

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Why the Holy Days?

Dear Brethren,

Why does God have us rehearse His Festivals and Holy Days year after year? The answer that appears most obvious is that we as humans tend to forget and need a continual reminder. This is true, but there is more. Here are three reasons.

The first is that, as mentioned above, we *do* need a reminder. Old-timers in the Church can likely think of someone who has left the Church and forgotten the meaning of these special days. I am reminded of the woman who once told me, *You can only hear the same sermons so many times; you need to hear something new.* She came out of Worldwide into an independent group where sermons strayed far from the truth we hold so dear.

She later expressed to me, *We were once so arrogant, thinking we were the only ones saved.* She pointed out a dear gentleman we both knew, saying, *If there was ever a Christian, he is. Just because he has the wrong day doesn't mean he is not saved.* I felt compelled to remind her that there is much more to it than “the wrong day.” He also had the wrong gospel, he was substituting heathen holidays for the Holy Days, he believed in flawed ideas of heaven and hell, and he worshiped a false, trinitarian god. She had forgotten what she had once known about the Festivals and Holy Days—the meaning of Pentecost (first-fruits) and the Last Great Day (when all who have not yet been called will have their opportunity). She had forgotten that the fine qualities of this nice gentleman meant that he would surely respond wonderfully when God opened his mind in the Great White Throne Judgment.

I was stunned. How could a longtime Church member so quickly lose understanding of these truths we had rehearsed so many times? And she was part of a group of people who still met on the Holy Days, though her leaders were failing to feed

their flock with basic truths! How much more have others lost, who do *not* assemble on these God-ordained days to hear their meaning rehearsed each year?

The Strata of Sin

But there is more than remembering basic meaning. A second benefit of keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread annually is that through them we rehearse a lifelong process of putting sin out of our lives. I heard one professor at Ambassador College describe it as cutting away the layers of an onion. Our lives have many sinful layers. With God's help, you strip away the outward layer of sin, then stand back and consider how you have been freed from a specific sin, such as smoking. That is good! But later, you look *again* at the onion and see another layer of sin that must be removed—perhaps getting caught up in politics, or laxity in Sabbath observance. The process of stripping away one layer after another continues as you become aware of one flaw after another. There are many strata to human nature, just as there are many to an onion—yet too many in God's Church become comfortable after baptism and give up on this process.

No wonder God warns us through Jeremiah that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Or, as He wrote earlier, “O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” so he cried out, “O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing” (10:23–24). Do you do the same? Do you understand the profound meaning of these passages? And let us not forget Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Human nature

Volume 24, No. 2



Inside This Issue...

The Bible vs. the U.S. Constitution... p. 3
Strive to Conquer Sin Completely... p. 6
Complaining or Completion?... p. 10
Hezekiah's Humility... p. 12
Winter Weekend Activities... p. 14

"Submission" Is Not a Dirty Word... p. 16
Student Essays Explore Fruit of the Spirit... p. 18
Local Church News... p. 20
Living Education's Multitude of Counselors... p. 23
Commentary... p. 24

is easily deceived. Some “truths” about ourselves and our character—of which we are sure in our own thinking—are, in fact, not true.

When we prepared for baptism, the principles found in these passages were points of focus for us. Many of us memorized them, recognizing their importance. But, as I wrote in our *John 3:16* booklet, “The problem with memorization is that, once we learn something, our brains stash it away and concentrate on something new” (p. 41).

So, we must never “stash away” the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Rather, we must year-by-year peel away one wrong action and way of thinking after another. Putting away sin does not end at baptism.

Are You Desensitized?

And there is a third valuable lesson for us. Our world is constantly blurring standards of right and wrong. What we once considered wrong may not seem so wrong today. We grow more tolerant of sinful behaviors as we become desensitized to the sin all around us.

Hunter Madsen and Marshall Kirk explained desensitization in their book *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the '90s*, outlining their plan to influence Americans to accept homosexuality. They explained how to use the media to make homosexuality appear a normal part of society. Do you find yourself desensitized, even siding with behaviors contrary to the Scriptures? Do you encourage sinful behavior?

This is what happened in Corinth with the man who was sleeping with his stepmother (1 Corinthians 5). Paul, decrying the Corinthians’ tolerance of sinful behavior, connects it directly to their forgetting the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice and the Days of Unleavened Bread. “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (vv. 6–8). We are equally guilty if we give a thumbs-up

on social media and tell someone how brave he or she is for “coming out of the closet.”

The Bible calls Satan “the prince of the power of the air”—the one who directs “the course of this world” (Ephesians 2:2). The depth to which he directs the world is often underestimated, as he uses the same devices repeatedly and we grow desensitized to them. The same violence and sexual immorality Satan inspired prior to the Flood and among the cities of the plains—including Sodom and Gomorrah—is playing out again in our world today. Corinth’s immorality can be found in our modern cities, and in all forms of modern media. How many are addicted to pornography, gory video games, gambling, fornication? These things may be accepted in our generation, but God does not “cave” to the vote of man.

Our constant desensitization toward ungodly values means that we must take stock each year and ask ourselves, *What have I absorbed this year? How have my moral perceptions changed over the last five years? Do I tolerate any entertainment that I would have shunned ten years ago?* These are serious questions for serious meditation!

Paul admonishes us to “walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise” (Ephesians 5:15). To be *circumspect* means to have our eyes wide open to what is happening around us. Paul tells us further,

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:11–14).

What do you need to change this year?



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The Bible vs. the U.S. Constitution

One of our ministers was challenged, “Can you show me even one example where the U.S. Constitution is in disagreement with the Bible?” This question demonstrates a profound lack of understanding of the Gospel message and possibly ignorance as to what is in the Constitution. The questioner was immersed in all the political wrangling going on in America today, and his approach expressed the attitude, *I have my God-ordained rights; no one is going to tell me what to do.*

We should all be thankful for the liberties we have in the U.S. and other Israelite countries. The U.S. Constitution provides for checks and balances as safeguards against tyranny. The founders understood the selfish tendency of human nature and what can happen when carnal men have too much power. They therefore set up what was intended to be a fair—but, in some ways, deliberately inefficient—system, not allowing any single state too much power. That is why each state, no matter its size, has two senators but varying numbers of Congressmen in the House of Representatives based on population.

The American founders also enshrined certain individual rights that could not be taken away by majority opinion, and they set up a judicial system to uphold these rights. That is how it is *supposed* to work—but, as we know, selfish individuals often find ways to get around or ignore laws. Nevertheless, it would be impossible for us to carry on this Work without such freedoms as those of speech, religion, and expression. This is especially so because the truth is not a majority creed.

Every U.S. citizen—and even citizens of other nations—should be thankful for the freedoms enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, as those freedoms have *de facto* spread far beyond national borders and created a base from which God’s Church can preach the truth around the world. But does that mean the U.S. Constitution agrees with the Bible? Will it be the founding document under the rule of Christ—and, if not, what *will* be the founding documents of Jesus’ worldwide rule?

Sadly, many are ignorant of the document in which they profess to have such faith, and they often conflate *three different documents*. As one can easily find online, “The Declaration [of Independence], the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights are, in many ways, fused together in the minds of Americans” (*ConstitutionCenter.org*).

The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence was drafted in 1776 and, among other points, gives us these memorable words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

These words and phrases certainly sound good, but what about the following words found in the Declaration? “To secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Does this statement not go back to the Garden of Eden, where man took to himself the prerogative to choose right and wrong? Will the rule of Christ be derived from “the consent of the governed”? Or will it be derived from the decree of God Almighty?

The Declaration continues, “Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.” In other words, it is the “Right of the People” to overthrow a government they deem unjust—exactly what was done by the American Revolution, and why this document is called a declaration of “Independence.” America’s founding fathers wanted to be independent from the king of England. One can certainly argue that this was a good choice, but—more than most people realize—it no doubt had more to do with God’s plan to separate two brothers, similar to what happened to Israel at the time of Jeroboam and Rehoboam, when God said the separation that created two nations, Judah and Israel, “is from Me” (1 Kings 12:24).

The question must be asked: Should a true follower of Christ take up weapons to overthrow the government he is under? What did Jesus say? “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight... but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). When Jesus was taken into custody—ultimately to be martyred—Peter whipped out a sword and took off a man’s ear (John 18:10–11). Did Jesus commend Peter for his zeal? To the contrary—He rebuked him for attempting to thwart God’s greater plan. Matthew’s account of the incident adds, “But Jesus

said to him, ‘Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword’” (Matthew 26:52). Later, the Apostle Paul explains that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

The U.S. Constitution

The U.S. Constitution was drafted eleven years after the Declaration, when the Revolutionary War was over. Again, we see a focus on human rule from the bottom up, as its preamble begins: “We the people....” There are seven articles in the Constitution, each focusing on setting up a humanly devised form of government. Article 1 establishes a Congress—the House of Representatives and the Senate. Article 2 establishes the executive—a president. Article 3 establishes a Judiciary—the Supreme Court and lower courts. Article 4 defines relationships among the states. Article 5 details how amendments may be made. Article 6 addresses debts and treaties. Finally, Article 7 contains the ratification of the document.

As we see, this describes a form of government nowhere found in Scripture. So, we must ask, *No matter how much we may be enamored with it, is the U.S. Constitution in agreement with the Bible?* Does God want “we the people” choosing our leaders? (We might also ask, *How are we doing on that score?*) Is the Constitution merely the foundation of one more humanly constructed rule of law that is in the process of failing, as have all the others? In many respects it has served exceptionally well for more than 235 years, but its days were numbered from the beginning. It *will* fail, thanks to human greed, selfishness, and sin. No, this is not the Kingdom of God!

We are thankful for freedom of speech. Without it, our speech would be censored, which is even beginning to happen now that America is straying further and further from its founding documents. **But should there be limits to free speech? If the U.S. were truly a godly nation, there would be!**

The First Amendment

The Bill of Rights was proposed in 1789 and comprises the first ten amendments to the Constitution—and it is what many people think of when they think of the Constitution. Because so much can be said about these amendments, the scope of this article only allows me to review the first two. The First Amendment says that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the

free exercise thereof.” We are thankful for that amendment, as without it the truth would be suppressed quickly by a state-sponsored counterfeit Christianity, as it was in England and Europe. But does freedom of religion reflect the Bible, the mind of God?

Let us not forget the question sparking this article: Are the U.S. Constitution and the Bible in harmony? Well, does the Bible support the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of religion? While we are thankful for the freedoms and rights we enjoy, the ultimate answer is *absolutely not!*

Nowhere does the Bible speak kindly of other gods. “Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me! There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Psalm 81:8–10). Deuteronomy 12:1–5 called for the destruction of pagan places of worship, and Leviticus 20 took it one step further, decreeing the death penalty for anyone promoting the foreign god Molech. One might wonder why a loving God would take this approach. The answer is simple: False religion does not reflect the mind of God and will ultimately supplant the true worship of God if left unchecked.

Of course, we understand that we are not living in the Old Covenant nation of Israel. As such, individual Christians must not take it upon themselves to enact the death penalty or to destroy the property of those with different beliefs. But the mind of God toward idolatry and false religions is clear. God also warns us against counterfeit Christianity in Matthew 24:4–5, 2 Corinthians 11:13–15, and Revelation 17–18, just to name a few of many instances. He condemns idolatry from Genesis to Revelation. There will be none of any nation’s “freedom of worship” under the government of the only true God!

The First Amendment continues, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press....” We are thankful for freedom of speech. Without it, our speech would be censored, which is even beginning to happen now, as America is straying further and further from its founding documents. But *should* there be limits to free speech? If the U.S. were truly a godly nation, there *would* be. The Bible—yes, even one of the Ten Commandments—forbids one kind of speech: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

This principle extends to how we speak about our rulers: “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people” (Exodus 22:28). A powerful statement was made after a man

blasphemed the name of God (Leviticus 24:11–16). The mind of God (v. 12) dictated that the man be put to death. Even so, we as Christians under the New Covenant are not responsible for punishing others. That is left for God to handle—and handle it He will, in His time!

Has God changed His mind about freedom of speech? Not according to Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8. In a practical example of this, after the Apostle Paul spoke very sharply without realizing he was speaking to the High Priest (Acts 23:1–5), he acknowledged his error and quoted from the command in Exodus 22:28 when he was informed of this fact.

Another example of God’s mind involves how we speak of our parents: “For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 20:9). Once again, we are not under the theocracy of the Israelite nation administered by Moses, and it is not our responsibility to carry out the death penalty. But this passage shows us the

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mind of God toward the offender. We are not to speak evil of God, of our rulers, or of our parents. Brethren, there is much violation of this, even among members of God’s Church. We must take the mind of God seriously!

Under the Constitution, all these examples of speech are protected—you can use God’s name in vain, you can say anything vile against a ruler, and you can curse your parents! Returning to our central question of comparing the Bible and the U.S. Constitution, we have seen that there *is* a clear dichotomy between the two governing documents.

The Second Amendment

The Second Amendment reads, “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Men have interpreted this amendment in differing ways, but rather than getting into the nuances and taking sides on arguments, we must ask what this amendment means to servants of God.

Are we to use guns to “overthrow” a corrupt government? Are we to join the military and learn to fight and kill? Should we become politically involved in the carnal disputes over the Second Amendment? Or are we part of a different kingdom with a citizenship held in heaven (John 18:36; Philippians 3:18–20)?

A Future Constitution

While we are grateful for the freedoms we have under the U.S. Constitution, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and any other humanly devised document that brings a level of peace and religious freedom, *none* agree with the Bible. We have seen a few indisputable examples in this article. All such documents contradict the Bible in numerous ways.

Let us now turn to the question of what Constitution—what instrument of government—Christ will institute upon His return. What will be the foundation and structure of His rule? The Bible answers this question. It tells us the form of government, how leaders of that government will be selected, the laws of that government, and how those laws will be enforced.

Instead of “We the people...” it will be “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2). Israel of old rejected God’s rule (1 Samuel 8:7), but His rule will be reestablished—not only for Israel, but for the whole world (Zechariah 14:9). David will be resurrected to be king over all Israel (Jeremiah 30:9). The Twelve Apostles will each rule over one of the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). We who respond during this age to God’s calling will be given responsibility over cities (Luke 19:11–19). That is the pattern found in Scripture, but much detail will be filled in as Christ appoints rulers over nations, cities, and specific responsibilities within them.

The Ten Commandments will be our Bill of Rights (Exodus 20:2–17), from which will come true liberation (James 1:25; 2:12). Freedom of speech and expression will come with limits that reflect the mind of God—putting an end to disrespect, profanity, pornography, and pagan religious practices. God’s Spirit will undergird that new world (Hebrews 8:6–13). Children will honor their parents and there will be respect for Christ’s chosen leaders. There will be no more need for guns to fight wars or protect oneself (Isaiah 2:1–4). And when someone does stray too far off track, there will be reminders from caring Spirit rulers (Isaiah 30:20–21).

That will be a very different world from the one in which we now live. We are told to come out of this present Babylonish world (Revelation 18:4). “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). Mankind’s Declarations of Independence, Constitutions, and Bills of Rights *are* in disagreement with the Bible. How sad it is that members can be in God’s Church for decades and not realize this basic truth. Perhaps it is time to search more thoroughly for the leaven that sits in the back of our minds! (L)

Strive to Conquer Sin Completely



By **Richard F. Ames**

Most professing Christians today believe that God’s law was “nailed to the cross” when Jesus Christ was crucified. They will say, “Jesus led a perfect life in your stead—there’s nothing at all for you to do except believe!”

We in God’s Church, however, have precious truth that mainstream Christianity ignores or rejects. We understand that God has given His people the motivation *and* the means to come out of sin. But are we using the tools He has given us? Are we really striving to come out of spiritual Egypt, as pictured by the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread? We must strive to conquer sin completely!

To obey our Savior requires faith. Think of the example of the Apostle Peter, responding to Jesus’ command to walk across the water. Peter got off to a good start, but then faltered. “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (Matthew 14:30–31).

Peter’s personal exodus from sin almost failed here because of his doubt, but Christ saved him. Each of us in God’s Church is on an exodus of our own, leaving sin behind and progressing toward righteousness.

Triumph, Not Doubt

But sometimes we have doubts. Sometimes we may look at our situation and think God isn’t intervening on our behalf. And then we remember that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called ac-

ording to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). But do we remember what is written after that famous verse? God the Father created us to be “conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (v. 29). Yes, Christ overcame and has been glorified. And we, too, were created for that purpose—not as the Firstborn, but looking forward to being born into the Family of God as *firstfruits*. We can be conformed to Christ’s image—we can internalize His holy and righteous character as our own! With the Holy Spirit—with the power of God in us—we can triumph. As the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians,

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? (2 Corinthians 2:14–16).

To the world, genuine Christians are “the aroma of death.” To those who are perishing in their sins, Christ’s righteousness in us is an affront to their way—and they do not know that their way leads to death. But to God, we are the aroma of life, a beautiful fragrance. It reminds us of the incense coming up before God’s throne in the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8). And it is an aroma of *triumph*.

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:10). We have been saved from our past sins, we are being saved from

our present sins, and if we endure to the end we shall be saved for all eternity. How do we endure to the end? We continually strive to draw closer to our Savior. We seek to become more and more like Him. One aspect of that—an aspect we stress especially before taking the Passover each year—is that we examine ourselves and ask God to show us our weaknesses. We say, with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23–24).

How can we see our “invisible” flaws? God’s word and His law can help us see what we normally cannot—but are we willing to act on what He shows us? We read that “if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:23–25).

Have you been a “doer of the work” regarding repentance? Do you right now have a repentant attitude? Have you made a commitment to maintain a repentant attitude to the end of your life? Paul described the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow: “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Corinthians 7:10–11).

Have you seen the fruits of repentance in your own life? Has your repentance produced indignation toward what is evil? Do you live with a godly fear, with a strong desire to do what is right, and with a zeal to do God’s Work and live His way of life? Are you refreshing your mind with the truths of God? Are you reading His word daily? Or do you only read it occasionally—maybe during a congregational Bible Study, or during a Sabbath sermon? Remember what Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). God speaks to us through Scripture. He wants us to understand His word—the truth (John 17:17)—and He wants us to live by His every word (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4)!

Search and Destroy Your Sin

These are vital points of self-examination. You might want to review my old *Living Church News* article “Self-Examination: A Vital Key to Growth” (March–April 2009). And we certainly do examine ourselves as we prepare to take the Passover each year. But although only baptized members take the Passover,

self-examination is also important for those who aren’t yet baptized. None of us should become forgetful, like the ancient Israelites who again and again drifted away from God, not appreciating how He had delivered them.

How far did the Israelites fall back into sin? They even built a golden calf to receive their worship. And how did Moses respond when he saw the Israelites worshipping the golden calf? “Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it” (Exodus 32:20).

That’s what Moses did when he saw the Israelites’ sin. Is that what you do with your sin? When you discover sin, you need to put it out—symbolically grind it to powder and scatter it on the water. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. Before baptism, you and I were slaves of sin. But when we were baptized—when we began to live God’s way with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—we became slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:18). And what fruit does that slavery produce?

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:20–23).

Sinners may think they are free, as they don’t regulate their conduct by God’s word. But the truth is that they are slaves to sin, to death, as they are walking in the flesh. It’s different for Christians. “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1–2). Those who practice sin are subject to the penalties of God’s law. But those who practice righteousness, who do not walk according to the flesh, are *not* subject to those penalties—penalties Christ paid for us through His shed blood.

Walk in the Spirit, Not in Sin

How do we know that we are walking in the Spirit? One sign is that we are humble and that we recognize quickly when we have sinned against God or against another human being. We are quick to repent—not just with our words, but by changing our behavior. We remain on guard against even the smallest sin, because we know that if we tolerate sin in our lives it will only grow. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9). We must not tolerate sin in our lives.

That is a vital lesson of the Days of Unleavened Bread. We remember that Paul told us, “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8). Put simply, we strive to live as Christ lived.

My *New King James Version* Bible has a heading above Romans 12:9—“Behave Like a Christian.” Below it we read a powerful summary of Christian conduct:

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse (Romans 12:9–14).

To abhor evil—to hate it—we must recognize what evil is. Remember what God said to Ezekiel: “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it” (Ezekiel 9:4). We know that God is going to protect those who maintain that kind of attitude. Just as we embrace righteousness, we learn to reject unrighteousness. “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate” (Proverbs 8:13).

Yes, we are to hate sin, not to look for excuses for practicing sin. We strive to practice righteousness. “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10). We want to be the people who keep God’s commandments. “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 John 3:24).

That’s how God lives in us—by the Holy Spirit. “By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:13). And what is the result of abiding in Him? “Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him” (1 John 3:6). If we are striving to obey God, but we stumble in weakness, we are not *practicing* sin; we root it out as soon as we find it. Though we may sin, we hate our sin and we seek to repent and overcome. And God is ready to forgive as we repent. “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

Exodus 15 was written as a hymn of victory for the Israelites who escaped Pharaoh’s armies. And each of us, on our own personal exodus out of sin, should be able to recount our own victories—times when we relied on God and He provided wonderful triumphs. Can we sing, as did the Israelites, “I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously” (Exodus 15:1)?

Pharaoh’s armies could not touch the Israelites. And we read that “whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the evil one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18, *American Standard Version*). As men and women of faith, we follow the examples of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. We thank God for the understanding He has given us. “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

Love God: Keep His Word

Many call themselves Christians and profess to love Jesus. But are they truly Christians? Jesus Himself gave an answer: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me” (John 14:23–24).

These people may be sincere. But they are sincerely wrong. It is one thing to be grateful for Christ’s forgiveness of sin when we repent. But it is another—and a grievous error—to make the false assumption that we can keep on sinning and expect God to ignore our conduct. As Paul reminded the Romans, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:1–2). Such licentious, antinomian people are shamefully crucifying their Savior again and again (Hebrews 6:6).

Apart from their conduct, even in doctrine such lawless people deny the one sign Jesus plainly gave to declare His Messiahship, the “sign of Jonah.” True Christians show their obedience by keeping the Passover as Jesus taught, not by “Christianizing” pagan fertility customs and calling them “Easter Sunday” observances.

Paul had to endure trials and tests, in his preaching and even in his personal life. He pleaded to God to remove obstacles. We read, “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:7–9).

When God would not remove the thorn in Paul's flesh, Paul did not despair. He came to understand that his human weakness allowed God's power to become more evident in his life. That's the power of the Holy Spirit. As Paul reminded the Romans, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings

As we each continue on our personal exodus from sin to salvation, we must always remember that we are not saved because of our own righteousness or because of our own hard work. **He gave His life for us, and He has given us His very faith, which allows us to live His way as we go about our own lives. We are conquering sin through the gift of the Holy Spirit—and we must remember to use that Spirit continuously.**

which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26). Paul prayed for one outcome—removal of his suffering—but God answered that prayer by intervening in ways Paul could not have imagined.

Endure and Conquer

Brethren, we must strive to conquer sin completely! If we endure to the end, we will receive a wonderful reward! "So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54–57).

Yes, God will give the victory, even beyond what we can imagine doing for ourselves. But we have a part to play. Remember Jesus' admonition: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). We must never forget that God promises us triumph through Christ. As baptized Christians, having received the Holy Spirit, we have within us God's perfect, holy, and righteous character. But it is up to each of us *how much* we let God's character become our character. As we continue our journey from sin to perfection, we must keep our eyes on the "big picture." We may stumble, but we must not give up the fight. Cleansed by the blood of Christ, we must strive to remain pure in heart, knowing that God will give us the victory.

And we must keep our hearts in the Work! Remember what Paul told the Corinthians: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the

work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Let us never forget Paul's inspiring and encouraging words to the Galatians: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20, *King James Version*).

As we each continue on our personal exodus from sin to salvation, we must always remember that we are not saved because of our own righteousness or because of our own hard work. Yes, we must work as hard as we can, but nothing we do can make unnecessary the sacrifice Jesus Christ made on our behalf. He gave His life for us, and He has given us His very faith, which allows us to live His way as we go about our own lives. We are conquering sin through the gift of the Holy Spirit—and we must remember

to use that Spirit continuously.

Our Life-Long Exodus

Each year, the Days of Unleavened Bread remind us of our continuous need to conquer sin in our lives—to overcome self, Satan, and society. It is a lifelong process. Many of us have experienced that, as we grow in our Christian lives, we reach plateaus where we think we've done a lot of overcoming—and then God reveals to us entirely new areas to which we were previously blind. Even Paul lamented, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24–25). To mainstream Christians, this passage is hard to understand, as they have the mistaken "once saved, always saved" idea. But Paul constantly strove to overcome his sinful human nature. He saw himself correctly, but he did not despair—he thanked his Savior, who made his deliverance possible! Paul knew that his whole life—day to day, year to year—was his own ongoing personal exodus from sin.

So, ask yourself, "Have I grown spiritually this past year?" We should be able to see fruits in our lives, mainly the fruit of God's Holy Spirit. Does your life show the fruit of active outgoing concern for others? Are you growing in patience in our stressful world? Have you grown, this last year, in emotional maturity and stability? If you have, then thank God for your progress in developing godly character. And if you haven't, redouble your efforts to do so, as your Savior wants you to do!

And, as we strive to overcome, we can rejoice that we are *not* laboring in vain. As we prepare for the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread—and, indeed, throughout the year—let us continue to strive to conquer sin completely! (L)



Complaining or Completion?

By **Mark Sandor**

Throughout history, several pivotal events took place on and around the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. While the most famous are the Exodus from Egypt and the death of Jesus Christ, one of my favorite examples comes from the fifth chapter of Joshua, which records the Israelites keeping the Passover for the first time in the Promised Land. While not explicitly stated, it appears that the marches around Jericho occurred during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

An event recounted in Joshua 5 shows how far the Israelites had come in redirecting their mindset toward God and His Work. We read that when the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River, God commanded Joshua to *circumcise the Israelites*—and this command was obeyed (Joshua 5:2–8). This is stated in such a matter-of-fact manner that it can be easy to read over these verses.

Does it amaze you to consider how promptly and apparently willingly the Israelites carried out this command? Of course, it is entirely possible that there may have been some grumbling that isn't noted for us. At the same time, up to this point in the inspired record, God has not been shy about recording the vast number of times the Israelites complained about one problem, duty, and situation after another—and holding them accountable. But in the book of Joshua, the record of complaining stops abruptly, despite various circumstances that might have produced complaining. It is reasonable to believe that this new generation of Israelites had learned the lesson God taught about the complaints of their parents, whose buried bodies they were about to leave behind in the wilderness.

And a record that reveals no complaining is even more astonishing when you consider just what God commanded in Joshua 5. Can you picture an entire population of males—many of them already adults—not making *some* complaints at the prospect of being circumcised? Furthermore, God gave His command just after the Israelites had crossed into enemy territory—before they had conquered a single city west of the Jordan. This pause to carry out a massive surgical project could easily have led to military disaster, especially when we consider what happened to Shechem in Genesis 34.

Would We Have Complained?

Maybe we think we wouldn't have complained—but would we have disguised some complaints in the garb of helpful suggestions? *You know, Joshua, maybe we should cross back over the Jordan before we do this circumcision. Or, Why not wait and do this after we've conquered the land?*

Picture this occurring in modern times. How would people react if a nation's leader ordered all military men to undergo—at the same time—a surgery that would keep them from active duty for about a week? Better yet, what if that leader did this immediately after landing his armies in hostile territory? A leader who tried this would be ridiculed—or worse—for such action. And perhaps rightly so, for without God's blessing, this could easily bring about military defeat!

Despite all this, the Israelites were silent and obedient in this situation. They accepted circumcision, they kept the Passover, and they then returned their focus to God's mission of conquering the Promised Land. We see in them a remarkable departure from their previous habit of complaining.

God was working with the Israelites, and not simply to get them physically out of Egypt. He sought to change their culture, their laws—indeed, their entire mindset. And doing so took far longer than the time it took to physically walk from Egypt to Israel. In fact, it took the passing of a generation! Nevertheless, God accomplished His purpose patiently with this stiff-necked people, bringing them to the point at which they would not even complain about being circumcised while in enemy territory.

Their lack of a complaining attitude was one major sign of the completeness of their exit from Egypt. And it is no coincidence that these events took place immediately before and during the spring Holy Days. As we now approach the spring Holy Days, Joshua 5 can help us, too. Becoming aware of our own complaining often provides a clear sign of how well we are removing the leaven of carnal behavior from our lives.

Strive to Become Complete

Before the spring Holy Days each year, we hear sermons that cite this concise instruction from the Apostle Paul: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—un-

less indeed you are disqualified” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Why did this matter to Paul? He prayed for the Corinthians “that you may be made complete” (v. 9) and in fact exhorts them plainly, “Become complete” (v. 11).

One way we can bring a complaining attitude under control is through daily Bible study, which Scripture itself describes as a tool to help us become complete. We read, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Even an apparent setback can give us the opportunity to become complete. Scripture reminds us, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2–4). Trials give us the opportunity to grow in faith and patience—they help us become complete, if we let them. No doubt this can be difficult when we don’t fully understand the trial we’re facing. But even if we haven’t yet figured out the lesson God is trying to get across to us, we can grow in patience and develop God’s holy and righteous character more completely. And these growth opportunities, like the Israelites’, may test our resolve not to complain.

Complaining or Explaining?

From time to time, I have counseled people who regrettably refrained from telling others about a bad situation because they were trying not to complain. If they had told someone about the problem, it could have alleviated their trial! The New Testament Church experienced this in Acts 6, when the Apostles were informed of a problem developing between the Hebrew and Hellenist Christians. Church leaders were able to examine the problem and provide a solution; without explaining the problem to the Church leadership, the problem would not have been resolved. This was not a case of complaining for the sake of complaining or trying to undermine the God-ordained leadership. And, if we are honest with ourselves, we usually know the difference between a sincere attempt to resolve a troublesome issue and griping just because griping makes us feel better for the moment.

With that in mind, how often do we find ourselves complaining and disputing about our civil leaders? They may very well do things we disagree with or that are downright sinful. But we know that Philippians 2:14 does *not* say, “Do all things without complaining and disputing *unless your political leader is a real doofus.*” Politics often stands out as a topic where the discussion is more about complaining and disputing than about problem-solving. In fact, as Christians, we know very well that only the return of Jesus Christ will put an end to certain problems. We are not exempted from Paul’s

simple and direct instruction: “Do all things without complaining and disputing” (Philippians 2:14). Problem-solving is a positive step to help a situation become better. But complaining and disputing should simply not be part of our lives.

Paul emphasizes the significance of this mindset in Philippians 2:15, continuing the sentence by saying “that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” One vital aspect of our being lights to the world—doing the Work of God in our own personal lives—is to refrain from complaining or disputing! When people see that we are content despite disagreements, we shine as lights to the world. Moreover, when we avoid complaining, we show that we are learning one of the lessons of the Exodus. Paul explained that we should not complain “as some of them also complained” (1 Corinthians 10:10). We can often learn what *not* to do from the Israelites that left Egypt!

A Growth Opportunity

When we catch ourselves complaining, we have a great opportunity to examine ourselves and see how we can repent and become more complete. Frequently, the answer is to focus on the big picture and be thankful for what God is doing. This appears to be what worked for the Israelites in Joshua 5–6. Unlike their fathers, they looked beyond their hardships and focused on what God was doing. God promised to fulfill His promises to their generation, and they knew the land was theirs for the taking if they would simply be obedient and follow God’s instructions.

Towards the end of his life, Joshua reflected on the lesson the Israelites had learned: “And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed” (Joshua 23:14). Joshua had witnessed the Israelites’ transformation from a generation of complainers to a new generation of people who were too focused on God’s Work to let themselves get caught up in complaints.

As spiritual Israelites today, we have the same opportunity and the same promise of God’s assistance. He is willing and able to help us conquer our sins. Among those sins, one of the most troublesome is holding on to an attitude of complaining. But we can and must overcome the carnal human tendency to complain. And we can have confidence that we *can* overcome, remembering the inspiring words of Paul, who was “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:3–6).

God desires to complete His work in us. Let’s be sure to do our part by overcoming our tendencies to complain, so that our conduct can become completely unleavened! (LW)

Hezekiah's Humility: A Lesson in Overcoming Tests and Trials

By **Rand Millich**

As Christians, we face physical and spiritual trials in our lives. Some ordeals we anticipate; other tests come unexpectedly, and we find ourselves unprepared. Sometimes trials come and we do not even recognize them for what they are.

The Apostle Paul wrote that “whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). When it comes to tests and trials, we can learn many valuable lessons from the life of King Hezekiah. He was a leader who “did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done” (2 Chronicles 29:2).

Hezekiah was fully prepared to face his first major trial: to overcome the apostasy that his father, Ahaz, had caused to befall the nation. Ahaz had destroyed “the articles of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 28:24).

At age 25, in the first year of his reign, Hezekiah began to correct the sins of his father. We read that “he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them” (2 Chronicles 29:3). Because the priests and the Levites had been negligent in their duties, they were now required to sanctify themselves and to clean up the holy place.

Hezekiah understood the principle of cause and effect. He understood that there was a reason for the trouble the nation was enduring. The wrath of the LORD had fallen on Judah and Jerusalem because the nation had broken the covenant it had made with the Eternal God of Israel. Hezekiah turned God’s fierce anger from Judah by spurring the nation to become obedient to that covenant once again (2 Chronicles 29:8–11). He worked diligently with the priests and Levites to reestablish the worship of God in the Temple at Jerusalem. However, there were too few priests to offer the sacrifices, and the people did not have time to gather at Jerusalem. So, following God’s instructions, Hezekiah and

the nation kept the Passover in the second month (2 Chronicles 30:1–5; Numbers 9:10–11).

After Hezekiah and a great congregation kept the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, he continued to restore the worship of the true God to Judah and to as many from Israel as were willing to follow God. We read that “in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered” (2 Chronicles 31:21). Hezekiah had faced the trial that he had clearly seen coming and, when he became king, successfully dealt with it.

Unexpected Trials Arrive

For 14 years, everything went very well for Hezekiah and Judah. Then Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against Judah (Isaiah 36:1). Hezekiah may not have seen this disaster coming, and probably thought what we often think when we are afflicted with a major trial: *But God, I have been following you with my whole heart and I’m doing Your Work. Why are you letting this happen to me?* However, Hezekiah did what he should have done. We are told, “And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD” (Isaiah 37:1). Hezekiah sought counsel from God’s prophet Isaiah, and God’s angel destroyed Sennacherib’s army (vv. 36–37). God fought the battle for them!

Later, another major unexpected trial hit Hezekiah when he became “sick and near death.” Isaiah told Hezekiah to set his affairs in order because he was going to die; God was not going to heal him (Isaiah 38:1). Again, Hezekiah faced this trial in a proper way. He turned to God and wept bitterly, praying that God would heal him of this affliction. Hezekiah was humble and contrite, and “the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, ‘Go and tell Hezekiah, “Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years’”” (Isaiah 38:4–5). How would we live if we knew the exact year we were going to die? This could be a trial in itself!

Hezekiah had to face one more major trial in his life, as a test. This time the trial blindsided him, because he did not recognize it for what it was. Merodach-Baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and gifts to Hezekiah, telling him that he was glad to hear that Hezekiah had recovered from his serious illness (Isaiah 39:1). God then withdrew from Hezekiah to test him and to see what was in his heart (2 Chronicles 32:31). Hezekiah was flattered by the attention from the Babylonian king's son, and he showed off all his silver, gold, spices, and precious ointments, along with all his war-making capabilities. He withheld nothing in his house or kingdom. Hezekiah did not think of this as a trial—he thought it wonderful that other people cared about his health and were pleased to hear of his recovery. In reality, however, he let his pride get to him. Although the coming captivity had to do primarily with the sins of other kings and of the nation as a whole, Hezekiah's attitude partially affected God's decision as well (2 Chronicles 32:24–25).

Through the prophet Isaiah, God told Hezekiah that the days “are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left... and they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon” (Isaiah 39:6–7).

Hezekiah failed that test, but he repented (2 Chronicles 32:26) and God forgave him, just as God will forgive us if we repent when we fail tests. Overall, Hezekiah did very well, and Scripture tells us that “the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, indeed they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet” (2 Chronicles 32:32).

Lessons for Us

We can learn several lessons from Hezekiah's life. We may face different kinds of trials—some we clearly see coming, some are unexpected, and some we may not realize are tests! Through all our trials, we must focus on God. We must look straight ahead to God and do what He wants us to do. When Hezekiah dealt with the trial he could plainly see—Israel's apostasy—he was certain of the right course of action. Proverbs 4:23–27 tells us to look straight ahead and to do what is right, turning neither to the left nor the right. We are to seek first the Kingdom of God and trust Him to provide all our needs (Matthew 6:33). We should approach all of our trials in this way.

Hezekiah's example also reminds us that we must use our time well, for it is our life. Hezekiah rose to the occasion when he finally recognized unexpected trials for what they were. When he knew he was going to die, he sought God's mercy with fervent prayer and humility of mind. When God extended his life, he eventually lived it in such a way that God recognized him for his goodness.

If we knew that we had 15 years left to live, how would we use that time? Would we think that we could party and carouse for 14 years and 11 months, then repent and “be good” for the last few weeks—or even days? God wants us to use our time, and our lives, wisely. Paul tells us, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:15–18). If we live this way, we will be able to deal with all the trials of life—even the unexpected ones.

Hezekiah's example also reminds us to be wise and discerning. Hezekiah had the proverbs of Solomon: “These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied” (Proverbs 25:1). Therefore, Hezekiah should have known that “a man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet” (Proverbs 29:5). The men of Babylon were searching out Judah's strengths and weaknesses, and they used flattery to convince Hezekiah to show them all that Judah possessed. Proverbs also tells us, “He who hates, disguises it with his lips, and lays up deceit within himself” (26:24). The envoys from Babylon used kind words to deceive Hezekiah, and we are warned not to believe the kind words of an enemy (Proverbs 26:25). Satan comes as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13–14), but he is our enemy. An enemy may flatter us, but he is still an enemy. Even when we may not recognize a situation as a trial, we will pass the test anyway if we use wisdom and discernment.

Humility Lets Us Overcome

Hezekiah's example should remind us to be humble, not prideful. While Hezekiah's pride was based on the good he had done, we must remember that we are here by God's grace and mercy. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). Proverbs also reminds us, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the hearts” (21:2). God was testing Hezekiah's heart (2 Chronicles 32:31). The Apostle James reveals that “‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore submit to God” (James 4:6–7). When we are humble, we will be able to overcome every trial, because we will be close to God and have access to His Spirit and power.

We need to learn these powerful lessons from the life of Hezekiah. Most of Hezekiah's life was spent wisely in devotion to doing God's work. He was focused on God. Let us be focused on Jesus Christ and on the Work that He has given us to do. Let us use our time circumspectly. Let us walk with wisdom and discernment, and let us emulate Hezekiah in one of the strongest traits he possessed: humbly seeking God through fasting and prayer. (L)

Winter Weekend Activities Across the U.S.

By **Editorial Staff**

Over the past winter, six congregations of the Living Church of God hosted weekend gatherings across the United States, providing enhanced fellowship and educational opportunities for regional brethren. Brief reports summarizing these events were kindly provided to the Headquarters office, and we at the *Living Church News* thought these would be encouraging for our brethren around the world. We hope you enjoy them!

Atlanta, Georgia

A week into December, God miraculously opened the door for us to hold the Atlanta Family Weekend at the newly renovated DoubleTree by Hilton. This facility had previously served us well during the 2020 Feast of Tabernacles. Plans quickly came together through the diligent efforts of our local leadership.

On Sabbath morning, Evangelist Richard Ames gave an insightful Bible Study on the Epistle of James. One new member commented that it had been many years since he and his family had heard such an in-depth Bible Study. In the afternoon, Mr. Ames set the tone and purpose for the weekend with his sermon titled “Develop Godly Relationships.” That evening, we enjoyed a scrumptious dinner with smoked brisket, pulled chicken, and all the fixings. After dinner, Braselton congregation member Ms. Elizabeth Moore entertained the brethren with humorous stories from her childhood. The evening concluded with the “Behind the Work” video from the 2021 Feast of Tabernacles.

On Sunday at 9:00am, the brethren gathered for fun and a variety of table games, including chess. A delightful lunch concluded the special weekend.

—Dan Hall

Charlotte, North Carolina

The Charlotte Family Weekend proved to be a very special occasion for our Church family. The Sabbath service attendance of 263 included about 60 visitors from nearby congregations. Mr. Gerald Weston gave the sermon, and the service was streamed to eleven surrounding congregations. The Sabbath



service was followed by an outstanding chili dinner and lots of fellowship. After sunset, the evening concluded with a very entertaining talent show that featured four mystery performers in our production of “The Masked Singers.” Few in the audience were able to guess who the performers were—but we had a lot of fun trying!

Sunday activities at a local sports facility, enjoyed by 243 participants, included carnival games, group games, volleyball, children’s games and activities, silent auctions for baked goods and various arts and crafts, and a lunch of freshly grilled hamburgers and hotdogs. With activities designed for participation by brethren of all ages, we enjoyed a true family weekend.

—John Strain

Delavan, Wisconsin

From December 31, 2021 to January 2, 2022, 29 enthusiastic young adults from several U.S. states joined Mr. and Mrs. Gerald and Carol Weston and Mr. and Mrs. Bob and Carla Rodzaj for a wintry Young Adult Weekend on the shore of Delavan Lake in southeastern Wisconsin. Interactive group sessions,

presentations, Sabbath Services, a question-and-answer session, and messages by Messrs. Weston and Rodzaj addressed the needs and issues young adults face today. The purpose of the event was to bring young adults together in a focused learning environment to revisit the foundational teachings and mission of the Church, to receive reinforcement and encouragement in their roles, and to forge new relationships and strengthen existing ones. Delicious and relaxed meals, enjoyable group games, and free time provided plenty of opportunities for everyone to mix, share their stories, build bonds, support each other, and simply enjoy time together. In every way, the event fulfilled its purpose.

—Bob Rodzaj

Kansas City, Missouri

The Kansas City Family Weekend went extremely well. God blessed us with relatively warm weather for the time of year, making travel easier. On Friday, we rented a gym so that our youth could get together for fellowship and any sports they might enjoy.

On the Sabbath, 238 attended in person, plus 91 online, for a total of 329. Mr. Mike DeSimone gave the sermon and Mr. Mark Sandor gave the sermonette. A catered meal was served afterwards. For the evening, families participated in a “Kahoot” trivia night featuring general, Bible, and Church topics. This was done online with smartphones and computers. Those who had personal devices shared them with those who didn’t. The event organizers provided questions for the very young as well as questions for older folks. Almost everyone stayed after the dinner and participated. Some commented that this would also be a good game for other local activities.

On Sunday, families participated in a Bible-themed carnival. Booths included a mirror maze, a “road to the Kingdom” game using remote-controlled cars, a ring toss with prizes that were intended to be given to others throughout the day, a cake walk, and many other interesting activities.

This event was a team effort, and many commented on how much they appreciated that the activities included the entire family. Those setting up their booths seemed as excited as those who enjoyed them, and the children, especially, all seemed to have their favorites.

—Rand Millich

Mineola, Texas

The Texas Family Weekend at the Hidden Pines venue in Mineola was a total success. There were 207 in attendance for Sabbath services, followed by a delicious fajitas dinner, as well as a talent/fun show and dance after sunset.

On Sunday morning, 165 attended the Bible Study, which was followed by a first-class brunch and more fellowship and fun.



The weather was perfect, and we had plenty of outdoor space for touch football and for young and old to fellowship in peace and safety. The messages were outstanding, the food and fellowship were exceptional, and all had a delightful time. The goal of the event was to recapture foundational family values, and these were reinforced and cemented during this very worthy and successful Texas Family Weekend!

—Gary Stein

Montgomery, Alabama

The Family Weekend in Montgomery, Alabama, was a great success! Eighty-nine brethren attended Sabbath services, including those online and on the telephone. Our guest speaker, Mr. Dexter Wakefield, gave a Friday evening Bible Study, as well as a sermon titled “War: What Is it Good For?”

On Saturday evening, 57 members attended the activities, including dinner and karaoke. Sunday activities involved family games, including a sack race, a shoe race, and an unwrapping contest with prizes.

We all enjoyed a weekend of fellowshiping, games, and much eating together as a family. Some complained about a little muscle soreness later, but we survived!

—Anthony Stroud



Woman to Woman

“Submission” Is Not a Dirty Word

By **Janth B. English**

Have you ever noticed that many perfectly good words are maligned in our society? Words such as *humble, meek, or servant* evoke negative emotions in the minds of those who have been imbued with this world’s carnal values. Yet Jesus Christ said that we are to humble ourselves (James 4:10) and that the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). He also said that to be truly great, one must learn to be a servant (Matthew 20:26).

The words *submit, submission, and submissive* are treated with disdain in our modern world. God clearly has a different opinion—but what about us as women in God’s Church? Especially when we see it used to describe a wife’s relationship with her husband, what goes through our minds? Do we as women cringe a bit when we hear “the ‘s’ word”?

Let’s be clear: *Submission* is not a bad word—it is a good word. To submit means “to defer to someone else.” This is exactly what Paul was telling us when he admonished Christians to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21). Everyone submits to someone. Businesses defer to their customers. Employees submit to their employers. Christians are admonished to submit to civil authorities (Romans 13:1). Children submit to their parents (Ephesians 6:1). Husbands submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, and even Christ has a head—God the Father (1 Corinthians 11:3). Submission is a universal concept; it is how we all get along. Without deferring to one another, there can be no peace. So, why is it problematic for wives to submit to their husbands? Why do even some Christian women find the subject difficult, or even offensive?

I must admit that, initially, it did not set well with me when I first heard marriage sermons explaining that wives are to submit to their husbands. I did not grow up in the Church, and I had been taught that women are capable of doing and should do their own thing. Just hearing the word “submit” was like someone running their fingernails over a blackboard (if you are old enough to remember what those are). I assumed “submission” must be like a master/slave relationship—with the woman as a slave catering to every whim of her master. Perhaps some women among us still feel this

way. In my case, I did not understand how God expects family relationships to work, and what submission really looks like when practiced properly.

Choose Your Team Captain Wisely

God places one man and one woman together in marriage to be a team, to work jointly to accomplish family goals. Every team needs a captain, and God has preordained that the husband is the captain of the family team—the head of the family. When a woman accepts a man’s marriage proposal, she is promising to acknowledge that man as her head; she gives up the “right” to be her own head. In the Living Church of God marriage ceremony, the bride promises God that she will obey—submit to—her husband. When we think of it from this perspective, we see how much care and prayerful consideration should go into a woman’s selection of a man to be her leader. Does her potential husband exhibit the fruit of God’s Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23)? Does he put God first (Matthew 6:33)? Is he of good reputation (Ecclesiastes 7:1)? What is his vision for your future together (Proverbs 29:18)? Can you see his vision as your own? The more you have in common, the easier it will be to work together as a team (Amos 3:3). You can see why it is so beneficial to receive counseling from God’s ministry before making such an important decision.

However, even the best teams must deal with disagreements at times. We can all attest to the fact that if two or more people are trying to accomplish a task, there will most likely be two or more opinions about how it should be done. Being submissive does not mean that you give up your right to an opinion. If your husband is amenable to it, let him know how you feel. Husbands should understand that, as women, we are helpers, and thus can often provide a different perspective on a situation.

Share, Then Defer

Of course, your husband may or may not be persuaded by your advice. And, as God says, the husband gets to make the final call. If your husband decides to stick with his original plan, the wife is expected to defer to his decision. This is submission in action, as God planned and intended it. A Christian



woman should not engage in nagging, complaining, browbeating, manipulation, or sulking to get her own way.

Like submission, changing how we react begins in the mind. Only the wife can decide whether she will obey God and defer to her husband; submission should not be forced on her. God desires each woman to have a meek spirit and to voluntarily submit to her husband's leadership (1 Peter 3:3–5).

What if your husband did not seek your advice and would not consider your opinion? What if you are absolutely convinced that your husband's plan will not work? Should you, a Christian wife, just stand by and watch the plan fail so that you can say "I told you so"? Should you work at your husband's plan in a half-hearted manner because you did not agree with the plan in the first place? This is the juncture where godly women put God's Spirit into action; here is where real Christian character shows up.

First of all, you should pray and ask God to help the plan to succeed, to give your husband the wisdom needed to implement it, to show him favor, and to give you the ability to defer to your husband's decision and to be an exceedingly great helper in this matter. Then you should do everything you can to make it work (Ecclesiastes 9:10)! It is not easy to work hard at something you think will fail, but with God's help, you can do it.

I can look back on my own experience and tell you that there were times when I thought something my husband wanted to do was doomed to failure. Nonetheless, I asked God to help me to assist my husband in making the plan succeed—and He did! It happened so often that I began to see that God was blessing us because we were working together as a team; this was only possible because I asked God to help me to submit to my husband's decision.

There Is Hope and Help for an Unconverted Mate

What if your husband is not in the Church and does not understand godly roles in the marriage? Even so, your responsibilities as his wife are the same. Godly women are to submit to their husbands in all things—*except*, of course, when *God's* statutes and laws are violated (Acts 5:29). Some men may not know how to be a godly husband, but there is still hope. God wants the converted wife to set a good example for her husband. If your husband is unconverted, God says that your conduct, including submission, may win him over (1 Peter 3:1–2). This is very encouraging!

Again, let us remember that submission is not bad; it is good. It is often hard to do because of our human nature and the influence of the society around us. For a wife, it may be difficult, but her responsibility is to submit—to defer—to her husband's decision even when she does not agree with it. And although submitting seems difficult at first, it is like most things—the more you do it, the easier it becomes. Practice makes perfect—and the more you do it, the more you appreciate the good fruits that come of it. As godly women, we should understand the role of family government in our homes, and we can learn to appreciate it. When we see the husband as the head of the household, and submit to him accordingly, we set for him an example that should influence his own submission to God, who is the head of the man in guiding his family.

We must trust God to direct our husbands as they lead and guide their families, and we must accept the roles that God has given us as companions, counselors, advisors, helpers, and more. And we know that we are part of a team, a family. God is wise, and He has ordained that husbands be in charge of their families and that wives should submit to their husbands (Colossians 3:18). Submission is a character trait that all godly women should cultivate—and you can, with God's help! ^(L)

From Living Education: Student Essays Explore Fruit of the Spirit

Over the past academic year, students enrolled in Living Education–Charlotte have enjoyed a course titled “Putting the Fruit of the Spirit to Work.” This course is taught by Mr. Michael Elliott, an elder serving in the Charlotte area as a ministerial trainee, who gives students weekly lectures on how to produce spiritual fruit in daily life.

As part of their coursework, Mr. Elliott has assigned each student short essays on fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). The following has been adapted from two such essays, and we hope you enjoy this glimpse into what the Living Education–Charlotte students have been learning!

The Fruit of Longsuffering

Several years ago, I was standing in the hot sun with a camera pointed at me. I was in a film club made up of a bunch of young teens, and we had decided to film a short movie—which would turn out to be more than an hour long. We were meeting up several days a week to film, and these days consisted of either acting or working behind the scenes from about 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., with a lunch break of 30–60 minutes. It was not uncommon for us to leave with sweat-soaked shirts. When we finally finished filming, which took an entire summer, I and some of the others would meet once a week to work on editing the film.

Tempers flared, people occasionally got hurt on set during filming, and the days were often long and boring. Yet, when it was done, we had an hour-long film, and the bonds between us were stronger than ever before.

In a small way, this experience taught me about longsuffering, which is arguably a difficult fruit of the Spirit to develop. According to *Merriam-Webster.com*, “longsuffering” is defined as “patiently enduring lasting offense or hardship.” It can be tempting to equate this with simply bearing hard times, but there is an added element. James pointed out this element when he wrote, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2–3).

While it is commendable to be able to endure pain and suffering, there is an added aspect here—we are to have *patience* and *joy* in our endurance. Jesus Christ showed an extreme example of this when he went through the horror of His crucifixion. We are not told that He just gritted His teeth and bore it begrudgingly, but that He, “when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten” (1 Peter 2:23). The next part of this verse reveals how Jesus was able to endure so much, yet still be a perfect

example of joy and patience in suffering: He “committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.” Jesus’ focus was on the will of His Father in heaven. Paul summed this up when he said, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Endure to the End

This world we live in is a rough place. Clinical psychologist Dr. Jordan Peterson once said, “The purpose of life, as far as I can tell... is to find a mode of being that’s so meaningful that the fact that life is suffering is no longer relevant” (“Reality and the Sacred,” *YouTube.com*). We have that mode of being. We know that God is our Father and that He has a wonderful plan for us, and that He will bring a world where war and suffering will be gone. We need to hold on to that vision—the end goal, the “finished movie”—and to the relationships with Him and others that we are developing now.

As a young man still in school, I look forward to my life. This world looks rough, and I am sure I am not alone in believing that these next few years are going to be rough—but, as I have been taught from an early age, my job right now is to “build the barn” figuratively, to prepare to have a family and provide for them. We are all “building barns,” building who we are, so we can eventually join God’s eternal family. There are going to be the days that pour on us, when we feel like nothing is going right and we’ll never reach the goal, but by putting our trust and faith in our Father in heaven, we can—and must—have longsuffering and endure to the end. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

—Charles Austin



Ryan Price and Charles Austin

Three Keys to Peace

In the world today, many people find themselves stressed, worried, and scared of the future. With a global pandemic on everyone's mind, war looming on the horizon, and constant turmoil on the home front, how could they not be? As Christians, we will face persecution and trials, and there will come a time when we are completely cast out from society, for we "will be hated by all for [Christ's] name's sake" (Mark 13:13). How can we keep a positive mindset when the pressures of this life are all around us and temptations lurk in every corner of our lives?

The answer lies in a fruit of the Spirit, found in Galatians 5:22–23. That fruit is peace, which does not only mean peace-making, although that is certainly an aspect of it. Bearing the fruit of peace also means having *peace of mind*. Yet how exactly can we have peace of mind in this life?

To answer this, first we must determine what peace of mind is. The dictionary at *Merriam-Webster.com* defines it as "a feeling of being safe or protected." So, peace of mind is a sense of feeling safe. In this article, we'll go over three keys to achieving the peace of mind that leads to a happier life.

Key 1: Cast Sin from Your Life

Sin is the opposite of peace; it is the source of all strife and division. In Mr. Wallace Smith's article "The Gift of a Truly Sound Mind" (May–June 2020), he writes, "Sin's corruption includes a degradation of our capacity to draw accurate conclusions about the world and ourselves." Sin ruins our ability to think rationally. As Mr. Smith said in his article, Satan is a prime example of how this happens—sin corrupted Satan's

mind so much that despite his firsthand experience of God's power and righteousness, he has devoted himself to opposing Him. He is so deluded that he continues to knowingly fight God.

If a powerful spirit being can be corrupted like this, we should be very wary of how sin can also delude our human minds. So, the first step to achieving peace of mind is to cast away sin's delusion and repent.

Key 2: Have Faith in God's Plan

Proverbs 29:25 tells us, "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe." We can trust that God will keep His promises. If we've repented, been baptized, and are working to keep sin out of our lives, we can rely on His promise that we will be born into His family in the soon-coming Kingdom.

We see many examples of our Father's promises being fulfilled in Scripture, and one such promise led to the nation of Israel. In Genesis 22:16–18, God promised Abraham that his family would be "as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore" and that "in [his] seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because [he] obeyed [God's] voice." What do we see today? The people descended from Israel have spread throughout the earth; Ephraim, a company of nations, once ruled most of the world as the British Empire, and Manasseh has brought prosperity and trade across the world as one of the greatest nations in history, the United States.

Even when Israel went completely against God, He didn't abandon them, because of that special promise He made millennia ago. So, too, will He not abandon us. No matter where we end up in life, He will take care of us if we rely on Him.

Key 3: Keep Focused on the Big Picture

Now, while God does take care of us, this does not mean we will completely stress-free lives. God wants us to build His righteous character through the trials and stresses we face. We will never be fully at peace in this wicked world; however, we have hope in the brighter future of a new tomorrow. We can have peace in the fact that this life isn't all there is.

If we can keep our focus on the big picture, no matter how bad things get, we can be liberated from the cares of this world. As Christ says in Matthew 6:25–34, God will provide for us—our job is to learn to emulate His righteous character and prepare for this future time of true peace, for we will be the ones to usher in this new age as His sons and daughters. If we keep casting sin out of our lives, trusting God, and looking to the hope of a new tomorrow, we can have peace of mind to help us get through this life. As is written in 2 Corinthians 13:11, God is the God of love and peace, and He will be with us.

—Ryan Price

In Loving Memory

Mrs. Elizabeth Almaguer, 52, died on November 5 after her courageous battle with cancer. Mrs. Almaguer was born in Peru, Indiana, the daughter of the late Thomas and Roberta (nee Clem) Woodhouse. She was the embodiment of kindness and caring and her joy for life was evident in her smile and the sparkle in her eyes. She was a loving wife who truly made her house a home. A longtime member of the Church, Mrs. Almaguer dearly loved God, her family, and her friends. She enjoyed gardening, arts and crafts, making bracelets, and especially her Cricut machine, which she used to create T-shirts and greeting cards for family and friends, expressing her sentiments. She also enjoyed the companionship of her beloved English bulldog, Sadie. Mrs. Almaguer will be lovingly remembered and forever cherished by her husband Juan Almaguer, stepson Matthew Almaguer, brother Robert Woodhouse, and the many brothers and sisters she had in Christ. She was a member of the Chicago, Illinois, congregation.

Mr. Walter Lee Cook, 78, died on December 13 in Kansas City, Missouri, and his graveside service was held in Harrisonville, where he lived. Born in Kansas City in 1943 to Robert H. and Rose Mae (Carroll) Cook, he graduated from high school in Raytown and lived in Raytown and Kansas City for 58 years before moving to Harrisonville, where he lived for the past 19 years. Mr. Cook was a biblical scholar and an avid American historian. He was a member of the Cass County Historical Society, a former member of the Harrisonville Historic Preservation Commission, and a member of the Kansas City Area Historic Trails Association and the Oregon-California Trails Association. He wrote several articles on the history of Jackson County, Missouri. Mr. Cook attended the Kansas City congregation. He is survived by one sister and many cousins.

Mr. Dwain Odell Crisman (known to many as Doc), **84**, of Plano, Texas, was with all his children and several of his grandchildren when he died on December 23 after a brief illness. He was born July 30, 1937, in Elida, New Mexico, but grew up in West Texas east of Newlin, graduating from Estelline High school. He went on to briefly attend Texas Tech University, and after moving to Dallas, attended Southern Methodist University. He was baptized in 1963 and faithfully served in God's Church for more than 50 years. Ordained a deacon in 1968 and an elder in 2006, Mr. Crisman was a pillar in the Dallas congregation for many years. His heart was in God's Work, and his love for the brethren was exemplary. He will be very greatly missed.

Mr. James L. Goins, 88, died on November 14, after a second stroke within ten days, at the Florida Medical Center at Oakland, Florida. He was a longtime member of God's Church, first hearing the truth through Herbert W. Armstrong and the Radio Church of God. During the apostasy of Worldwide, Mr. Goins stopped attending until he learned of the Living Church of God in January 2011 through a *Tomorrow's World* Presentation conducted by Mr. Richard Ames in Pompano, Florida. Mr. Goins is remembered for his stellar vocal solos, including his own rendition of "My Way," changing the lyrics to "I Did It God's Way." He most recently performed it at the 2021 Feast of Tabernacles Family Fun Show in St. Augustine, Florida. Mr. Goins will be very much missed by all who knew and loved him.

Mr. Kenneth E. Harrington, 95, died on December 13. Baptized in October 1961, he was a member of God's Church for 60 years. He is survived by his wife Joanne of 47 years, and many children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, along with six great-great-grandchildren. He was an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed hunting, fishing, and gardening. Mr. Harrington never complained and often found the lighter side of life. He was a positive, uplifting influence on his family, as well as on the Church brethren where he attended in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Mr. Harrington will certainly be greatly missed by all.

Mrs. Violet Goodyear, 96, died January 9. She was a member of the Gander, Newfoundland, congregation. Mrs. Goodyear was predeceased by her husband, a daughter, and a son. Left to mourn with loving memories are four sons, two daughters, eleven grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren. A private family funeral service was held, conducted by Mr. Frank Best via Zoom.

Mr. Charles Lightening, 77, died on October 28 after a long battle with health problems. His wife Sarah was his caregiver and was with him when he died. A longtime member of God's Church, Mr. Lightening attended with the Chicago, Illinois, congregation. He first came into contact with God's Church as a teenager, after hearing Mr. Armstrong's radio program while repairing a radio. He served in the United States Army as a radio mechanic and radio announcer while deployed in Vietnam. His tour of duty there was cut short, however, when it was learned that he was the only son in his family. After his return to the U.S., he worked as an aircraft mechanic. Later, he worked as an electrical engineer until a stroke forced him to stop working. The youngest of three siblings, Charles was

preceded in death by his two sisters and is survived by his wife and son, as well as nieces, nephews, and friends.

Ms. Martha Anne Page, 90, born on June 11, 1931, died on December 30, 2021. She was a beloved mother of five children, 14 grandchildren, 27 great-grandchildren, and seven great-great-grandchildren. “Miss Anne” was a spry little lady in the New Orleans, Louisiana, congregation. She was a member of God’s Church for many decades, baptized in 1968. Even in advanced age, she found a way to attend services as often as her health allowed, and she will be sorely missed.

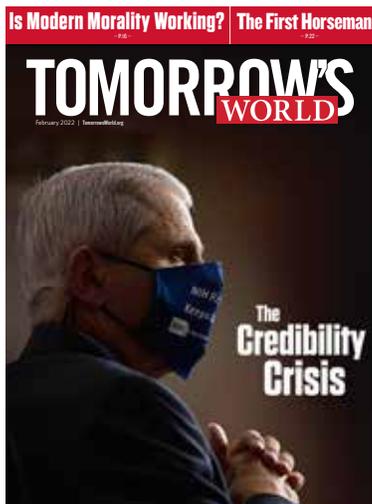
Mrs. Betty Jo Lindley Penkava, 73, died peacefully in the arms of her husband at Hospice of Randolph in Asheboro, North Carolina, on Wednesday, February 10, 2021. Mrs. Penkava was born in Asheboro on March 14, 1947, the daughter of J. D. Lindley and Helen Nance Lindley, and was raised in Franklinville, North Carolina, graduating from Franklinville High School in 1965. She was a homemaker, raising sons Eric Louis Penkava, Alex Trent Penkava, and Jason Parks Penkava. Mrs. Penkava was a longtime member of God’s Church, baptized in 1968, and enjoyed participating in many activities and worshiping with her friends in the Greensboro congregation. She loved her Lord and Savior, her Church family, and her large extended family, and she very much enjoyed helping

others. She was known for her enduring smile and laughter. She was preceded in death by one son and is survived by her husband of 57 years David Louis Penkava, two sons, and five grandchildren.

Mr. Bill Powers, 83, longtime member of God’s Church, died peacefully at his home on January 13, with his wife Donna at his side, as was his request. A man of faith, he was comforted by the many prayers for him and his family. Mr. Powers was born on September 24, 1938, in Parsons, Kansas, and baptized on November 15, 1970. He was a devoted husband and a caring father, and he loved his brethren in God’s Church. Fellowship after services in Dallas, Texas, and eating out with brethren were two of the things Mr. Powers looked forward to each Sabbath. He will be remembered and greatly missed by his wife, four children, seven grandchildren, 14 great grandchildren, many friends, and all others who knew this humble, lovable gentleman.

Mr. Douglas L. Wise, 89, died on November 24. Baptized in 1988, he was a longtime, faithful member of God’s Church, and attended the Bluefield, West Virginia, congregation. He is survived by his wife, Donna Wise. Mr. Wise will be deeply missed. His funeral was conducted by Area Pastor Lenny Bower, with both his physical and church family in attendance.

Behind the February 2022 Cover: The Credibility Crisis



Pictured here is the cover of the February 2022 issue of *Tomorrow’s World* magazine, warning of the credibility crisis sweeping our world as more and more people follow political agendas rather than true expertise. Mr. Wallace G. Smith’s corresponding article describes in detail our “brutal new world in which every man is his own self-declared ‘expert’” and points readers toward God’s profoundly different world of tomorrow, “founded on a radical commitment to truth.”

This cover features Dr. Anthony Fauci, the controversial Director of the United States National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, whose appearance on the cover was at first seen as somewhat risky. Mr. John Robinson remarked that there were initial concerns about whether readers outside the U.S. would recognize Dr. Fauci and the controversy associated with him. However, Regional Directors including Mr. Stuart Wachowicz and Mr. Rob Tyler confirmed that Dr. Fauci has garnered enough international attention for many readers worldwide to find his image relevant.

“The reactions to the article have been interesting,” mused Mr. Smith. “Some are furious because they think we’ve ‘attacked’ their favorite political figure and can’t even bring themselves to read the rest of the article. That’s part of what I appreciate about God’s Work: The only side we take is Christ’s. As a result, we step on pretty much everyone’s toes, to one

degree or another, on both sides of the political aisle. A wise old friend of mine said once that you don’t get flak unless you’re over the target, and this article has earned us a good bit of flak!”

The cover also features Mr. Gerald E. Weston’s thought-provoking article “Is Modern Morality Working?,” in which he powerfully outlines how turning away from God has impacted society. In addition, the cover highlights Dr. Douglas S. Winnail’s fundamental “The Mysterious First Horseman,” which delves into how biblical prophecies about the First Horseman of the Apocalypse add context to current events.

—Editorial Staff

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Marc Arseneault was ordained to pastor rank on December 11 by Canadian Regional Director Stuart Wachowicz. The ordination took place at services in Montreal, Quebec, which were streamed via ZOOM to all the Quebec congregations and Edmundston, New Brunswick. Mr. Arseneault pastors those congregations as well as the one in Ottawa, Ontario.

Mr. Paul Rempel was ordained an elder on December 18 by Canadian

Regional Director Stuart Wachowicz and Area Pastor Michael Brown at a service in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, that was linked to all the congregations in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North Dakota, and northern Alberta. Mr. Rempel serves in the Prince Albert congregation.

Messrs. Brian Ruane and David Burnette were ordained as deacons on December 11 by Area Pastor Wyatt Ciesielka and elders Harvey Friddle

and Donald Stevens. Mr. Ruane and Mr. Burnette serve in the Greensboro, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. John Wall was ordained an elder on December 18 by Canadian Regional Director Stuart Wachowicz and Area Pastor Marc Arseneault in a service in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which was linked to all congregations in Western Canada. Mr. Wall serves in the Winnipeg congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. Kenneth Morrison and Miss Mandiya Idrisu were united in marriage Saturday evening, January 15, in Accra, Ghana, by Pastor Rees Ellis. The wedding ceremony was attended by family and friends who witnessed the happy couple's promise of love, respect, and fidelity. The groom is from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and the bride is from Accra. They will live in Baton Rouge.

Frederick (Freddy) Gerald and Charlotte Lynn Rand married on December 9, 1961. The Dallas congregation and family members

surprised them with a 60th wedding anniversary celebration after services on December 18, 2021. Mr. and Mrs. Rand had three sons with one now deceased, six grandchildren with two now deceased, as well as six great-grandchildren and a wonderful daughter-in-law, Michele. Mrs. Rand said, "It has been, and still is a beautiful ride with loads of wonderful memories! Silver, gold, and diamond [anniversaries] gone—looking forward with great anticipation in our walk together throughout eternity."

Mr. and Mrs. Richard (Donna) Tripp recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. They were married on October 27, 1956, and celebrated the occasion with 15 of their local brethren at a wonderful dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Tripp serve in the Chanute, Kansas, congregation as deacon and deaconess. They are a wonderful example to all who come into contact with them. Congratulations on a wonderful milestone!

Births

On January 5, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin (Kalie) Detwiler welcomed their first child into the world—**Archer West Detwiler**. Archer weighed seven pounds, six ounces, and measured 20 inches long. Grandparents Adam and Angela West are thrilled and enjoying lots of time with the new addition. The Detwiler family attends the Albany, New York, congregation.

Living Education's Multitude of Counselors

One of the most valuable experiences students have as part of Living Education–Charlotte is that of listening to the Forum and Assembly presentations each week at Headquarters. The Forum each Tuesday and the Assembly each Thursday are part of the students' regular class schedule. Every presentation has something different in store—a new speaker, a new topic—and often the information is presented in a creative and interactive way.

The Director of Living Education, Mr. Jonathan McNair, intentionally seeks out a wide variety of presenters for these messages, knowing that hearing godly instruction from diverse backgrounds, specialties, and personalities is of great benefit to the students. They may hear from Mr. Lawdi Ferreira in South Africa for one presentation and next hear from Mr. Peter Nathan in the United Kingdom, or from one of the many ministers in the Charlotte area. Each speaker is encouraged to address the topic of his choice, ensuring that the students receive heartfelt and well-researched instruction.

Summaries of these Forum and Assembly messages are available at *LCGEducation.org*. For example, we've compiled the following excerpts of such summaries written by Ryan Price, currently a Living Education–Charlotte student working part-time in the Editorial Department:

A Bit of What the Students Are Hearing

Mr. Michael Thiel is an entrepreneur in advertising, currently writing ads and marketing for nearly a dozen industries. In his Forum address to the Living Education students, he discussed aspects of entrepreneurship and what it takes to become an entrepreneur. There are many perks to entrepreneurship: you won't be pressured to work on the Sabbath, you won't have to worry about job security, and you will often be able to work from home. Of course, there are also downsides—you'll have to pay higher taxes in the form of self-employment tax, you won't be given health insurance or paid time off, and your income will not be guaranteed.

For another Forum message, the Living Education students got to hear from Mr. Jonathan Bueno, a Living University alumnus and a pastor in God's Church. To help the students better relate to their local ministers, Mr. Bueno gave them insight into the ordination process and the responsibilities of an area pastor. There are many aspects to a pastor's role, but Mr. Bueno effectively broke them down into teaching, counseling, and administration. This helped the students to better understand their local pastors and their relationships with them.

Mr. Josh Lyons, another minister and Living University alumnus, brought to the Living Education students' attention that the Bible has many verses related to finance and wealth and that it gives us foundational financial principles of being balanced, being generous, and tithing. But he wanted to focus on some other practical tips for his message, so he spoke to the students about ten financial principles he hoped would help them in life. One principle Mr. Lyons spoke about was that of buying things used—a brand-new car, for example, will decrease in value as soon as you drive it out of the dealership. For many, buying used cars is a better option. This applies to furniture and appliances, too.

At the end of the first semester of Living Education, Mr. Gerald E. Weston asked the students a question: "How did you use your time this semester?" It seems time is always in short supply, but it is important that we consider how we use our time, for time is our life. For his message to the students, Mr. Weston addressed the fleeting nature of time and challenged the students to use their time wisely. He asked the students to consider how they spent their time over the semester—and, more importantly, what they will do with the time ahead of them. Developing good habits now, thinking about where our time goes, being circumspect, and making good choices with our time will lead to lasting success, both spiritually and physically.

A Multitude of Counselors

Presentations such as these give the Living Education–Charlotte students pertinent and thought-provoking information on a wide variety of topics, from credible and Christian sources. These weekly messages ensure that students receive instruction from teachers with diverse personalities and talents, which helps them see that—rather than expecting all His followers to be clones of one another—God takes delight in achieving unity among many kinds of people. Listening to Forum and Assembly messages also helps the students understand the many different facets of God's Work, as they hear from those striving to accomplish it not only in Charlotte but around the world.

While the Forum and Assembly summaries available at *LCGEducation.org* are an excellent resource, any Living Education student could tell you that they are no substitute for listening to the presentations live. If you are a young single—age 18 to 30—and able to dedicate nine months to such in-depth instruction, please consider applying for Living Education–Charlotte next year! "In a multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 24:6), and the onsite students of Living Education have many and diverse counselors provided to them through weekly Forums and Assemblies.

— Editorial Staff

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Is COVID-19 a Sign of the Four Horsemen?

Of the catastrophic events recorded in Revelation, the most well-known prophecy is likely that of the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” As COVID-19 and its variants gallop on, let’s consider this specific question: Is COVID-19 a sign that the four horsemen have started their end-time ride?

Revelation 6:1–8 describes the four horsemen, and in Jesus’ famous Olivet Prophecy, in which He explained the events that would occur at the end of the age leading up to His second coming, He also explained the symbolism of the four horsemen (Matthew 24:3–8). Perhaps the pale horse represents COVID-19, as some may claim? Can we know for sure?

Revelation 6:8 provides an important clue. It says that the horsemen will have power to kill *a fourth of mankind*—25 percent. How much human life has COVID-19 taken?

As of February 1, 2022, the number of deaths due to COVID-19 is about 5.7 million according to *Our World in Data*, and the world’s population is about 7.9 billion. A million and a billion might sound similar, but one billion is actually one thousand times greater than one million. Simple division shows that COVID-19 has only killed about *0.07 percent* of the world’s population. This is not insignificant by any means, but *in comparison* to the death of *an entire fourth* of mankind that the four horsemen will cause, it is minuscule—a tiny fraction compared to a quarter of the whole. In other words, the number of COVID-19 deaths would have to be about *350 times greater* to reach a fourth of today’s population, which would be almost two billion.

The four horsemen will cause death on a scale humanity has never experienced—yet, astonishingly, the four horsemen only represent the “beginning of sorrows,” as Jesus says in Matthew 24:8. The remainder of the seven seals, followed by the seven trumpets and then the seven bowl plagues, will lead to the death of the majority of humanity, in addition to the loss of much plant and animal life (Revelation 6:8; 8:7–12; 16:3). These cataclysms will be the culmination of God’s wrath upon humanity for its wickedness (Revelation 15:1).

Therefore, to state a sobering fact bluntly, unless the COVID-19 pandemic intensifies substantially, *it is not deadly enough* to indicate that the four horsemen have begun riding.

This is obviously a sobering point to think about, because COVID-19 has taken the lives of nearly six million people. Most of us, if not all, have acquaintances, friends, or even family members who have died after contracting COVID-19. Yet as deadly and devastating as COVID-19 has been, God is going to allow much worse events to take place because of the rampant evil and wickedness engulfing the world. Perhaps COVID-19 will awaken many people to the need to humble themselves, to zealously turn away from the growing popularity of all kinds of wickedness, and to beg God for His mercy and forgiveness.

Since COVID-19 grabbed the world, many prayers have been prayed, pleading for God’s deliverance and healing. However, it’s not enough to ask God to make the pandemic “go away” if societies continue to sprint toward evil. Before asking for healing, we should ask God for humble and surrendered hearts, because COVID-19 and its variants, most likely, are not even the beginning of the “beginning of sorrows.”

—Josh Lyons