*

In a major part of the church scene today, we have a similar condition. People go to the gathering either with no offering at all (dead formalism), or to create a ‘praise and worship’ time which is mostly for their own enjoyment. We must seriously answer some heart-searching questions. Do we really go to the house of worship bringing offerings of praise, love and thanksgiving *for Him*, or do we go to obtain something *for ourselves*? When we are in his house, do we speak directly to Him out of our heart? Does our worship constitute a giving to Him, not only of praise, but *of our lives* as well? As A. W. Tozer describes in his book, *“The Pursuit of God,”* I am afraid we are cultivating a **‘get way of life.’** Whereas the altar was once a place of giving our all for His will and purpose, it has now become the place where we *‘get’* all we want for our own gratification.

Recently, I was invited to speak at a church which opens its program with a typical ‘praise and worship’ time. As the band began to play and people began to sway with the music, I became disturbed in my spirit and found it difficult to flow. Suddenly, the Lord spoke to me and said, *“You see what’s going on? It’s not for me; it’s for them.”*

As in Malachi’s day, the Lord’s offering today is either non-existent or has become perverted.

### **Rejection of Discipline and Correction**

*“...Wherein have we despised thy name?” (Malachi 1:6)*

*“...Wherein have we polluted thee?...” (Malachi 1:7)*

“...Wherein have we wearied Him?...” (Malachi 2:17)

“...Wherein have we robbed thee?...” (Malachi 3:8)

If they had recognized the prophetic voice and the chastening God was bringing to them, they would have responded with remorse and repentance. But their responses both of heart and speech were ones of arrogant rejection. They refused to be accused of any wrong doing and were bent on justifying their position. In their eyes, it was not they who were wrong, but the prophet who erred in his assessment of things. We cannot find any other dialogue between God and man in which the people were so brazenly argumentative with God. Even the expressed unbelief and cynicism of the wilderness days were not so blatant as their responses to this prophetic word. God was grieved to the point where He stopped speaking to them.

Once again, a prophetic voice is rising to bring some discipline and correction to some unacceptable practices. We must speak out against fleshly, soulish and even supernatural manifestations which are not scriptural and not of the Spirit. When our music is characterized by the style and beat of the world, we must speak out against it. When worshipers become inebriated in the soul for their own gratification, we must address the error of their way. When people jerk, scream, roll on the floor and give out animal sounds, we must realize that another spirit has come to pollute the sanctuary of God. The stark truth is that today's 'offerings' in a great part of the church scene have become *unacceptable*.

How will the church react when the Lord attempts to bring correction?

## What Does the Lord Do?

*“Behold, I will send my messenger,  
and he shall prepare the way before me;  
and the Lord, whom ye seek,  
shall suddenly come to his temple...  
he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap...  
he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver;  
he shall purify the sons of Levi  
and purge them as gold and silver...  
Then shall the offering...be pleasant unto the Lord.”*  
(Malachi 3:1-4)

God does not leave perverse conditions unaddressed. He will no longer tolerate the polluted offerings, the growing rebellion to his word or the broken relationship with his covenant. He will release a corrective word through the prophetic voice to initiate a process of purification. The Lord whom they constantly seek in a perverted manner shall suddenly come in their midst as a refiner’s fire. There will be no mistaking His intention: *to purify the sons of Levi* (those who offer).

Although it is generally agreed that the above prophecy had a fulfillment in the ministry of John the Baptist, scripture may have multiple applications. When similar conditions exist, the prophetic word is made alive again and may be applied. As we have mentioned, Malachi is more than an historical account. *It is a picture of an end-time condition.* We, indeed, have a very similar situation in today’s church and it is our conviction that God is moving in exactly the same way.

***A baptism of fire is coming!***

## What Will Be the Results?

*“Then they that feared the Lord  
spake often one to another:  
and the Lord hearkened and heard it...”*  
(Malachi 3:16)

Those that strive for ‘numbers’ at all costs may not like to hear this word, but the scriptures show—and experience confirms—that the crowds do not like to hear a purifying word. When you start speaking on repentance, holiness and the way of the cross, the crowd has a way of dwindling. The multitudes have always flocked around the Lord for ‘the loaves and fishes,’ that which God could do *for them*. The scripture quoted above indicates that only a small company—which may be called a ‘*remnant*’—embraced the prophetic word of purification in the fear of the Lord. Even in declaring this word, the prophet had intimated that few would accept it. He had said,

*“But who may abide the day of his coming?  
And who shall stand when he appeareth?”*  
(Malachi 3:3)

What will the church do in the hour when God brings discipline and correction? Do we think we are ready to meet our heavenly Bridegroom in our present state? Is salvation the only criteria for meeting the Lord? Already, a baptism of fire is being released by those who have a pure, unadulterated word in their mouth. It is critical that we have ‘*an ear to hear what the spirit is saying to the churches.*’ Those who comprise the true Bride of Christ will take very seriously their response to the Lord and allow the purification process in their lives. (See Revelation 19:7, 8)

## What Shall Characterize the Remnant?

(Malachi 3:16-18; 4:1-3)

Seven characteristics of the remnant Church are described in the scripture passages listed above:

### 1. **They will walk in the fear of the Lord.** (Malachi 3:16)

One can always sense a healthy fear of the Lord on those who are in right standing with Him. It is manifest in the way they receive a word of discipline. Bearing the true marks of the sons of God, such believers accept instruction and correction into their lives without murmuring or rebellion. (How we receive chastening reveals whether we are becoming 'sons' or illegitimate children. See Hebrews 12:7, 8)

Another passage in Hebrews describes (the heavenly) Zion as a dimension of God speaking, shaking and removing from His Kingdom things that offend. In view of this, we are exhorted to

*'have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.'*

Whereas much of the church world has become a playground full of children playing with their toys, the *remnant* will carry the fear of the Lord in their lives.

### 2. **They will be remembered of the Lord.** (Malachi 3:16)

The word '*remembered*' in the Hebrew text means '*to set a mark upon.*' This mark would be a means of selecting an

individual or a nation for blessing or judgment or for a visitation of some type. At the time when God was judging Sodom and Gomorrah, it is recorded that *'God remembered Abraham.'* (Genesis 19:29) In 1 Samuel 1:11, Hannah cried to the Lord that she might be remembered in regard to her barrenness. In 1 Samuel 1:19, we find, *'...and the Lord remembered her.'*

Cornelius, in the New Testament time, was also one *'remembered'* by a visitation from the Lord. Because of his fear of the Lord and life of devotion, the Lord sent the Apostle Peter to him with the good news of salvation. (See Acts 10:31)

We often speak of revival, visitation and the coming of a greater glory. Although the general blessings of the gospel are free, we must *qualify* for that which God has for His true church in the end-time. The *'arising of the glory of the Lord upon thee'* spoken by the prophet Isaiah (60:1) will not come to a carnal, self-centered, infantile church, but upon a church which is *'holy and without blemish.'* (Ephesians 5:27) The *remnant church* will not be selected at random.

### **3. They will express the nature and character of Christ.**

*"And they shall be mine,  
saith the Lord of hosts,  
in that day when I make up my jewels..."  
(Malachi 3:17)*

Jewels, along with gold and silver, are symbolical of the divine nature. The remnant church will be comprised of those who give expression to the nature and character of our Lord Jesus Christ. In those who will allow it, God's purifying word shall remove the dross from His people and

cause the likeness of Christ to be seen in them. The prophet Isaiah alluded to this process when God declared through him,

*“Oh, thou afflicted and tossed  
with tempest and not comforted, behold,  
I will lay thy stones with fair colors  
and lay thy foundations with sapphires.  
And I will make thy windows of agates  
and thy gates of carbuncles,  
and all thy borders of pleasant stones.”*  
(Isaiah 54:11, 12)

See also 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 for a confirmation of this truth.

#### **4. They will be spared from God's coming judgments.**

*“...and I will spare them,  
as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”*  
(Malachi 3:17)

Regardless of how we might feel about the dispensational approach to things, it is a fact of Biblical history that there are time spans in the God-man relationship that have ended in judgment. We can site the days of Noah, the days of Sodom and Gomorrah and the closing days of Jesus' ministry. In each case, when the cup of iniquity was full or when the rejection of God's overtures was final, some form of judgment was released. In the present end-time scenario, such will also be the case. The Bible refers to a time of great tribulation and to Jesus' coming with his saints to *'take vengeance on them that know not God.'* (See 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10) The Apostle Peter also speaks of a *'judgment by fire.'* (2 Peter 3:10)

Although many Christians are depending on a pre-tribulation rapture as a means of escape, the better position is to prepare ourselves for the day of judgment. Ephesians 6:13 admonishes believers to put on the whole armor of God that they might be able to withstand the evil day. And Psalm 91 promises protection to those who have found *'the secret place of the most high.'* This speaks to us of an *intimate relationship* with the Lord, which can only be attained by a walk of obedience to His word. It is on this basis that the remnant will be spared.

**5. They will be distinguished by a mark of authenticity.**

*"So you will again distinguish  
between the righteous and the wicked,  
between one that serves God  
and one who does not serve him."*

(Malachi 3:18 NAS)

One of the greatest hindrances to the cause of Christianity has always been the *nominal Christian* (Christian in name only). One of the subtle tactics of the enemy has been to sow the tares among the wheat, to infiltrate the church with the counterfeit and discredit the Lord's testimony. Even the early church had this problem. The writer Jude speaks of those who had *'crept in unawares.'* The Ephesian church had discerned false apostles and the church in Smyrna counterfeit believers. (See Revelation 2:2, 9)

This problem has grown to great proportions today. Many, far too many, call themselves 'Christian' and claim to be 'born again' without manifesting any change in lifestyle from the person of the world. These may say they have made a decision for Christ and attend church regularly, but live like the unregenerated, lying, cheating, having affairs

and indulging in all kinds of immoral practices. The divorce rate in the church is now about the same as the divorce rate of the unchurched. No wonder the world is confused and not interested in what churches have to offer.

But, thank God, there *will* be a people who will bear the *mark of authenticity*. They will be a people who have yielded to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit and who have had the character of Christ produced in them. There will be no mistaking their identity, for they will be the genuine product. In an hour when darkness shall cover the earth, the light of the divine character will shine forth in His people. God's kingdom may now be a great mixture, but a purging process will deal with all iniquity, resulting in a righteous remnant who will *shine forth as the sun*. (Matthew 13:43)

6. **They will be characterized by a full measure of the glory of Christ.** (Spiritual Maturity)

*"But unto you that fear my name  
shall the Sun of righteousness arise  
with healing in his wings;  
and ye shall go forth  
and grow up as calves of the stall."*  
(Malachi 4:2)

The 'Sun of righteousness' in this passage is without doubt a reference to our Lord Jesus Christ and the term 'healing' has to do with bringing the church to the place of embodying the fullness of Christ. Just as the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus, so it is to dwell in the corporate man, Christ the head and the Church the body. Again we make reference to Isaiah's prophecy, which speaks of a

time when the glory of the Lord shall arise on the Church.  
(Isaiah 60:1-3)

The prophet Haggai, speaking in the days of Judah's restoration, was carried by the Spirit to a point in time far beyond his day when he declared, "*The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former...*" (Haggai 2:9) He was speaking of the Church.

While many look for external displays and manifestations, the arising of the Sun of righteousness will first be an inward thing. The fullness of Christ's glory can only impact all of creation after it has first been deposited in the Church. This process of the gradual increase of the glory of Christ in a people is referred to in 2 Peter 1:19:

*"We have also a more sure word of prophecy,  
whereunto ye do well that ye take heed,  
as unto a light that shineth in a dark place,  
until the day dawn and the **day star**  
(the Sun) arise in your hearts."  
(Parenthesis mine.)*

The church's healing will be complete only when she has been delivered of her carnality, worldliness and childishness and been brought to a state of spiritual maturity. The ultimate goal for the church's stature is none other than the '*fullness of Christ,*' the perfect (full-grown) man described in Ephesians 4:13.

**7. *They shall be an instrument in the hand of the Lord.***

*“And ye shall tread down the wicked;  
for they shall be ashes  
under the soles of your feet  
in the day that I shall do this,  
saith the Lord of hosts.”  
(Malachi 4:3)*

Since the creation of man, throughout the history of Israel and into the days of the Church, it can be said that *God has been looking for an instrument*. It is not that He is unable to establish the desires of his heart all by himself, but that he has purposed to do it through fully redeemed man. In seeking purpose and meaning for this being called ‘man,’ David on one occasion cried out,

*“What is man,  
that thou art mindful of him?  
And the son of man,  
that thou visitest him?”*

God’s Spirit readily gave the answer,

*“Thou madest him to have dominion  
(to govern) over the works of thy hands...”  
(Psalm 8:4-6)*

Let us briefly meditate on a few expressions from scripture which convey God’s intention to use human instrumentality for his purposes:

*“Behold, I will make thee  
a new sharp threshing instrument...” (Isaiah 41:15)*

*“...I will make you like a warrior’s sword...”  
(Zechariah 10:13 NAS)*

*“...God also selected...the things that are nothing,  
that he might depose and bring to nothing  
the things that are.”*

(1 Corinthians 1:28 Amp.)

*“...in order that the manifold wisdom of God  
might now be made known  
**through the church**  
to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places.”*

(Ephesians 3:10 NAS)

While much of the church world continues to focus on God's blessings and what he can do *for them*, He awaits a people who will qualify to become his instrument. While carnal and immature believers are demanding that our houses of worship provide entertainment and good feelings, creation groans and waits for God's sons to bring them deliverance from the bondage of corruption. O, how we need to pray, *“Lord, make us a proper instrument.”*

May the Lord grant us an ear to hear the Spirit's prophetic message in these last critical days.

