

# THE SABBATH SCOOP

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## LET YOUR 'YES' BE 'YES'

*What is something an outsider noticed about people in the Church of God? What can we do about it?*

By Gregory Dullum

One bright, sunny California morning—before the smog rolled in—I was walking across the Ambassador College campus on my way to class. As I passed the library building, Dr. Doris Brewer came out and walked with me. Dr. Brewer was a broadcasting instructor and director of the campus radio station. She was not a member of the Church of God, but she was surrounded daily by church people.

Dr. Brewer was very upset that morning. She told me one thing she noticed about people in our church was a lack of commitment. They would SAY that they would do something and then NOT DO IT.

It was a major task for Dr. Brewer to schedule students to be on the radio from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. six days a week (quitting early on Friday for the Sabbath). She couldn't understand why students agreed to be at KBAC for a show and then drop out part way through the semester—or not show up at the radio studio when it was time for their show.

Dr. Brewer's comments stuck with me over the years. It took someone who was outside the church to show me a character flaw of people inside the church. Over the years I have noticed other examples.

Many years later, I helped plan a dinner meeting for a Graduate Club (a club for men who had graduated from Spokesman Club). If all 40 men brought their wives or dates, and a few other guests came, simple arithmetic told us to expect between 80 and 100 people. WRONG! Not even close.

We had a sign-up list. By signing the list, men agreed to set aside the time, drive the distance and pay the price of the meal. Forty-eight people committed to come. Knowing that unexpected things happen, we told the restaurant



Photo by Gregory Dullum

The KBAC radio station studio was located on the second floor of the library at Ambassador College in Pasadena, Calif. One morning as I was on the way to class, Dr. Doris Brewer, an associate professor of mass communications (who was not a church member), came out of the library and told me something about people in our church that I would never forget.



Doris Brewer

to expect 42; we committed to pay for 42 meals. Only 38 showed up.

How committed are WE today? Do we do what we say we'll do? Can people depend upon us?

What does the Bible say about committing ourselves to do something?

Jesus tells us, "Again, you have heard that it was said of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great

King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Mat. 5:33-37).

Jesus said, "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes.' " He did NOT say, "Let your 'Yes' be 'No.' "!

Why do we fail to do what we say we'll do? One reason may be our Israelite heritage. We are physically descended from the Israelites and God calls us spiritual Israel. How committed were the ancient Israelites?

After receiving the 10 Commandments

**LET YOUR 'YES' BE 'YES'**

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## Let Your 'Yes' Be 'Yes'

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and other laws of God, what did they say?

“So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has said we will do.’ ... Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient’ ” (Ex. 24:3, 7). But *did* they DO IT?

Forty years later as they were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses told them, “from the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD” (Deut. 9:7). The Israelites committed themselves to obeying the LORD, but they didn’t follow through! Their “Yes” did not mean “Yes.” It actually meant “No”!

Their character flaw may be “in our genes.” There are other reasons as well.

In the church we are taught to serve and help others. In striving to do that, we might overcommit ourselves—saying “Yes” to too many things. Or we reluctantly say “Yes” to something we really don’t want to do, and when the time comes to fulfill our commitment, we don’t follow through if our heart isn’t in it.

If we fail to fulfill our commitments, we might feel relief from not having to do an unpleasant task. But it reflects badly upon us. Remember those two old expressions, “His word is his bond” and “He’s only as good as his word.” People will think less of us if we aren’t dependable. And if people know we are part of a church, we can give the whole church a black eye, as did those radio students who disappointed Dr. Brewer years ago.

What if Jesus Christ were not committed? He did NOT *want to die* when the time of his crucifixion drew near. He prayed to the Father, “O My father, if it is possible,



Photo by Gregory Dullum

Once the switches are set, a train will reach its destination, barring disasters.

let this cup pass from Me” (Mat. 26:39). Jesus could have chickened out and left Gethsemane before Judas arrived with the chief priests, elders and temple soldiers to arrest Him. If He had failed to follow through on his commitment to be crucified, we would have no Savior and we would all be condemned to eternal death!

But Jesus didn’t chicken out! He continued his prayer, “nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (v. 39). When Jesus said “Yes,” He meant “Yes”!

What if the Father says to Jesus one day soon, “Son, it’s time to return to earth and establish our kingdom there,” and Jesus would reply, “No, I decided not to go. Something else came up. I’m just not ready. I don’t feel like going right now.” This sounds ridiculous! Why? Because Jesus proved his commitment through the ultimate sacrifice. We can have total confidence that He will return to this earth! His “Yes” means “Yes.”

We are to become children of God, born into the God family. We will be co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14, 17, 2 Cor. 6:18). We need to have the *same commitment* that our older Brother has!

How can we become more committed?

**1. Let our “Yes” mean “Yes.”** Agree to do the things that are according to the will of our Father.

Jesus tells this parable: “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in the vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of the Father?” (Mat. 21:28-31). It is better to say “No” and then change our minds to “Yes” than to commit ourselves with a “Yes” and fail to produce.

A Chinese proverb says, “Great souls have great wills. Feeble ones have only wishes.” Do we have a backbone or a wishbone? When we say we’ll do something, mean it!

**2. If we’re not sure we can commit to something, don’t say “Yes.”** Say,

“**Maybe.**” And then set about to turn that “Maybe” into a “Yes” or “No” by counseling about it, praying about it, studying about it, fasting about it, and counting the cost. Once we make a decision, get back with an answer *as soon as possible*. Don’t leave someone hanging on a “Maybe.”

**3. Set our will.** Once we have made a commitment to do something, set our will to do it. Let nothing deter us. William McDougall said, “Will is character in action.” We all should be developing holy, righteous character. We can develop it by exercising it—putting it in action when we set our will.

“The end of a thing is better than its beginning” (Eccles. 7:8). It is better to **SHOW UP** than to **SIGN UP**.

Commitment is like a train on the tracks. Once the switches are set, the train *will reach its destination*, barring a major disaster or derailment.

Derailments do happen but they are *very rare*. Our not being able to fulfill commitments should also be very rare.

Let’s decide now that we will be dependable. Commitment is not a cure-all. But it is a first step. Let’s *make our decisions* and **STICK TO THEM**.

Let us follow Christ’s instructions when He said, “Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes.’ ”

### Know Your Bible

By Charles Nenninger

1. What prophet was told to go to Nineveh?
2. Who became king after Solomon?
3. Who did Boaz marry?
4. What woman was thrown from a window and her body was eaten by dogs as God prophesied?
5. What two cities picture the state of the world at Christ’s return?

(Answers on page 5)

## The SABBATH SCOOP

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# Who's to Blame for Our Sins?

*Satan tempts us to sin. Is he to blame when we give in to temptation?*

**By Gregory Dullum**

“The Devil made me do it.”

Comedian Flip Wilson coined this phrase on the TV show “Laugh-In” and on his own television show. On the surface, we laugh at his statement. We deny it. We say he’s all washed up because Satan CAN’T make us DO anything. We cite the book of Job to prove that God sets limits on Satan. And we are RIGHT to say so.

But those are intellectual arguments that come from our brains. What do we really FEEL, deep down in our hearts, in our innermost secret feelings? What do we really BELIEVE in that place *deep inside our minds* where we don’t let anyone else come? I wonder if we don’t believe Flip Wilson.

## Aren't We Good People?

John tells us, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). We MUST admit that WE ALL SIN from time to time. But whom do we *blame* for our sins? Aren't we pretty good people, after all? Aren't we called by God? Aren't we his church? Don't we have his holy spirit?

So who or what CAUSES us to sin? What do we think about AFTER we realize we have sinned? Do we *take responsibility for our own actions*? Or do we blame it on Satan? What do we tell God? “I’m sorry, God. Please forgive me. Satan tempted me. The temptation was so strong. It’s not my fault. It’s Satan’s fault.”

## Can We Blame The ‘Old Man’?

Do we turn to Paul’s writing and use his words to escape blame? He talked about how it wasn’t really he who was sinning: “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If I then do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ... But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:15-19, 23).

Do we blame our sins on some other nature in us? We are good, wanting to do

good. But we still have this other guy—the bad guy—inside of us who wants to do evil. So when we slip up and sin, it’s not really we who are sinning. It’s THAT BAD GUY doing it. In Romans 6 Paul speaks of burying the old self at baptism. Do we sometimes think that old, evil self crawls out of that baptism pool and reigns again in our bodies *if only for a moment*? Then we repent and shove him back under the water. It’s not really WE who are sinning. It’s *that other guy*.

If we make excuses for our sins, then we MISS THE POINT of baptism, Passover and Christ’s sacrifice for us. If we blame our sins on Satan or on some other personality and don’t take responsibility for our choices ourselves, we are on the wrong track.

## We Choose to Sin

Dr. Laura Schlessinger, in her book, *How Could You Do That?! The Abdication of Character, Courage and Conscience*, writes on page 36: “Ultimately every action is the result of choice with intent—no matter how much you’d like to blame the devil for makin’ you do it.”

You see, NO ONE MAKES US SIN. We choose, on our own, to do it. Yes, there is temptation. But as Dr. Laura writes, “Temptation is a suggestion, not a commandment.” Just because we are tempted to do something does not mean we have to follow through and do it!

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death” (James 1:13-15).

There is a process. Temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted in all things but He never sinned (Heb. 4:15). Sin does not happen until we CHOOSE to act upon the temptation.

We think about the sin, we make up our minds to sin and then we go ahead and do it. We have no one to blame but ourselves. Let me put it bluntly. There are only two ways of life. God’s way of love for others, and Satan’s way of total selfishness. We CHOOSE to break God’s law and go Satan’s way for an instant. Usually, after we sin, we realize what we have done and we feel bad and we repent. But we can’t blame others for our actions. We can’t blame Satan.

We must put the blame squarely on our own heads. We made the choice.

We do not have to choose to follow a temptation. We can choose to do the right thing instead!

On page 93 of her book, Schlessinger writes, “Having the power to choose between good and evil is what makes human beings truly free. Our freedom consists of mastery over oneself, over our whims, temptations, immediate gratifications, self-centeredness, and greed, etc. That freedom to choose challenges us all the time.”

## No Self Control?

Sometimes we feel we have no self-control. A caller to Dr. Laura’s talk show told her, “I don’t feel I have much control over myself.” Do we ever feel that way? How do you think Dr. Laura responded? She told him, “You can choose NOT to exert control. You can choose TO exert control” (p. 156). The choice is still ours to make, isn’t it?

God offers us help with self-control. It’s a fruit of his spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)!

## Consider the End

The choices we make affect us. If we choose NOT TO SIN, we build character. If we choose TO SIN we experience shame, guilt, regret, self-loathing. For one moment of pleasure we may experience hours, days, weeks and even years of agonizing guilt and shame, wishing we had not made the wrong choice.

Before we choose to sin, we should take a moment to look ahead at the consequences of our actions. Maybe that will be enough to avoid the sin altogether.

Isn’t this what Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, which we celebrated last month, were all about? Doing away with our sins? Putting them out of our lives forever? Making the right choice more often?

If we have been thinking it is not our fault that we have sinned, STOP. Remember this point which Dr. Laura repeats near the end of her book (pp. 265, 268): “Everything you do is by conscious choice. Choices are between options. All options are not equal in their potential outcomes. ... This chapter is all about the ultimate truth of your freedom. No matter the stimulus ...

**WHO'S TO BLAME?**

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# Choose to Live

*Life is about making choices. God wants us to choose life over death, and to live that life to the fullest!*

By Gregory Dullum

This is the time of year for high school and college graduation ceremonies. They call graduation “commencement.” Indeed, students are leaving behind the structured lives of their youths and coming out from under the wings of their parents. They are beginning their lives in what we call “the real world.”

Life in the real world is full of CHOICES. *Every day* we make choices. Someone once e-mailed me a story titled, “Dance Like Nobody’s Watching.” I don’t know if this story is true or if it was made up to teach a lesson like one of Jesus’ parables. Either way, we can learn from it.

## Dance Like Nobody’s Watching

Jeff was the kind of guy you love to hate. He was always in a good mood and always had something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, “If I were any better, I would be twins!”

He was a unique manager because he had several waiters who had followed him around from restaurant to restaurant. The reason the waiters followed Jeff was because of his attitude. He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Jeff was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.

Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up to Jeff and asked him, “I don’t get it! You can’t be a positive person all the time. How do you do it?”

Jeff replied, “Each morning I wake up and say to myself, ‘Jeff, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or you can choose to be in a bad mood.’ I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life.”

“Yeah, right, it’s not that easy,” I protested.

“Yes it is,” Jeff said. “Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how to react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. You choose to be in a good or bad mood. The bottom line: It’s your choice how to live



Photo by Gregory Dullum

As graduates leave the structured world of formal education, they will soon realize that life in the real world is full of choices. God wants us to make the right choices.

life.” I reflected on what Jeff said.

Soon thereafter, I left the restaurant industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it. Several years later, I heard that Jeff did something you are never supposed to do in a restaurant business: he left the back door open one morning and was held up at gunpoint by three armed robbers. While trying to open the safe, his hand, shaking from nervousness, slipped off the combination. The robbers panicked and shot him. Luckily, Jeff was found relatively quickly and rushed to the local trauma center.

After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, Jeff was released from the hospital with fragments of the bullets still in his body. I saw Jeff about six months after the incident. When I asked him how he was, he said, “If I were any better, I’d be twins. Wanna see my scars?” I declined to see his wounds, but did ask him what had gone through his mind as the robbery took place.

“The first thing that went through my mind was that I should have locked the back door,” Jeff replied. “Then, as I lay on the floor, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live or I could choose to die. I chose to live.”

“Weren’t you scared? Did you lose consciousness?” I asked.

Jeff continued, “The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the emergency room and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes I read, ‘He’s a dead man.’ I knew I needed to take action.”

“What did you do?” I asked.

“Well, there was a big, burly nurse shouting questions at me,” said Jeff. “She asked me if I was allergic to anything. ‘Yes,’ I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, ‘Bullets!’ Over their laughter, I told them, ‘I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive and not dead.’”

Jeff lived thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully. Attitude, after all, is everything.

Work like you don’t need the money.

Love like you’ve never been hurt.

Dance like nobody’s watching.

## We Have Some Control

We cannot control *all* the events which will take place in our lives. We do have *some* control over *some* of them. If we choose to obey God and live his way of life, things will *generally* go better for us. This does not mean we won’t have trials or problems. We will. But we also will experience the *blessings* of God.

God inspired Moses to tell the ancient Israelites, “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:15-19).

These words apply to us as well. God wants us to *choose* LIFE *and* BLESSING by choosing to live his way.

It was more than 20 years ago now (but sometimes it seems like yesterday) that the church slipped into apostasy and the “buzz word” was how we were now FREE! We were no longer burdened by God’s laws! Our burdens had been lifted. I don’t recall ever feeling BURDENED by

living God's way. God wants what is BEST for us. He wants us to ENJOY LIFE in the proper way—by *obeying his laws*.

## Live Life to the Fullest

God goes one step further. Not only should we choose life, we should choose to live it TO ITS FULLEST! We should choose to be happy every day. (Of course there also are occasional times for sorrow, but I am speaking of a general attitude toward life!)

God tells us to *choose happiness!*

“See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thes. 5:15-18).

Rejoice always! In *everything* give thanks. In trials. When burdened with problems. When growing old.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philipp. 4:4-8).

Let us keep positive, focusing NOT on what we *can't* or *shouldn't* have, but on what GOOD things God *wants us to have!*

## Recurring Theme of Ecclesiastes

There is a recurring theme in the book of Ecclesiastes. We may think Ecclesiastes is all about doom and gloom because of such phrases as “Vanity of vanities ... all is vanity,” “There is nothing new under the sun,” “all was vanity and grasping for the wind,” etc. But throughout the book, we are told to ENJOY LIFE! We are told choose to live life to its fullest! Notice these verses:

“There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. ... For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God” (Eph. 2:24, 26).

“He has made everything beautiful in

its time. He also has put eternity in their hearts except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of his labor—it is the gift of God” (Eccles. 3:11-13).

“Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage” (Eccles. 5:18).

“So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor for the days of his life which God gives him under the sun” (Eccles. 8:15).

“Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works. Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil.

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun ... for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Eccles. 9:7-10).

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil” (Eccles. 12:13-14).

## Choose to Live Life Fully

Let us choose to live life FULLY. To live life to its full means we must live it *God's way*. He created life and he knows what is best for us.

As we obey God, we are to choose each day to *rejoice!* We are to *work hard* and then *relax and enjoy* the fruits of our labor. That includes enjoying delicious dinners with refreshing drinks while laughing with friends and sharing romantic interludes with our spouse.

Remember the lesson of Jeff. Attitude is everything. Work like you don't need the money. Love like you've never been hurt. Dance like nobody's watching.

## Know Your Bible Answers

1) Jonah. 2) Rheoboam. 3) Ruth. 4) Jezebel. 5) Sodom & Gomorrah.

## Fun Fact

of creation, history, holidays & the Bible



Drawing and Fun Fact are courtesy of NAPS

In parts of Yugoslavia, Mother's Day is called “Materice” by the Serbian people and is observed two weeks before Christmas.

## Witerature

*Wit and wisdom to complement the truths of the Holy Bible can be found in secular writings.*

80 by Gerald Gardner & Jim Bellows, SourceBooks, Inc, 2007, pp. 2-3.

## Laughter Is Healthy

“There is a real connection between humor and longevity. Norman Cousins is a great example. He was in a hospital. They hadn't figured out what was ailing him. Then he heard two doctors discussing his case at his bedside. And they cast such a dark cloud of gloom on him that when his wife visited him a little later, Cousins said, ‘I can't listen to this. I can't be in those doctors' company, I want to go to a hotel room.’ So they took a hotel room. And they rented medical equipment for the room. And he called his friend, Allen Funt, the creator of the TV show *Candid Camera*, because Cousins enjoyed that show. And they screened a constant diet of *Candid Camera* and the Groucho Marx television show, *You Bet Your Life*. Then he wrote a book which came to the attention of the faculty of UCLA, and they invited him to come and teach his theory—the theory of the influence of laughter on your health.”

Prov. 15:13, 15; 17:22

## Quotable Quotes

“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear.”

—Mark Twain

## Memory Scripture

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.”

—Isa. 28:10

## Who's to Blame?

Continued from Page 3

your response is NOT predetermined ... : You ultimately choose. You can choose to react like a one-celled amoeba, strictly determined to avoid all discomfort. Or, you can choose to react like a human being, with the ability to make choices, acknowledging that the ABSENCE of hurt and discomfort is INSUFFICIENT to give your life meaning and purpose."

In other words, choosing to do the right thing can cause immediate pain. Let's say the sin is smoking, and the temptation is to light up. But we DO THE RIGHT THING and refuse to smoke that cigarette. What happens? We suffer the PAIN of nicotine withdrawal. But in the long run we will be glad we suffered because we will have kicked the habit (and the pain will eventually go away).

The same is true with cravings for drunkenness or overeating or illicit sex or many of life's sins. Making the right choice means experiencing a little pain now, but winning a big reward in the end. Making the wrong choice means stopping the immediate discomfort or craving. But we pay for it in the long run because we STAY IN THE SIN. We feel guilt and we hate ourselves for not doing right. We have lower self-esteem. And then we need to go to God and repent (again).

Let us take full responsibility for our wrong choices. When we sin, do not blame it on Satan. Do not blame it on temptation. Do not blame it on the old self creeping out of the baptismal pool. When you and I sin it is because you and I WANT to sin (if only for a moment). We choose to sin and we go ahead and do it, even though we probably know better and we'll regret it when it's over.

### After We've Sinned, Then What?

Let's say we've sinned. We now admit we're guilty of making the wrong choice. What do we do now?

The wages of sin is death. We deserve to die for our sins. We must go before God and repent. If we are not baptized we must become baptized "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Christ is our Passover Lamb. He died, like those Passover lambs died back in Egypt, so that we, like the Israelites in Egypt, may live. Jesus Christ died for us.

That is why we must repent and be baptized. That is why we renew our baptism every year at Passover.

And let's not slip back into a *habit of choosing sin!* There is another choice! Let us make a *habit of choosing to live God's way* (Deut. 30:11-20).



## Puerto Rico Prepares for Zika Epidemic

"On an inexorable march across the hemisphere, the Zika virus has begun spreading through Puerto Rico, now the United States' front line in a looming epidemic.

"The outbreak is expected to be worse here than anywhere else in the country. The island, a warm, wet paradise veined with gritty poverty, is the ideal environment for the mosquito carrying the virus. The landscape is littered with abandoned houses and discarded tires that are perfect breeding grounds for the insects. Some homes and schools lack window screens and air conditioning, exposing residents to almost constant bites. ...

"A quarter of the island's 3.5 million people will probably get the Zika virus within a year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and eventually 80 percent or more may be infected. ...

"The epidemic is unfolding in one of the country's most popular vacation destinations, where planes and cruise ships disembark thousands of tourists daily. Anyone could carry the virus back home, seeding a mosquito-borne outbreak or transmitting it sexually" ("Puerto Rico Braces for Its Own Zika Epidemic" by Donald G. McNeil Jr., *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, March 19, 2016, pp. 1-2).

When asked what would be the sign of his coming and the end of the age, one of the things Jesus mentioned as "the beginning of sorrows" was "pestilences" (Mat. 24:3, 7).

Other prophecies tell us that disease epidemics will be a major problem as we reach the end of this age before Christ returns. Ezekiel warns that one third of our nation could die from pestilence (Ezek. 5:12). The "pale horse" from the symbolic "four horsemen of the apocalypse" seems to represent deadly diseases, which, along with war and famine, will kill one fourth of the world's population (Rev. 6:7-8).

The Zika virus is just one example of an end-time disease spreading throughout America and the world.

## A Supreme Court Shift?

"There is a reason Republican senators are so adamant in their refusal to let President Obama appoint a successor to Justice Antonin Scalia, a towering figure in conservative jurisprudence. An Obama appointment would be the most consequential ideological shift on the court since 1991, creating a liberal majority that would almost certainly reshape American law and American life" ("Scalia's Death Offers Best Chance in a Generation to Reshape Supreme Court" Adam Liptak, *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, Feb. 18, 2016, p. 1).

A liberal Supreme Court would push the U.S. away from God's way of life. One example is its vote last June 26 to legalize gay marriage. As our nation becomes more like Sodom and Gomorrah, it gets closer to punishment from God that will include captivity (Deut. 28:41, 47-52, 64). That captivity must happen before Christ returns, because one of his first duties upon returning will be to free the captives (Isa. 11:11-12, 16).

## Quakes Hit Japan, Ecuador

"At least two people were killed and 45 injured by a magnitude-6.5 earthquake that knocked down houses and buckled roads in southern Japan on Thursday night [April 14]" ("Strong quake kills 2, injures 45 in Japan" by Mari Yamaguchi, Associated Press, *Southeast Missourian*, Friday, April 15, 2016, p. 9A).

"Aid began to flow in Sunday [April 17] to areas devastated by Ecuador's strongest earthquake in decades, and the death toll continued rise as people left homeless hunkered down for another night outside in the dark.

"Officials said the quake killed at least 246 people and injured more than 2,500 along Ecuador's coast. ... the quake ... struck shortly after nightfall Saturday [April 16]" ("Toll rises to 246 from Ecuador earthquake" by Dolores Ochoa and Allen Panchana, Associated Press, *Southeast Missourian*, Monday, April 18, 2016, p. 9A).

"Earthquakes in various places" are another sign we are approaching the end of this age (Mat. 24:3, 7-8).