

goodness of His promise. Jesus wants us to be virtuous not voracious, peaceful not violent, humble not arrogant, and spiritual not materialistic, racist, sexist, and so forth.

### **The Hope of the Faithful**

First-century Christians sought to live again the pristine morality of the Edenic life before the Fall. They looked forward to Jesus Christ's return and the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah, chapter 11:

#### **Peace in Christ's Kingdom**

<sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb: and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: the calf and lion, and the sheep shall abide together, and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup> The calf and the bear shall feed: their young ones shall rest together: and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. <sup>8</sup> And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp: and the weaned child shall thrust his hand into the den of the basilisk. <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt, nor shall they kill in all my holy mountain, for the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the covering waters of the sea.

The faithful often lived like the Nazarite ascetics under temporary or permanent vows and practiced temperance, abstinence, fasting, simplicity (voluntary poverty), purity, modesty, truthfulness, and renunciation of many "worldly" pleasures. Other forms of restraint like nonviolence and silence were also practiced. Constant prayer, humility, charity, a positive service attitude, and other virtues were cultivated in the early church. What has happened to this asceticism over the last twenty centuries? Is there still hope for humanity's unity and perfection in Christ? Are we still seeking the promise of God's benevolent kingdom?

### **Pathological Inculturation, Trials, and Tribulation**

Somehow, in the rush to save souls the moral discipline of the early church broke down. The result was a separate set of behavioral expectations for the merely baptized or confirmed faithful and those who took additional vows of religious life. Often adjusted expectations resulted from Christian confrontation with uncivilized cultures. The development of certain regional strategies to cope