

Living Church News

Volume 11, No. 6 November–December 2009



Pray for God’s “Team” at Headquarters!

Dear Brethren and Friends,

For some months, I have wanted to share with you in this personal “Dear Brethren” message a description of the “team” we have here at Headquarters. I know you will all be interested in hearing about the key ministers directing Christ’s Work from Charlotte—about our activities and how we interact.

Please understand that I cannot possibly, in this one short message, describe *all* of our fine and faithful employees here at Headquarters. I will simply describe the “top” team members, and you will understand that we are backed up by *dozens* of wonderful servants here at Headquarters, plus *scores* of faithful ministers and elders around the world, and *thousands* of you dedicated brethren. For truly *all* of us are the “Body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12). He is using individuals in different ways to finish His Work today in proclaiming the *true* message of the coming Government of God and the true name of Jesus Christ all over this earth.

First of all, Mr. Richard Ames is, beside me, the individual with the most responsibilities in Christ’s Work in the Living Church of God at this time. As most of you know, Mr. Ames has been in Christ’s Work *full-time* since he graduated from Ambassador College in 1965. At that time, he was student body president—already having earned a degree in engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Mr. Ames is truly an *outstanding* individual in all-around capacity—and certainly in dedication and the ability to preach and to write the message of God’s Word.

Since he has an excellent radio voice, and had previous training and technical skills enhanced by outside instructors while on the *World Tomorrow* telecast from Pasadena, he is naturally our most *outstanding* television presenter. Normally, his programs bring in more responses than any of the rest of us. And he has certainly been a wonderful help in directing the Media Division and helping us move forward in the entire area of proclaiming Christ’s message.

As many of you know, Mr. Ames married my “little sister” back in 1964! So he and I have been not only friends but brothers-in-law for all these years! Nevertheless—as everyone involved in the telecast realizes firsthand—I did not put Mr. Ames on the television program because he was a *relative*. I have had *many* relatives. But none of them have had the background, the outstanding radio voice and personality, the training and the ability Mr. Ames has to do the program. So Christ has truly prepared him to help finish the Work at this time. Most of you know that I, with the Council of Elders’ and

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others' input, have designated him as my "successor" in case God should choose to take my life before Christ returns. So I ask all of you to *pray fervently* for Mr. Ames in a special way!

Next, I would like to note the fine background and contributions of Dr. Douglas Winnail. Before Dr. Winnail came to Ambassador College, where he earned his B.A. in Theology, he had already earned a Ph.D. in Anatomy and Preventive Medicine. Later, he earned a master's degree in Public Health, teaching at a number of colleges (including Ambassador) and serving as a field minister for the Worldwide Church of God and Global Church of God. He served for several years as a Regional Pastor and Regional Director in the Living Church of God before coming to Charlotte. He has *always* been a steady and dedicated individual and a truly humble "team player."

Having now worked with Dr. Winnail for hundreds of hours personally—here in Charlotte and on various trips overseas—I have found him to be a wonderful and balanced friend, and brother, in carrying on Christ's Work today.

I used to wonder why Mr. Carl McNair regularly used Dr. Winnail as an "idea man." *Now I know!* For he does come up with many thoughtful concepts, plans and organizational ideas which have proved extremely beneficial in "growing" the Work of God. He has helped us produce two fine leadership programs, and has made a regular practice of conducting regional conferences for the ministry and leaders all over the United States and the world. He has reintroduced and updated our "public appearance" campaigns, in which our ministers invite *Tomorrow's World* readers to special meetings to learn more about the Truth and the Work. Dr. Winnail *has* introduced and is introducing more programs to help grow the Work all the time—while energetically helping Dr. Germano and me bring to fruition the establishment of Living University.

So, Dr. Winnail also *needs your prayers!* And I hope that he will be able to continue on for many years, assisting me and Mr. Ames in the various responsibilities he carries, such as Director of Church Administration, Vice Chair of the Living University Board of Regents, key writer for our publications, and more.

Another key individual here, who has a very *long* record of faithful service in Christ's Work, is Mr. Dibar Apartian. Mr. Apartian is my "oldest" friend, since we first met each other 54 years ago when he came to Ambassador College as a professor of French. For about six years, we lived right next door to each other on South Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena, California. I have spent *hundreds* of hours with Mr. Apartian personally, and his wife was my first wife's best friend. So I have seen Mr. Apartian grow in understanding and dedication for many years, especially in directing the French Work—and also now the entire International Work under Dr. Winnail's overall supervision.

Having had so much experience over so many years, Mr. Apartian often adds a "special touch" in our ministerial deliberations.

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Continue to PRESS Toward the Goal

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

One of the primary dangers for all of us in God's Church is Laodiceanism. We are *definitely* in what the Bible indicates is the "last era"—the last Church age just before the Tribulation.

The Apostle John was inspired to describe this era in very clear terms in Revelation 3:14–22. Note that this era is condemned *not* for any specific *doctrinal* errors, but for a complacent, lukewarm attitude. So those who are Laodiceans may have a "watered-down" approach to doctrine in general, but they appear to have most of the Truth. It is just that they are complacent and may say, in effect: "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" (v. 17). Yet, in *God's eyes*, they are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked" (*ibid.*).

Where do I stand? Where do you stand?

Each of us must constantly try to objectively evaluate *ourselves*—*not* other people. And I warn you solemnly that *not* all Laodiceans are in the "other" groups! For we in the Living Church of God have a certain number of Laodiceans, and *all* of us are in danger of becoming that way if we succumb to the dominant tendency of this Church age—and of the society around us.

How can we resist that pull? Jesus Christ has commissioned His Church to do a special Work, to fully prepare for the Kingdom of God all who will listen. For we are not only warning our peoples about the coming Great Tribulation, and carrying out the "Ezekiel commission" (Ezekiel 33:1–7); we are also preaching the full Gospel—or "good news"—of the coming Kingdom or Government of God, soon to take over this earth (Matthew 24:14). In ad-

dition, we are proclaiming the full name of Jesus Christ—the vital importance of our surrendering to Him and His ways, and of Him living His life within us through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20). Also, we are following the biblical pattern of government within this Work, looking to the living Christ to set His servants in positions of leadership since He is the living Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:20–23).

Jesus Christ warned: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:15–16).

Even among God's people, there are those who exalt themselves, preach part of the Truth—and then go on to mislead their followers regarding many details of prophecy, the purpose of life and the way of life revealed by Christ's teachings in the New Testament. They will often reject basic truths from the Bible—even though they claim to follow it. And they will often harass, disfellowship or even crush those who oppose or even question their wrong teachings and their harsh, unchristian practices.

God specifically warns us that the final "era" or "age" of His Church will be dominated by the "Laodicean attitude." These people are not condemned for wrong doctrines or immoral practices. Rather, God simply describes how these seemingly "nice" people who practice and believe part of the Truth are nevertheless to be spewed out of Christ's mouth because of one huge problem: lukewarmness. Jesus said, "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me

gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Revelation 3:16–19).

Dear friends and brethren, as we see the final events of this age begin to get underway, it is vital that we each strive to get completely "right" with our God! Please carefully think over and pray about the above points. Please do everything you can to get closer to the true God and the Work He is using at this end time. Try with all your heart to do your best in serving Jesus Christ and involving yourself in His Work. We all need to follow the examples of the great men and women of God, who "cried out" to their Creator when they were in danger. And the *danger* of some of us becoming Laodicean is *much greater* than many of us may think! When the prophet Daniel felt discouraged by the continuing captivity of his people—and perhaps the general malaise among them—he began to zealously seek God. "Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by *prayer* and *supplications*, with *fasting*, sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, 'O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land'" (Daniel 9:3–6).

If we each sense the "Laodicean pull" and begin to *seek God* as Daniel did, we—*through our prayers* and *fasting*—may help prevent not only our-

selves but many of our fellow Church members from becoming Laodicean. In today's worldwide climate of compromise and corruption, it is all too easy for us to "drift" into Laodiceanism without even realizing what is happening! The Apostle Paul's exhortation certainly applies *today* in a special way: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but **exhort one another daily**, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12–13).

Please note that Paul said to "**exhort one another daily**." The word "exhort" means "to urge, advise or admonish urgently." So we should regularly admonish and encourage each other to study, to pray and to **grow** spiritually—and to do *all* that we can to prepare for God's Kingdom. Certainly, Paul did **not** mean that we should self-righteously preach at each other or "pick" at our fellow Christians. But, in deep love and concern as brethren, we *should* be our "brothers' keepers" in the sense that we do reach out to help encourage and even admonish a weak brother or sister who is perhaps drifting away from the Truth and from the Church.

And, again, we should be diligent in making sure that we are not "watering down" our full commitment to Christ in thoughts or actions. As the Apostle Paul said: "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, **forgetting** those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I **press** toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13–14).

Do you and I truly *bear down* and *press* toward the goal of Christ's soon-coming Kingdom?

For some years, I have emphasized to you brethren the profound need we all have to genuinely **study** the Bible and to "**feed**" on Christ—really reading and meditating on key passages in the

Bible over and over, marking them and even committing some of them to memory. But, at this point, I would also urge you to remember *why* the Bible was written: "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).

Let us all remember that the Bible was inspired by God not only to teach us true doctrine, but for **reproof** and for **correction**. How many thousands of Catholic monks and Protestant ministers down through the ages have *studied* and **studied** the Bible through the lens of their own preconceived ideas and have, therefore, **never** learned the full Truth, **never** been fully "conquered" by God and **never** truly surrendered to do *what God clearly says*?

Please think about that!

The approach of just studying the Bible the way we would study any book on history or philosophy is **not** good enough! Rather, we must humbly, prayerfully open our Bibles with the profound understanding that God is going to teach us concepts and approaches that we do **not** already understand. We must desire that—through His inspired word—He will **correct** us and **reprove** us where we are wrong, that He will **fashion** and **mold** our thoughts and actions and that, over time, He will bring us into genuine alignment with the way He thinks.

God tells us: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8–9). So a *vital* part of our Bible study and our church attendance—including *our attitude* in listening to the sermons—is to sincerely seek to find out where we are **wrong**,

where we **need to change!** We must come to God and to His inspired word sincerely "seeking" for *His* mind and *His* approach—not our own!

Do you do that?

Are you, personally, willing to *take correction* from God *through His inspired word* and from the **sermons** that are preached by true ministers in His Church? *If not, why not?*

Dear brethren, we must *all* be **corrected**, be **changed** and be fashioned and molded by God into the image of Jesus Christ our Savior. As Paul said: "Let this *mind* be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

I encourage *every one* of you to go "all out" in seeking to be more like Jesus Christ, and in preparing to have a vital part in the soon-coming government of God to be set up here on Earth. For Christ did **not** praise the fellow who, though perhaps "nice," was *spiritually lazy* and hid his talent in the ground: "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest'" (Matthew 25:26–27).

We need to learn to *seek* the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33)! As part of that effort, we had better go "all out" to **avoid** becoming lukewarm Laodiceans! For we in God's true Church—now "in training" to be the kings and priests under Christ in Tomorrow's World—are to be the "salt" of this earth. We are to impart that special *zestful* flavor that our God and our Lord Jesus Christ will see when looking upon humanity. For Jesus said: "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Luke 14:33–35). ■

Seven Eras, Seven Attitudes

By Richard F. Ames

The following is adapted from a letter sent in response to a question posed to several Headquarters ministers.

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your inquiry. You expressed concerns regarding the divided Church of God groups and certain Living Church of God teachings and emphases, so I hope this letter will be of help to you. The Church has always taught that the messages to the seven churches are warnings for all time, and that they also reflect the predominant attitudes in each of seven eras. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong explained: “These seven messages DO apply to seven successive Church eras. BUT they also apply to the WHOLE CHURCH through ALL eras. In other words, the Ephesus characteristics DOMINATED in the first era, and the Laodicean will dominate in the last, but SOME of these characteristics are found in EVERY era. The messages apply to the WHOLE Church (and so I have said and written for more than fifty years) but certain characteristics predominate in the various eras” (*The Incredible Human Potential*, p. 158). This truth is important in order for you to understand the reality of disparate Church of God groups indicated by Revelation 2 and 3.

You have taken issue with the Living Church of God’s exposition of Revelation 3:7, and seem to believe this scripture has no application to government. Yes, the Living Church of God has described the “key of David” as it relates to government (see sermon #414, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith’s January 2007 message, “How Does the Key of David Apply to Us?” available at www.lcg.org). As you wrote, Christ has the key. He is the Head of the body, the Church (Colossians 1:18). That is *exactly* what the Living Church of God has been teaching! He is the Head of the body that is organized, and administers its responsibilities through the ministry (Ephesians 4:11–13; 1 Corinthians 12:27–28; Hebrews 13:7, 17). The New Testament clearly defines and outlines government as applied to Church administration. Those groups that do not recognize Christ as having the “key of David,” and do not obey His instructions for Church organization and administration, will hardly identify with Philadelphia.

The Living Church of God does not label all other groups as “Laodicean.” The Church has correctly stated that there are Laodiceans in the Living Church of God, as well as in other groups. The Living Church of God has zealously exhorted its members to be watchful, so that we do not let down and become “lukewarm.” We are living in the Laodicean era, so we would expect that most Church of God groups, and most individuals in God’s Church overall, will exemplify that predominant attitude. But this does not excuse us from our responsibility to bear good fruits, individ-

ually and collectively—including those fruits exemplified by the Philadelphian era.

Is it because of “pride” that the Living Church of God strives to fulfill the description in Revelation 3:7–13? Not at all! Obviously, any true Christian will strive to obey and reflect the biblical pattern given to us by the One who holds the “key of David.” Church members should individually, as well as collectively, strive to support the New Testament Church in following Christ’s instructions on government, applying the principle of the “key of David.” Remember, Revelation 3:7–13 sets the ideal, but we must work to *live up to* that ideal. We cannot say by “fiat” that we fulfill those characteristics; rather, we must “examine,” “judge,” “prove” or “test” ourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Corinthians 13:5) to ensure that we obey Christ’s form of Church government. In fact, Church leadership has a *responsibility* to focus publicly on that point, as well as on many other biblical doctrines (2 Timothy 4:1–5).

Many who develop new ideas about Revelation 2 and 3 fail to notice that Christ was the Head of all seven churches in Asia Minor to whom the letter was written. Were those churches “united”? Or did they have disparate doctrines, some of which were abominable?

The Pergamos congregation had members holding to the abominable doctrine of Balaam. The Church at Thyatira tolerated sexual immorality. The Sardis Church was mostly spiritually dead. The Laodicean Church was wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. Were all the Revelation 2 and 3 churches the “true Church of God”? Certainly, Christ Himself, by addressing each of them, claimed authority over them. Yet, several had serious flaws—which, unless corrected, would disqualify them!

We need to understand. What comprises the “true Church of God”? The seven churches could *nominally* be called true churches, because Christ was their Head. But did they fulfill the requirements for unity with Christ? Were they *following* their Head? As we have seen, many were *practicing* sinful doctrines, and unless they accepted Christ’s correction they would not be in God’s Kingdom!

Those churches, historically, were under Christ’s judgment, as are all the Churches of God today (1 Peter 4:17). The Living Church of God is under judgment, and as such we strive to fulfill the mission God has given His Church (Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15–16). We strive to follow our predecessor in this Work, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1) in fulfilling that mis-

sion. The fruits should demonstrate whether Christ is working through a Church of God group (Matthew 7:20), and mature Christians should be able to discern this rightly.

The Apostle Paul gave this scriptural definition for the true Church: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). In other words, the body of Christ, the Church (Colossians 1:18), is a spiritual organism. Truly converted members exist in various corporate Church of God groups today, but the spiritual organism is one body.

Historically, Mr. Armstrong would refer to the Radio Church of God, and later the Worldwide Church of God, as “the true Church.” Why? Because evidence at that time indicated that most of those who fulfilled the characteristics of true Christianity were members of the Church that was then headquartered in Pasadena, California. Other unknown remnants of the true Church—who kept the Passover, the Sabbath, the Holy Days and other biblical doctrines—would sometimes be discovered in remote parts of the world when Christ led them to contact Pasadena and join in fellowship with the main body. Today, however, with both Philadelphian and Laodicean Christians striving to hold fast to the truths God restored through Mr. Armstrong, we can observe that scattered Laodicean members of the spiritual body will naturally gravitate toward fellow Laodiceans, when they find them—and scattered Philadelphian Christians will be led by the Holy Spirit toward fellow Philadelphians.

Be sure to read our booklet *Where Is God’s True Church Today?* by Dr. Meredith. He writes: “This church is not a building or a corporation or an invention of human beings. It is a spiritual organism with a history going right back to Jesus Christ and the apostles” (p. 2).

Understandably, the reality of disparate and disagreeing Church groups is painful to many, but agonizing over it—and wishing for “unity” even though the Bible shows such unity will not fully occur until Christ returns—will not change the reality in these end-times, just as it has never done in the history of the Church. Instead, our responsibility is to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7) and apply it to ourselves individually and collectively.

Are the Church of God groups divided because of “bickering leaders”? In part, yes. But to overlook the obvious, such as *major differences* in how Church groups teach and follow the doctrines of church organization, government and administration (as well as other doctrines), leads to serious misjudgment (refer to sermon #199, “We’re Not the Same,” and “We Are Not All the Same,” *Living Church News*, Sep–Oct 2004).

In passing, we should notice that the Living Church of God leadership *does* communicate and work with leadership in other groups when appropriate. Living Church of God leadership does not “bicker” with other groups, but focuses on the mission of the Church. We respect the fact, as indicated

above, that there are Philadelphians in other groups, just as there are Laodiceans in our group. Let us understand. Members of the Living Church of God did not come to the Living Church of God by accident, or because of leaders’ bickering. They chose, as most still choose, to strive to follow the full truth of the Bible, not one side of some factional dispute, and to fulfill the mission Christ gave the Church. Each member of the body of Christ is responsible for making such a choice.

Is it true that the existence of disparate Church of God groups hinders true “testimony” to the world? In part, yes, but no more so than the seven disparate churches of Revelation 2–3, all under Christ, hindered true “testimony.” Remember, not all of them hindered that testimony! Christ said He set an “open door” before Philadelphia then—and, prophetically, He is doing the same today! Those who understand Christ’s prophecies understand that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations” (Matthew 24:14).

I pray that you will have the eyes to see clearly where the Gospel of the Kingdom of God is being preached, and that you will support Christ’s mission wholeheartedly. Yes, the reality of different Church groups can be saddening at times, but we must have hope, not fear. We must know that Christ is alive, and that God’s promises are sure. Our hope must be in Christ, who told us, “Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Remember: in spite of the differences among Church of God groups—including some that depart in *important* ways from sound biblical doctrine and practice—Christ is not limited! As He stated: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20). Those who focus on the mission Christ gave His Church will see for themselves where that mission is being carried out most fully as He intended.

In Revelation 2–3, Christ admonishes us seven times to examine our attitudes with respect to the seven churches, and to respond accordingly: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7). We in the Living Church of God recognize that we must strive to exemplify Philadelphian character and to finish the Work Christ has given His body, the Church.

Thank you again for your inquiry. May God bless you with His faith in fulfilling His will and Work.

In Christian love,

Richard F. Ames

Hospitality: Our Christian Duty

By Scott Winnail

When was the last time you had brethren over to your home for a meal? When did you last eat with brethren you had not known before? Perhaps at the Feast of Tabernacles? When was the last time you were invited to another Church member's home for a meal?

Why does this matter? *What does eating a meal with brethren have to do with being a Christian?*

The primary way in which God's people "assemble together" is, of course, at weekly Sabbath services (Hebrews 10:25). But, as Christians desirous of growing up into Christ (Ephesians 4:15), what else can we do to deepen the bonds of fellowship with our brethren? Attending the commanded weekly "holy convocation" is vital, but we must also "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). Have you considered the importance of the fellowship and activity that occurs **outside** of the weekly Sabbath service, where so much mutual encouragement can take place? *Have you considered the importance of eating together with your brethren?*

Why is it so important that we stir up love and good works among one another, especially as we draw close to the end of the age? Jesus Christ highlighted the difficulties that would come upon society and God's people before His return (see Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). How important will our relationships with fellow Christians be as times grow more difficult? In Proverbs, God reminds us, "there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). And "a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17). If we do not have close relationships with our spiritual brethren, will we be able to rely on those relationships for support when "the going really gets tough"?

So, how do we develop close, loving, and supportive relationships with our spiritual brothers and sisters? To do this, we must spend time building those relationships and getting to know each other. For this very reason, the Apostle Paul admonished the brethren in Rome that true Christians must be "given to hospitality" (Romans 12:13).

Hospitality has always been a vital part of true Christianity. Notice this description of first-century Christians: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, *in the breaking of bread*, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Breaking of bread—enjoying fellowship during a meal—was a central feature of first-century Christian life! Notice that this was a shared duty; the brethren broke bread together "from house to house" (v. 46).

Be honest with yourself. What excuses do you have for **not** inviting brethren to your home or apartment for a meal? Are you too busy? Is your home too small or "not nice enough"? Is your home too dirty or unkempt? Is it too expensive to host guests in your home? Do you dislike cooking?

Christ called His followers His "mother" and "brothers"—His family (Luke 8:21). In the same way, we should view our fellow Christians as family. Eating together with our brethren will help us grow closer as a Church. It will help us grow closer to each other. It will help us become better able to share with, pray for and serve each other. It will also help build the bonds that will allow us to endure through tough trials and the prophesied times ahead.

Steps for Growing in Hospitality

So, what can you do to grow in hospitality? What can you do to over-

come some of the barriers to doing your part in serving the brethren "from house to house"—including **your** home? Here are several ways to help ensure not only that you can eat with your brethren, but also that you can *build the lasting ties* that will bind the Church more firmly together:

Keep your home "presentable" at all times. Have you ever thought about inviting brethren to your home, but decided not to because you were embarrassed by how "messy" your home was at the time? One simple way to overcome this barrier is to be sure to keep your home relatively neat all the time—not necessarily spotless, but comfortable enough for guests. Make it a point to pick up after yourself, and put things away when you are through with them. Keep your bed made when you are not using it, and teach your children to follow suit. This way, you can be ready to have your home clean enough for company in just a few minutes.

Be yourself. It is important to remind yourself that although you are an "ambassador" for Christ, you are **not** the head of state, and your home is **not** the royal palace. People sometimes feel intimidated if they cannot cook a gourmet meal or "impress" guests with something fancy. But this is not necessary. Getting together for a meal with brethren is not done to impress, but to serve and to get to know one another. In fact, most people prefer the familiar atmosphere of a relaxed get-together, and may even be uncomfortable at the prospect of a "formal" dining occasion. Remember that the ultimate benefit of eating together is the opportunity to get to know each other and to deepen friendships, not to have a "fine dining" experience. In this regard, one of the most memorable meals my wife and I have shared with brethren was com-

pletely unplanned by our hosts. We were visiting a congregation for the first time when an older man and his adult daughter invited us to their home for lunch after Sabbath services. Their home was truly a “humble abode” and the food was not fancy. We talked together in the kitchen as they “threw something together” for all of us to eat. The food was simple but tasty, and the conversation was spiritually stimulating. Their demonstration of love left a long-lasting impression. These brethren could have been embarrassed by their home or the simplicity of the meal, but instead they were focused on serving their guests. Because of that Christian focus, they set a lasting example for us.

Keep it simple and focus on serving. You can make an inexpensive and simple meal that is both tasty and nutritious! Consider even chili, soup and bread, spaghetti—or whatever is easy for you to prepare. Nearly every culture has a chicken and rice or hearty soup recipe. The point of being hospitable is to serve and to get to know people, not to “entertain” or “impress” them or put on a show. It is also important to avoid the “Martha Trap.” Scripture records one gathering during Christ’s ministry on earth, when He was together with some of His disciples for food and fellowship. Mary and Martha were both involved in serving a meal to the guests. However, Mary and Martha had different perspectives on the event. While Mary took time to mingle with the guests and take part in the fellowship, Martha became so distracted by “serving” that she did not take time to interact—get to know, speak with and learn from—her guests. When Martha complained to Christ that Mary was not as preoccupied with service as she was, Christ helped her to see the error in her approach (Luke 10:38–42). When you have brethren over for a meal, make sure that you are not so busy serving that

you miss out on getting to know your guests.

Plan to eat with brethren regularly! Hospitality is Christian service, and you should push yourself to serve regularly in this way. Most of us can reasonably set a goal of hosting brethren for a meal every two months—and some who are more energetic, and have the time and resources, can plan to do so once a month. Remember, the goal is to build relationships, not to take on so much that your serving becomes routine or burdensome. Be sure that your groups are of a size that you can really get to know—and spend meaningful time with—all of your guests. And do not form a “clique” where you are always serving or being served by the same brethren. Get to know *all* your brethren, and include a variety of people in your plans.

Consider sharing the opportunity to serve. Think about joining with some other brethren to share the planning, expenses and responsibilities of a get-together. For some brethren, especially those who are single or who work in a full-time job, preparing for guests in their home is too much work to do by themselves. If this is your situation, consider asking someone else to help you host some brethren for a meal. Choose your guests together, and share the cooking responsibilities. This will reduce the amount of work for any one host, and will increase each host’s opportunity for fellowship with the guests.

It is OK to ask guests to help you prepare a meal at your own home. Consider allowing your guests to share the cost or the labor from time to time. Asking guests to bring the meat, a side dish, or a dessert is perfectly acceptable, and may make the difference between having people to your home and not doing so. It may also help your guests feel more like they are contributing to the event—especially if

you are having many people to your home.

Remember to serve those who cannot “repay” your service. Human nature would dictate that you only invite to your home those people who will invite you to theirs. But the Christian principle is to invite guests who may not be able to invite you to their homes in return. Remember, Christian hospitality is about serving your fellow brethren (Luke 14:13–14). You *can* invite guests who are able to return the favor, but it is important to God that you *also* serve those who, for whatever reasons, cannot reciprocate. All God’s people are important to Him—and should be to us as well.

God has blessed each of us in different ways. He made us all in His image, and He has called us at this special time for a powerful purpose. God wants us to fellowship together, and **not just during Sabbath services.** We should all be trying to increase the amount of fellowship—and the **depth** of fellowship—we experience with God’s people.

So, make it a goal to meet and get to know better those brethren you do **not** currently know very well. Remember God’s admonition that it is “more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). When we practice hospitality from the heart, *we* are the ones who really benefit. Giving is fun and extremely rewarding, and its end result is a Church more tightly knit together, more warm and outgoing, and more reflective of the character trait that Christ stated His true disciples would have: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Hospitality brings true Christians closer together! As we spend time in fellowship, whether at a meal or in other activities, the time we spend with our brethren helps us to build our bonds in the faith even stronger! ■

In a Negative World, Be Positive!

Here is an important key that can promote your spiritual well-being.

By Dibar K. Apartian

What are your thoughts when you meet someone for the first time? How do you react? What impresses you most? His looks? Her voice? The way he or she is dressed?

What if you already know the person? What is the first thing that crosses your mind when you see him? His faults? A misunderstanding you might have had? Perhaps a wrong she has done to you?

Do you usually have nice thoughts upon meeting a person, whether an old acquaintance or a stranger? Be honest. Take time and think before you answer.

And what are your first thoughts when you get out of bed in the morning? Good or bad? Pleasant or distasteful? Are you already haunted by the various problems you will have to face during the day?

It should come as no surprise that much of your well-being depends on your attitude—your frame of mind.

One beautiful morning, years ago, as I was walking on the Ambassador College campus in Pasadena, I smiled and greeted a student and said, “Isn’t it a beautiful day?” Without hesitation, he answered, “Yes, sir—but it’s supposed to be quite smoggy later on!”

How disheartening! But this is the way we often think and reason. Overcome with dread about what is ahead of us, we are oblivious to the beauty that surrounds us. We think of the smog that may set in later, instead of the sunshine we should be enjoying at the moment.

The Bible Is Positive

Strangely enough, many people can even read the Bible in a negative frame of mind.

First of all, they consider Bible study a repetitious chore—uninteresting—a routine they would gladly do without. Some even have so little understanding that

they think the Bible’s teachings—primarily the Ten Commandments and other points of God’s law—are negative. They see the “don’ts” rather than the “dos” in God’s word.

Christian growth requires positive thinking and a confident outlook on life. God is positive—His teachings are positive.

Naturally, all of us encounter obstacles—we sometimes face difficult situations in life. But we make ourselves miserable when we stress the problems and difficulties rather than the good side of things, the “all things work together for good” aspect (Romans 8:28).

Read and study the Psalms—a wonderful source of comfort and consolation. Some people reason differently about the Psalms—they see only heartaches and physical pains that David, in

momentary periods of dejection, expressed in his songs. But, actually, every one of the Psalms contains positive teaching.

We human beings have ups and downs. This is normal. But, with God’s help, we can pull ourselves together, control our thoughts, overcome the obstacles and go forward in life, fully convinced that God is our Master, our Protector and our Savior.

Even though you may find in the Psalms some verses with negative overtones—verses where human feelings are expressed—each Psalm ends praising God in an uplifting tone.

Take, for instance, Psalm 22. David must have written it at a time of sorrow and distress, for he cried out to God, saying: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent” (vv. 1–2).

Admittedly, those are not positive thoughts. But the Psalm does not end there. Look what David writes in the following verses, which are filled with hope and encouragement: “Our fathers trusted in You; they



trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed” (vv. 4–5).

Do you see the point? David did not dwell long on his problems. He quickly shifted his mind to focus on God, and in doing so regained confidence.

When you are downcast and negative, try to find reasons to be positive. Count your blessings and tell God how grateful you are to Him for what you have.

Do you know why Christ began what is known as the “Lord’s Prayer”—the sample prayer outline we are to follow—with brief statements praising God’s power and majesty (Matthew 6:9–13)?

Because doing so helps us to build in our minds a strong, positive attitude toward God, even before we address Him about our problems. Indeed, we must first realize that we are speaking to the Creator of the heavens and the earth—the One we call our Father.

The statements “Hallowed be Your name,” and “Your will be done” practically sum up the whole Gospel. Once your prayer begins with this positive attitude, you can speak with assurance. You have more confidence, more faith, because you realize that the Almighty God who hears you can do all things.

However, if you start your prayer with all of your problems, your focus is in the wrong direction. You have not established a firm relationship with God. That is why your prayers are sometimes of little value, and you feel as though you are just talking to yourself—as though your prayers are not going any higher than the ceiling.

David never doubted God. The Psalms do not express doubts about God.

When David weakened, his doubts were about himself and about his own strength—he wondered whether or not God would come to his rescue. But he never doubted God’s power and love. That is one reason why David was a man after God’s own heart.

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness” (Psalm 37:3). If you have this type of an attitude, you will never turn away from God or from His Church.

David further stated, “Delight yourself also in the LORD” (v. 4). How can you delight in God if you are negative? How can you praise Him if you have a sad heart and a sad countenance? It is impossible. You cannot delight in the Eternal unless you really enjoy life and are positive.

Notice verse 7: “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him.” Do you realize that if you lack patience, you end up becoming negative?

You must learn to be patient—to wait patiently in a positive attitude. That is what “rest in the LORD” means. You must be **still** emotionally, not allowing doubts or negative thoughts to enter into your mind. God **can** handle

your challenges—and **all** your problems—and He will, if you are still.

Doubting and entertaining negative thoughts in your mind is not remaining still. Take time and think: Could the real cause of your negative, disturbed state of mind be something you have done wrong—something you do not want to admit? Is there something in your life that needs to be changed, but you do not want to make the necessary effort? If that is the case, your prayers will not be answered.

Job’s Patience

When you read the book of Job, do you find it negative and rather depressing, what with all Job’s complaining and suffering?

Do you realize that Job, despite his intense misery, never doubted God? No, he did not truly understand what was happening to him, nor why he needed to overcome his self-righteousness. In his temporary discouragement he even wished he could die—he cursed the very day he was born! But Job **never** doubted God’s existence, power and wisdom.

Imagine! After losing almost everything he had—his children as well as all of his material possessions—Job still kept a positive attitude toward the Creator.

Job “arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD’” (Job 1:20–21).

Notice: Job praised God!

How did Job respond when his wife told him to curse God and die? “But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:10).

Job was patient. Despite the many questions he posed, he never doubted God. Amidst his tribulations and lamentations, he said: “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25–27).

It is human to doubt, sometimes, our relationship with God and to question why things happen. But a true Christian should never doubt God. The best way to maintain your equilibrium is to always keep in mind the reason for your calling. This will give you the courage you need no matter what happens.

The Apostle James wrote: “Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11).

See Beyond the Dark Days

Today, as world conditions worsen, some in God's Church allow their minds to dwell too much on the negative aspects of the forthcoming prophesied events. They dread the days of tribulation just ahead.

But why not look beyond those dark days and think of the wonderful time when Christ will return with power and glory to rule the whole world?

Too many of us forget our blessings and emphasize our difficulties. That is a sure way to become negative. Learn to be grateful for what you have. See the good in your life and help others see the good in theirs.

Your positive attitude can be a key to the happiness of those around you. Be a stepping-stone and not a stumbling block. Your greatest blessing is that you are called of God to understand His truth—to be part of His Church!

Are you convinced that you are in the true Church of God? If so, how can you ever turn back—return to the dark world out of which you came? No, it is not for you to turn back to the world. God is with you and will always help you—you can count on Him at all times. “The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Exodus 14:14).

This is the promise God gives all of His people. But He can only fight for you if you let Him. In order to “hold your peace,” you need to chase all negative thoughts out of your mind.

This does not mean that you need to be inactive or unproductive. To “hold your peace” means not to be anxious—not to worry. If you do your part, God will always do His.

Enjoy life—enjoy being alive. Enjoy the Church. Enjoy the family God has given you. Whatever your problems and trials, take them to God who has promised to fight for you.

Our forefathers, when facing obstacles, constantly doubted God and His intentions. But Moses, their leader, never doubted God. The people wanted to return to Egypt; Moses never did. They wanted to compromise with God's laws; Moses did not.

Do not ever think about giving up—of returning to the world. Do not ever desire to alter God's laws—to make them more suitable to your own selfish needs or lifestyle. Some are willing to compromise to procure better jobs or to have

more friends. But when you begin to compromise, you also begin to doubt God.

The Bible records countless promises God has made to you. But they are conditional. If you do not respect the conditions, His promises will not be fulfilled in your life. When you forget this, you become negative. Likewise, when you complain and justify yourself—or when you accuse others—you automatically become negative.

Satan Is at Work

Why do we, in God's Church today, sometimes face serious problems? Why do some even leave the body of Christ?

The answer is obvious. All of us are still human and carnal. We are living in a world where Satan—the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4)—will do everything in his power to influence our thoughts, to put doubts in our minds and to persuade us to become negative.

In fact, Satan himself is the most negative being in the whole universe. Do you know why? Because he is a liar (John 8:44)—and liars are cut off from God. Satan accuses the brethren before God's throne (Revelation 12:10), which makes him all the more negative. He judges and condemns falsely.

Are you occasionally guilty of having the same attitude? Judging, accusing, complaining, criticizing—these are tools Satan uses to make you negative. He wants you to disbelieve God.

When the Israelites left Egypt, they had every reason to be grateful to God, every reason to be happy and joyful, every reason to count their blessings and to rely on God. However, the very next day after they left Egypt, they began to complain; they had already lost all confidence in their Savior. They doubted His intentions and motives.

Things are not much different today as we approach the final days of this age, when Satan is more active than ever before (Revelation 12:9–10).

How does Satan accuse you? By spreading false rumors about you and your friends. By putting negative thoughts in your mind. By tempting you to tune in to his wavelength. Satan is successful in his ravaging task because some of us

The Bible is given to us for reproof, correction and instruction. Suffering will lose much of its sting when we face circumstances with a positive attitude. As long as Satan is the ruler of this world, doubts will exist. But God is greater than Satan—and He will always help you when you turn to Him.

allow ourselves, through discouragement and lack of faith, to be his victims.

The Bible is given to us for reproof, correction and instruction. Suffering will lose much of its sting when we face circumstances with a positive attitude. As long as Satan is the ruler of this world, doubts will exist. But God is greater than Satan—and He will always help you when you turn to Him.

If God Be With You

Life is not always easy for anyone. But in God's Church we have much to rejoice about, much to be grateful for—much to look forward to.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Do you love God? If He has truly called you, and you have repented of your sins and been baptized—if you have received God's Holy Spirit and are in the process of being converted now—then you can, with God's help, live according to His purpose—no matter what the circumstances may be.

The Bible does not promise you an easy life during this present age, but it promises a glorious life for all eternity. It warns you that, as a Christian, you will be hated, tried and even persecuted—especially during these end times. Therefore, you should expect oppression and tribulation (Acts 14:22).

But be courageous and positive, because you are not alone. God is with you (Joshua 1:9)! Set your eyes constantly on God the Father and on Jesus Christ.

If you see God's hand in your life each day, no trials or persecutions will ever be able to shake you or overpower you, however severe they may be.

Remember the Apostle Peter's experience when he saw Christ walking on the water. He cried out, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water" (Matthew 14:28). Christ told Peter to come. Without hesitation, Peter got out of the boat and began walking on the water. What happened next? "But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!'" (v. 30).

As long as his eyes were on Christ, Peter did not sink. He had faith and a positive attitude. But the moment he took his

eyes off the Son of God, he began to doubt—and therefore to sink.

This is true in everyone's life. Often, you see only the enormity of your difficulties, rather than focusing on Christ and overcoming those difficulties. Christ is always ready to help you. He will give you the power and ability you need to overcome. Rely on God! He will never turn His back on you.

Remember this positive, reassuring truth, written by the Apostle Paul: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Do you realize that there is not a person in the Church of God, around the world, who has been called to condemnation? Quite the contrary. God has called *those who are able* to overcome and reach the goal.

What is the Kingdom of God worth to you? What is God's

presence in your life worth to you? Is living God's way depriving you of fun? God knows what is best for you. He wants you to be part of His Family. He wants you to have real fun the right way, the pure way—not the world's way, which leads to death!

You do not even need to understand God in order to obey Him. In fact, obedience must always come first. It is regrettable that some try first to understand, rather than to obey. Soon they fall by the wayside.

A Certain Promise

Isaiah wrote: "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his

thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6–7).

This promise is certain, and it can help you remain positive even in the most difficult times. If you seek God, you *will* find Him. But seeking Him does not mean understanding all of His ways, for they are infinitely higher than yours (v. 9). Understanding will come, but only after obedience.

Blessed is the man whose "delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper" (Psalm 1:2–3).

This is an absolute and positive truth. Believe it—and live by it! ■

Be courageous and positive, because you are not alone. God is with you (Joshua 1:9)! Set your eyes constantly on God the Father and on Jesus Christ. If you see God's hand in your life each day, no trials or persecutions will ever be able to shake you or overpower you, however severe they may be.

CHRIST IN YOU: THE HOPE OF GLORY!

By Rod Reynolds

Scripture teaches that the resurrected saints will *share in the glory of Christ!* “We are God’s children; and if children, then also heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ—if in reality we share His sufferings, so that we may share His glory too” (Romans 8:16–17, *Williams Translation*).

What does it mean to have glory or to be glorified in the biblical sense? The glory of God signifies the divine splendor, honor and majesty of His person, and the showing forth of His attributes. The glorified saints will share in the divine nature of God (2 Peter 1:4), receiving the gift of eternal life (Romans 2:5–10). Yes, unbelievable as it may seem, given our fragile and transitory nature, like a “vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14), we who are now physical and limited beings will be given eternal life as full members of the God Family.

William Barclay in his book *New Testament Words* displays remarkable insight in discussing *eternal life*. “The word *aiōnios* [eternal] is the word of eternity in contrast with time, of deity in contrast with humanity, and... therefore *eternal life is nothing less than the life of God himself*” (p. 37, italics in original). The life that God offers us—*God life*, His life—is *quantitatively* different from our temporary physical existence. But eternal life is also *qualitatively* different from mere human life, else how could we bear it? The saints will live eternally in sublime joy and peace. They will be in “the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). David wrote of God, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore”

(Psalm 16:11). As Barclay put it, “Life is only of value when it is nothing less than the life of God—and that is the meaning of eternal life” (p. 41).

Though forever remaining subject to the Father and Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:24–28), the glorified saints will share many of God’s attributes, His power, His honor and splendor and His brilliance. Daniel 12:3 and Philippians 3:21 show that the bodies and faces of the glorified saints will shine forth with supernatural brilliance, just as that of the resurrected, glorified Christ as described in Revelation 1. There are not a few who might consider such a teaching blasphemous, but that nevertheless is the true teaching of Scripture. David wrote, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (Psalm 17:15). John wrote, “we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him...” (1 John 3:2). Your destiny, if you are a true Christian, and if you remain faithful, is to become like God, sharing in His glory for all eternity.

What assurance do you have that this magnificent, astounding purpose will be fulfilled in you? What is the basis for your hope of glory in God’s Kingdom? Paul said he was made a steward of “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is *Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:26–27).

As this Scripture points out, the purpose of God is largely hidden from the world. To most, it is a mystery in the sense that the term is commonly

used in English. But the Greek term *musterion*, as used in the Scriptures, actually means spiritual truth hidden from the world in general but *revealed* to the elect of God. *Musterion* comes from the word *mueo*, which means to initiate into the mysteries or secret knowledge (See *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, p. 424). The secret of God’s purpose for mankind, hidden from the world, is revealed to His special people, His chosen ones.

Your destiny as a true Christian and the means of achieving your destiny are both revealed in the phrase, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Your destiny, if you are a true Christian, is to be glorified with God—which can be accomplished only by Jesus Christ living in you through the Spirit of God. If Christ is living in you, and as long as Christ continues to live in you, you have the hope and the promise of glory with God.

Jesus Christ does not now dwell in everyone. There are certain conditions to His dwelling in a person. But there are steps we take to ensure that Christ will abide and dwell in us to the end, so that the hope we now have will be fulfilled. This does not mean that we—through our own efforts—“qualify” ourselves for salvation. We are to give “thanks to the Father who *has qualified* us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:12–14). Salvation is a gift which we could never “earn” regardless of how much effort we might expend. Nevertheless, effort

is required to fulfill our part in the covenant with God. We must “fight the good fight of faith” to “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:12, 19). Lacking that effort, we become subject to sin and deception, and may become *disqualified* for the inheritance reserved for the faithful (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5; Titus 1:16; 2:11–15; 3:8).

Certainly there are many valuable tools that will help a Christian remain steadfast, and help point us in the right direction to help ensure that Christ remains in us. Yet two of these tools are particularly simple, yet profound. They are: *study* and *obedience*.

What good is done by study and obedience? The rabbis of Jesus’ day taught that “it is in the power of each wholly to overcome sin, and to gain life by study and good works” (See *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 117, or 1.167 in the original edition). Of course, as Christians we understand that without Christ, and without God’s Spirit, all the study and good works in the world are to no avail, as far as eternal salvation is concerned. Yet we also know that Christ will not continue to abide in someone who never studies or hears His word, and who does not obey it.

Bible Study

To ensure that Christ continues to dwell in you, study God’s word diligently, daily, consistently. One need not be a great Bible scholar to be a Christian. Most of what one needs to know is plain enough to anyone *willing without reservation to believe and act on God’s word* (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 15:32).

Bible study of itself does not produce true spirituality. But it can produce spiritual literacy. It can provide necessary food for nurturing the Spirit. Scripture is a “who, what, how and why” book for the works of God. It is also a “how to” book for real Christians. Bible study can make a difference in our salvation, but only if we *practice* what the Scriptures teach.

James wrote that “the implanted word... is able to save your souls.” The word of God is like a “mirror” that can show us what we look like spiritually, and what we need to become (James 1:21–25). God communicates His will to us through Scripture—Jesus Christ having loved the Church and given Himself for it—“that He might *sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word*” (Ephesians 5:26).

You cannot be like Christ if you do not know what He is like. Study the Scriptures to learn what God is like, and strive to imitate Him, to follow His thinking, His teaching and His way of acting. You cannot have real, genuine faith and belief in God if you do not know Him and what He is about. You cannot follow Christ’s teachings unless you know what they are. You cannot obey God if you do not know what He requires. So study God’s word to learn who He is, what He is like, what He is doing for you and with you, and what He wants you to do. *Jesus Christ will live in you only if His words live in you.* Jesus said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). He said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). If you *truly* want to be a disciple of Christ—a real Christian—and not one in name only, you *must* abide in God’s word, and it in you (cf. John 15:7). Study God’s word with the view in mind of making it a part of you, the guide to your thoughts, your words and your deeds.

Obey God’s Commandments

Another step you can take to ensure your hope to the end is to commit yourself to obeying God’s commandments. Many who claim to be Christian have stumbled at the commandments of God, either collectively—thinking the law of God is done away—or individually, thinking they can selectively obey God, keeping some command-

ments but rejecting ones they dislike, such as the Sabbath, or tithing, or some other commandment that conflicts with their personal likes and dislikes.

“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 6–7). Notice that love is walking in the *Father’s* commandments. God is love (1 John 4:8). That is, love is the epitome of His nature and character. The commandments of God are intended to give practical definition to God’s way of love. Jesus said the “first and great commandment” is, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” And the second, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” All the law hangs on, or is summed up in, these two commandments (Matthew 22:34–40). Jesus also said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Love towards God is expressed through spiritually motivated obedience to His commandments (cf. Deuteronomy 11:13, 22; 13:3–4; Joshua 22:5; Nehemiah 1:5; Daniel 9:4). Love is the motivating force behind God’s law, and it—in its full intent and purpose—shows us how to love. Hence, love should be our motive for obedience.

Next, we find in 2 John 6–7 a very interesting statement. Those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh are deceivers and *anti*—“against” or “in place of”—Christ. What does this mean? It is much deeper than one might think, and goes to the very heart of our subject.

The Greek word translated “confess” is *homologeō*. It means much more than a mere statement of belief. Some might think that just “confessing” or stating that Christ came in the flesh makes one a Christian. But that is emphatically *not* what John is teach-

ing. The original meaning of the word, as pointed out in *Vine's Expository Dictionary* (under “confess,” p. 120) is “being identified in thought or language.” *Homologeō* literally means to same-think (by the concept of thought as internal speech) or same-speak.

In this verse, both the Greek word for “confess” (or “same-think, same-speak”) and the Greek word for “coming” are in the form of the *present participle*. The present participle in this instance implies *present and continuing action*. As the Greek scholar A. T. Robertson notes, the sense of the phrase is that of “treating the Incarnation as a continuing fact” (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. VI, p. 253). The meaning is that deceivers do not now think and speak the same as Jesus Christ, who is right now and continually coming in flesh. The flesh being spoken of is *the flesh of every true Christian now living*.

A Flawed Translation?

This thought is repeated in a slightly different form in 1 John 4:1–3. There, we read: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world” (1 John 4:1–3).

The *New King James Version*, as other translations of these verses, does a rather poor job of conveying their real meaning. First, the translators have added some words not in the Greek which tend to somewhat distort the

meaning. “Jesus Christ” appears twice in these verses and in both instances the translators have misleadingly preceded the name with “that.” “The” is added before the word “flesh,” leaving a narrower implication than John intended. Most importantly, few if any English translations effectively express the full implications of the Greek.

The Greek perfect indicative and perfect participle generally (there are exceptions) emphasize an *existing state*. The perfect is called the “long tense” because it commonly expresses

Bible study of itself does not produce true spirituality. But it can produce spiritual literacy. It can provide necessary food for nurturing the Spirit. Scripture is a “who, what, how and why” book for the works of God. It is also a “how to” book for real Christians. Bible study can make a difference in our salvation, but only if we practice what the Scriptures teach.

past action with results extending into the present. Often, the sense expressed by the perfect tense is *virtually indistinguishable from that of the present tense* (see remarks on the tenses in the *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, p. xii).

With this background, we can consider the verses in question. “Confesses” (*homologeō*) is in the present tense, implying *present and continuing action*. “Come” (*erchomai*), with respect to Jesus Christ being in the flesh, is in both instances in the form of the perfect participle (the most accurate translation of which is “having come”). The emphasis is not on the past, but on the *present, here and now*.

The true Spirit of God inspires us to think the same thoughts, speak the same words—and, by implication, do the same deeds—as Jesus Christ dwelling in the flesh. But the spirit of anti-Christ does not believe, speak and act according to Jesus Christ dwelling in the flesh. The “confession” John and other New Testament writers describe is not a mere acknowledgment; it is a *conviction that compels commitment, surrender and obedience*. This is the message of God’s word. Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Galatians 2:20). Yes, those of genuine faith have been justified—that is, deemed free of guilt—through the blood of Christ. But, having been thus reconciled to God, “we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:9–10). *Christ living in us is the key to salvation and eternal life* (cf. Galatians 2:20; Matthew 10:38; Ephesians 5:1–7; 1 Peter 2:21; 4:11; 1 John 2:3–6; 3:1–4)! Those who do not think, speak and act as Christ are of another spirit—the spirit of deception and anti-Christ.

Christ agreed with God’s law (John 4:34; 5:30; 8:29). He taught God’s law (Matthew 19:16–19; Luke 10:25–28). He obeyed God’s law (John 14:31; 1 Peter 2:22). This means He is now doing the same in the flesh of the people of His Church. He is the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

How can we know for sure if Christ is living in us? Scripture answers: “Now *by this* we know that we know Him, *if we keep His commandments*. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:3–6). ■

Why Persecution?

By Ivor C. Fletcher

The Apostle Paul gave Christians a sobering warning: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). At the time when this was written, the people of God faced a very real threat of persecution—which often took the form of beatings, imprisonment and even martyrdom.

For the past 300 years and more, the English-speaking, democratic nations of the world have enjoyed legal systems that largely provide for freedom of religion. The early colonists in what later became the United States of America had often experienced persecution in England and Europe. When the opportunity arose to establish their own legal systems, freedom of religion became a high priority.

The colonists also understood the dangers that state religions can create. Religions that are established by civil governments tend to regard themselves as the one true church. Other churches become regarded as heretical and are subject to state persecution.

In the very first amendment to the U.S. Constitution—Amendment 1 in the Bill of Rights—the federal government was prohibited from establishing any form of state religion. Over time, many other nations began to embrace similar concepts, with the result that most of God’s people now enjoy almost total freedom from severe religious persecution.

There are clear indications in Bible prophecy, however, that this happy situation will not last forever. A great false church that previously sought to “persecute the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:25), will—for a short time before the return of Jesus Christ—have a final opportunity to persecute the people of God.

Why, we might ask, does God allow His people to be persecuted? He certainly does have the power to protect them. On one occasion, God sent an angel to rescue the Apostle Peter from prison (Acts 12:3–11). The two witnesses will be given total protection from persecution for three and a half years before God allows them to be killed (Revelation 11:3–5).

The record of history, however, is that such incidents of spectacular protection are unusual, few and far between. Quite often, God does allow His people to suffer persecution. But why does He do so? In this short article, we will look at some of the reasons why God allows His people to suffer in this way.

A Witness to the World

The Apostle Paul spent some five years of his ministry in prison. His work of preaching the Gospel sometimes stirred up the anger of civil and religious leaders. Paul was brought to trial before governors, kings—and even the Emperor Nero. During a violent storm at sea, when Paul was being

taken as a prisoner to Rome, God sent an angel to encourage him, and to point out that: “you must be brought before Caesar” (Acts 27:24).

This opportunity—for Paul to take the truth of God to a man who was probably the most important human ruler alive at that time—was too good to miss. Through the context of persecution, the Gospel and other aspects of God’s Truth could reach those in high Imperial office in a way that would have been difficult without such a severe trial falling on Paul.

A Time for Reflection

Some might assume that Paul’s imprisonment was wasted time. After all, consider what extra work in God’s service he could have accomplished if those five years had been spent traveling from place to place, preaching the Gospel and raising up many new Church congregations.

His time was not wasted, however. Paul used it as an opportunity to write a number of epistles. Being confined to a prison cell for long periods of time allowed him to think deeply, reflect and meditate on many things. Would these letters, which are considered to be among Paul’s most inspiring works, have been written at all if he had not been confined by imprisonment?

Unger’s Bible Dictionary makes the interesting point that Luke, Paul’s traveling companion, could well have used the two-year period of Paul’s imprisonment at Caesarea (Acts 24:27) as an opportunity to research and write his version of the Gospel. This port city is located just 30 miles from Nazareth, where Jesus spent much of His early life. Jerusalem, where the final parts of Jesus’ life and ministry took place, is located some 50 miles to the southeast of Caesarea. The intimate details that Luke provides of Christ’s birth and early life may well indicate that he took the opportunity, during this time, to speak to several members of Jesus’ immediate family who were probably still living in the area.

A Trial of Our Faith

God sometimes allows persecution and other trials to come upon His people to try or test their personal faith. A study of the book of Job reveals a fascinating insight into the way that God relates to the people whom He is calling, and with whom He is working. Job was successful and wealthy. As he was living with his wife and children and tending his cattle and sheep, he was unaware that both God and Satan were observing and evaluating his life.

God put a question to Satan: “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?” (Job 1:8).

Satan, although accepting God's evaluation of Job, questioned Job's motives. He asserted that Job was only obedient because it paid him to be. If God were to take His blessings and protection away from Job, surely Job's faith would quickly fail (Job 2:4–6).

God accepted Satan's challenge, and allowed Satan to persecute Job in a severe way. Although Job had lessons to learn from this trial, he proved Satan to be wrong. Job's faith in God did not fail (Job 42:5–6). If we have an easy and trouble-free life, God cannot see how we react to pressure and hardship. He sometimes allows trials and persecution to come upon us to test our faith and our relationship with Him.

A Personal Experience

In 1965, as a young man serving in the Royal Navy, I was sentenced to spend a month in a military prison for refusing to work on the Sabbath. This was an extreme form of imprisonment that involved a regime of hard labor, in which prisoners were forced to work almost to the point of exhaustion.

This was not the only trial, however. In a situation like this, other people have almost total control of your life, from the time you wake up till you finally fall asleep. Many of the activities in the life of a Christian—including prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting—require a degree of personal freedom and privacy. Such conditions hardly exist at all in prison. The people with whom we spend our time—such as family, friends and Church members—do have an influence on us. Can you imagine all such contacts suddenly removed, apart from one letter a week to your next of kin, and all the positive influences around you being replaced by negative ones?

What if the people now surrounding you were murderers, thieves and sex offenders? How would you feel? How would you react? My experience was that God is aware of such situations, and is able to give Christians the ability to endure such scenarios. Paul reminds us: "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Yes, God sometimes takes us to the extreme limits of what we can handle as human beings, but He does not abandon us. As He does this, our faith is tested and we learn many important lessons. It is only natural that we would pray that God would protect us or rescue us from such dire situations, but sometimes He responds to us as He responded to the Apostle Paul: "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16).

Persecution and the Holy Days

The weekly Sabbath is not the only source of persecution for true Christians. Keeping the annual Holy Days of the Bible does, at times, require faith and courage, especially

when we keep them within a society that considers them to have been done away.

Late in the first century, the Church was admonished to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turned the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:3–4).

This attempt by false teachers to subvert the true Church continued into the second century. By that time, the weekly and annual Sabbaths had become key targets of the enemies of God's Church.

In about 107AD, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was sentenced to die as a martyr at Rome. He was taken, under armed guard, from Antioch to Rome. The long, slow overland journey passed through Asia Minor (Turkey). A number of overnight stops were made at cities along the way, including some of the seven churches of Revelation 2–3. This gave the local congregations an opportunity to send delegations of their members to visit Ignatius, to give him encouragement and bid him farewell. Ignatius, in turn, would hand over a letter to be read in these congregations.

One such letter, written to the brethren of Magnesia (15 miles from Ephesus), reveals some disturbing doctrinal changes that were beginning to be introduced into the Church: "We have seen how former adherents of the ancient customs have since attained to a 'new hope'; so that they have given up keeping the Sabbath, and now order their lives by the 'Lord's day' instead."

The Bible gives us no valid reason to stop keeping the weekly and annual Sabbaths. The apostates often used bizarre and almost laughable arguments. The Epistle of Barnabas, written in about 130AD, deceptively asserts: "We are very much mistaken if there is anybody at the present time with a heart pure enough to keep holy the day which God has sanctified." The author (not the Barnabas mentioned in Acts) then proceeds to urge his readers to keep Sunday instead of the Sabbath, based on the false argument that "that was when Jesus rose from the dead."

By about 140AD, the church at Rome had abandoned both the weekly and annual Sabbaths, and had started to keep pagan days in their place. Justin Martyr, writing at this time, mentions that true Christians, who wished to obey God, were often shunned and marginalized. By the end of that century, true Christians among these people were almost certain to be "excommunicated" from what had become a false church.

Yes, persecution is often the lot of those that God is calling. But whether or not our personal future includes persecution, we must each be able to say, with confidence: "For 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). ■

Living Youth Camp 2009: Voyageur Adventure

This year's Living Youth Camp Adventure trip was a grand success! Big smiles, new friendships and a bit of new courage were all products of participating in an adventure like this, following God's way each and every day. He certainly was with us all along the way on our memorable adventure.

More than 68 Church youth and adults took part in a six-day wilderness canoe trip around the Crane, Namakan and Kabetogama lakes in the Voyageur National Park in northern Minnesota. I personally had not been on that particular route for more than 40 years—needless to say, it brought back many good memories.

Everyone—campers and staff alike—had a wonderful and safe time. No one was hurt or injured, other than experiencing a few mosquito bites and a few cuts and bruises. Bright sunny days were punctuated by afternoon storms that brought wind and rain—not serious enough to dampen spirits, but difficult enough to challenge everyone and make it memorable! We all made it safely back to base camp in Orr, Minnesota, after an exhilarating—if sometimes taxing—six days on the lakes.

The program began on Sunday, July 12, with a welcome dinner for the incoming staff, meeting in Hudson, Wisconsin. The next three days were filled with intense instruction and training on various topics regarding the purpose of the program, the history of Church of God camps, learning to be a mentor, and challenging the current culture of apathy. Practical canoeing skills were taught on Monday afternoon, with swamp and rescue training. On Tuesday, the staff received more program-specific training, as well as lectures on biblical issues like understanding the meaning of justification and how it unlocks the books of Romans and Galatians, and the importance of assimilating God's law early in life. Risk management and map and compass reading were also discussed and practiced on Tuesday. On the next day, July 14, wilderness first aid, team-building, and legal issues were discussed, to round out the intense three-day training.

Campers began arriving at Minneapolis airport on Thursday, July 15, and were ferried by bus northward. Orr, Minnesota—the old site of the Summer Educational Program, of which many brethren have fond memories—housed the base camp for the program. On the morning of Friday, July 16, campers heard orientation lectures from Mr.

Weston and other faculty. In the afternoon, they had “station” classes in canoeing (paddling techniques and rescue procedures), camp procedures, and swimming. All campers took part in a mandatory (if somewhat cold) swimming test to determine their level of ability—a “must” before going out on the open water. Sabbath services were held at Orr High School—a pause and rest before the big trip!

The canoe trip itself began on Sunday, July 18, as the campers and staff were ferried to their put-in points by bus. They quickly learned how much time it takes to properly load a canoe and tie everything down, but once in the water they also appreciated how stable their canoe became with all that gear surrounding them—stable enough to take on wakes and waves far from shore. Over the next six days, the campers guided their canoes into some of the most pristine waterways of the world. Hundreds of thousands of canoeists every year flock to northern Minnesota's world-famous lakes to experience the wilderness first-hand.

Canoeists and kayakers from all over the world travel to this labyrinth of islands and lakes, bordering Minnesota and Canada, where deer, moose, beaver and bear make their homes. For many campers, this was their first personal experience enjoying the great outdoors on this level. It was not just a “virtual” trip—it was the real thing! There were no cell phones or Internet connections available in the wilderness. It was a welcome and refreshing break from our technologically crowded world to experience the refreshing lakes, verdant islands, and abundant wildlife of God's creation. I must say it was probably one of the Church's largest canoe programs of its kind





anywhere in the world, with all 68 canoeists on the water at the same time at various points in the Voyageur park. Even when SEP (Summer Educational Program) was in full swing years ago, we seldom, if ever, had so many at any one time heading out.

The trip concluded with everyone heading back to base camp on Friday, July 23. Following a welcome Sabbath rest, campers were transported by boat from the base camp across Pelican Lake to the city of Orr where an old fashioned sock-hop was held. On Sunday morning, campers and staff worked together to break down the base camp, pack all personal gear, and take the bus or car ride down to Minneapolis for a relaxing and refreshing swimming party and barbeque at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lee-Leger, local brethren in Minneapolis. Following the pool party, the girls “camped out” at the Lee-Legers’ home, and the boys went to the Kreyers’ farm to “camp out” for a short night. Bright and early the next morning, Monday, July 24, campers and staff were transported to the Minneapolis airport to complete their adventure and return home.

Mr. Gerald Weston and his team did an outstanding job. From coordinating and planning the trip to organizing the necessary equipment, base campsite, cooking and feeding—not only for canoeists, but also support staff and guests—theirs was a very big task. Mrs. Carol Weston and her crew did an outstanding job of feeding everyone. Mike and Kim Kreyer set up a magnificent camp kitchen with running water, electricity, refrigerator, freezer and everything else needed to provide meals for the entire camp.

Spiritual food was provided by Bible studies each day and by two Sabbath services. The adventure was indeed well organized—right down to picking up the campers and putting them on their respective flights back home.

Sheldon and Joette Monson carried much of the weight this year in lining up the base camp, securing extra canoes and camp equipment, and making sure each team of eight could fit all their physical needs into two 20- or 23-foot canoes for six days in the wilderness. Church members from congregations in Minnesota and Wisconsin all pitched in to help with the pre-orientation and conclusion set-ups, and with meals, transportation and service needs. Mr. Monson’s personal touch from years of experience of conducting wilderness trips was obvious in his helping Mr. Weston complete this significant undertaking so successfully. Mr. Rod McNair’s personal attention to detail, his kindness and his follow-up filled in the gaps, along with Mr. Jonathan McNair’s scheduling, Bible Study scripts and personal camp and wilderness experience, rounding out a “well-oiled” staff. No detail was left unattended.

Truly, everyone involved helped to make this year’s LYC Adventure program the adventure of a lifetime for many of God’s young people.

It was a fun trip, filled with excitement and challenge, living up to the theme of the adventure: “Learning to do hard things well!” It was indeed a test and a challenge, and it offered a great opportunity to teach young people about the Work, the Church and many of the principles of living God’s way. And it was a great deal of fun!

—Ben Whitfield, with material from Gerald Weston and Rod McNair

Pray for God's "Team" at Headquarters!*(Continued from page 2)*

He is the consummate gentleman, as well, and—since he grew up in Switzerland and France so many years ago—still carries with him a background of European culture. The Eternal God has granted him *more than 91 years* of life so far, and we are grateful that he is still serving so actively and productively! So, please also remember Mr. Apartian in your prayers.

Last, but not least, let me say that Mr. Davy Crockett—our Director of Business Operations—is somewhat newer in the full-time ministry, but has been with us in *this Work* from the very beginning. He and his wife served faithfully in the Little Rock, Arkansas congregation for many years. Mr. Crockett owned his own insurance claims adjusting business there, which was bought out by a larger company that wanted him to stay on and lead the combined companies for a few more years. At the end of his contract, rather than staying on as they wished, he asked to become *full-time* in this Work. He *knew* he was going to take a sizable salary cut in order to do this, but he wanted to do it anyway.

So, as many of you know, Mr. Crockett continued to serve the brethren faithfully, not only as a minister in Little Rock but *all over* Arkansas and as far east as Memphis, Tennessee. Then, after a few years, we asked him to come to Charlotte to serve as our Director of Business Operations. He has done a fine job in this, and has also given many fine sermons and sermonettes, and has helped in the ministry very much here in Charlotte as well. We all appreciate his unique contribution.

Here in Charlotte, these four men and I (sometimes affectionately called “RCM and the four Ds”—Dick, Doug, Dibar and Davy) meet together two or three times a week and make *all* major decisions as a “team.” We normally have an Executive Lunch on either Tuesdays or Wednesdays—and include in this group some of the other key individuals here as well, such as Messrs. Rod McNair, Gary Ehman, Charles Ogwyn and, more recently, Dr. Scott Winnail. Other leading visiting ministers—such as Messrs. Bruce Tyler from Australia, Rod King from Britain, Gerald Weston from Canada, and Mario Hernandez representing the Spanish Work—are also sometimes included, plus Dr. Michael Germano when he is in town on Living University matters. Others are invited from time to time as need arises.

We have an open and loving atmosphere in our meetings. We enjoy working together as “brothers” in carrying on this Work. Many serious topics are discussed, including doctrinal matters and problems facing the Work, but by regularly having such warm, brotherly interchanges—interspersed with humor and “kidding” each other—we are able to keep our balance and grow in love and faith to “finish the Work” as Christ indicated we certainly should.

We have conscientiously tried to follow a principle God particularly mentions in the book of Proverbs: “Where there

is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14). *Unlike* a number of self-appointed “prophets” and other self-titled individuals, I have long recognized that every leader deeply *needs* honest and straightforward advice and counsel! So I try to get this from all of these men—and from the Council of Elders as well—when any crucial decision is involved. This saves us a lot of trouble! And it is God's way.

I hope all of you brethren can also recognize the importance, in *your own lives*, of seeking “multitude of counsel.” Learn to *ask* for advice. You *do not always* have to follow everything that is suggested, but at least you can *listen carefully*, weigh the options and make a wiser decision in the end.

Many times, during or in concluding our meetings, we will exhort one another to *pray fervently* about various items in the Work or in our own lives. There is a genuine “brotherly” spirit and harmony among our leading ministers that is *very encouraging* to me. The above-mentioned ministers on our Headquarters “team”—plus those on the Council of Elders—have all been “tried” and “tested” again and again for many years, most of them *for several decades!* These men have had to be *on their knees* continually. They had to step back and see the “Big Picture” in order to remain loyal to the *Truth* during the apostasy that affected so many in the Worldwide Church of God after Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's death.

Of course, as mentioned above, although this letter has described the leading men in the top human positions under Jesus Christ in His Work here in Charlotte, we are also grateful for the many others who are faithfully and zealously serving God's people, and we *deeply* appreciate all their contributions, as we appreciate all those who are serving God's people all around the world. I hope this letter has given you some small “insight” into what God is doing here in Charlotte, as we strive to serve God's people everywhere and to preach the Gospel as a witness to the whole world, and feed those who respond to the Gospel message.

Dear brethren, I am grateful that these leading men on our Headquarters “team” have remained humble and faithful to the Truth, and that they have learned to genuinely *trust* the living Jesus Christ to watch over, protect, preserve and guide His Church. I am sure Almighty God is pleased with this, and I have wanted to share all of this with you brethren. Please *pray for us* that this spirit may continue! And pray for one another *and the Living Church of God* so that we may do a truly **powerful Work** that is pleasing to Jesus Christ as the end of this age approaches.



Local Church News

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Phil (Angie) West of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, congregation welcomed a baby boy born January 29. *Mac Charles West* weighed 8 pounds and was 20½ inches long. He joins his three big sisters, Marlee, Jaimee and Zoe, who were thrilled at his arrival.

Mr. and Mrs. Tim (Merilee) Markopoulos, of the Chicago, Illinois congregation, welcomed the birth of *Hannah Kathryn Markopoulos* on March 2. She weighed 7 pounds, 10 ounces and was 20 inches long. Hannah's big brother, David, is very excited to have a baby sister.

Mr. and Mrs. Paul (Ashleigh) Ford, of the Sacramento, California, congregation, welcomed their first child, *Emma Ruth Ford* into the family on June 29. She weighed 8 pounds, 3 ounces and was 20 inches long.

Mr. and Mrs. Bert (Julie) Sampson are the happy parents of a baby girl, *Abigail Elizabeth Sampson*. She arrived on July 5. Delighted grandparents are Steve and Becky Arnold of Houston, and Jim and Rita Sampson of California.

Mr. and Mrs. Bobby (Sherri) Jacques of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, are pleased to announce the birth of their first son, *Joshua Robert Jacques*, born July 9. Joshua weighed 8 pounds, 5 ounces and is the little brother of Victoria, Loran and Addison Jacques. He is grandson of Lise Jacques of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

Mr. and Mrs. Daniel (Charm) King of the Melbourne, Australia congregation, are happy to announce the birth of their son, *Yves Gillies Carlos King*, born on July 29. He weighed 7.02 pounds. The happy grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Rod King of Northamp-

ton, England, and Mr. and Mrs. Eddie Carlos of Melbourne.

Mr. and Mrs. Eric (Cammie) Brown of the Columbus, Ohio, congregation, would like to announce the birth of their son, *Caleb Cassius Brown*, who was born August 24. He weighed 9 pounds, 10 ounces and was 21 inches long. Caleb's three older sisters are also excited to have a baby brother in the family.

Mr. and Mrs. Kinneer Penman of Auckland, New Zealand, and *Mr. and Mrs. Laurence Marshall* of Helena, Montana, are thrilled to announce the birth of their first grandson, Jack. *John Marshall Penman* was born August 17 measuring 20½ inches, and weighing 7 pounds, 5 ounces. The delighted parents are *Joshua and Jenny Penman*, of the Charlotte, North Carolina congregation.

Ordinations

Mrs. Evelyn Bordonaro was ordained a deaconess on the Sabbath of June 13 by Pastor Mr. Jack Lowe. She serves in the Macon, Georgia, congregation, where her husband, Rick, serves as deacon. Everyone in the congregation was pleased to see Mrs. Bordonaro ordained a deaconess.

Mr. Jesus Puzon was ordained an elder on July 25 by Regional Pastor Mr. Bruce Tyler, Area Pastor Mr. Dayrell Tanner, and Pastor Basilio Osillos. He serves in the Quezon City, Metro Manila congregation in the Philippines.

Mr. Kevin Johnson was ordained a deacon on August 22 by Mr. Martin Fannin. He serves the Blairsville, Georgia, congregation.

Marriage

Mr. Franklin Joseph Gonzales and *Miss Janice Madrid* of the Quezon City, Philippines, congregation were joined in marriage on January 18 in a ceremony at the Peninsula de Punta Fuego in Nasugbu, Batangas. The ceremony was conducted by Mr. Basilio Osillos, pastor in Quezon City, Philippines. The bride's parents are Florendo and Levita Madrid and the groom's parents are Frank and Julieta Gonzales. Family and friends gathered together to witness the ceremony and enjoyed the reception afterwards.

We want to hear more about the happy milestones in the lives of our brethren. If your family has had a birth, marriage or major anniversary, please ask your local pastor to send word to the *Living Church News*, PO Box 3810, Charlotte, NC 28227-8010 (or to send e-mail to lcn@lcn.org).

Milwaukee Area Family Weekend an Uplifting Success!

Sixty-five brethren from Milwaukee, Chicago and surrounding Church areas, some from as far away as Kansas City, gathered at beautiful Bong Recreation Area in Kansasville, Wisconsin for a picnic and rocket launch. Services in Milwaukee on the Sabbath of July 25 began the weekend activities, followed by a Bible Study on “Thriving in the End Times.” On Sunday July 26, brethren enjoyed a picnic meal of barbecued hamburgers and hot dogs with all the “fixings,” followed by the announcement of the winners of the baking contest. Then it was off to the launch site! More than 30 rockets were launched successfully, with estimates that the highest rocket reached more than a thousand feet in the air! It was truly a memorable event. There was fun for every age group and the fellowship and camaraderie were truly inspirational. God provided beautiful weather and the unity was no doubt very pleasing to Him.

South Carolina Singles

Nineteen singles from around the country came together June 1 through June 8 for a week of fun, food, and fellowship at Edisto Beach, South Carolina. Mr. and Mrs. Shannon Christal, of the Joplin, Missouri congregation, served as chaperones. A few of the singles came early for the Pentecost weekend in Walterboro, South Carolina, including Darren Lee, from the Minneapolis, Minnesota congregation, who played the offertory and special music on Pentecost. The group of singles numbered 22 by the weekend of June 8. Friday evening was a hymn sing and a Bible Study conducted by Mr. Bill Whitaker, pastor of the Walterboro, South Carolina congregation, and after that a delicious steak dinner was served. On the Sabbath, Mariah Wolford from the Bluefield, West Virginia congregation, sang special music at services in Walterboro. A delicious meal was provided by the congregation for the singles and everyone else at services. The week was a great success. A local man noticed the group and commented that our singles were indeed “different,” well-behaved and well-mannered.

—Matt Lyons

Upcoming *Tomorrow's World* Telecasts

WGN: Sunday, 6:00 AM ET

VISION (Canada): Sunday, 5:30 PM ET; Monday–Friday, 3:00 AM ET

WORD: Friday, 1:30 AM ET

AIR DATE	BROADCAST TITLE
November 1	Are You Ready to Rule?
November 8	You Can Understand Prophecy
November 15	Is 2012 Really the End?
November 22	The Devil and His Demons
November 29	Heaven, Hell, and the Resurrection
December 6	America's Fall and Europe's Rise
December 13	What Will Save America?
December 20	Why Must Christ Come Again?
December 27	The Missing Message

For additional stations and times, check the Television Log on page 31 of your *Tomorrow's World* magazine.

Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. George (Alvina) Dellinger celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on June 28 and were honored on the Sabbath of June 20 at a surprise reception in Indianapolis, Indiana, where they serve as local elder and deaconess. The room had been decorated in their original wedding colors of blue and white with the addition of gold to represent their fifty years together. Mr. and Mrs. Dellinger re-enacted the wedding cake cutting ceremony to the hearty cheers of those present. The Dellingers met in 1956 when Mr. Dellinger helped his future wife, Alvina, move into her new college dorm. They were married in Fargo, North Dakota in 1959.

Mr. and Mrs. Ron (Linda) McGowen were honored after services on Sabbath, July 11, with a cake and lemonade reception in honor of their 50th wedding anniversary. Mr. McGowen is Assistant Pastor of the South Texas Church area.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin (Janet) Fannin celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at a reception after services in Knoxville on the Sabbath of August 1. Their two daughters and their husbands, and two grandchildren were there for this special occasion. Mr. Fannin pastors the Knoxville, Tennessee; Asheville, North Carolina; and Blairsville, Georgia, congregations. On the Sabbath preceding their anniversary, the Blairsville, GA, brethren honored them with a reception after services and on the Sabbath following their anniversary, the Asheville, N.C., brethren honored them with a reception. Mr. and Mrs. Fannin are very thankful to have been able to share this important milestone in their lives with much of their physical and spiritual family.

In Loving Memory

Mr. Johnny Dollar, 70, of the Williamsburg, Virginia, congregation died June 19. Mr. Dollar was baptized in 1967. He is survived by his wife, Geneva, two daughters, Sharon and Phoebe, one son, Bob, six grandchildren, three brothers and three sisters. Mr. Dollar was an avid gardener and was known for his friendliness and humor as well as being a diligent student of the Bible. The funeral service was conducted by Mr. Ken Frank.

Mr. Jan P. Morel, Sr., 73, of the Lafayette, Louisiana, congregation, died June 24 after a long illness. He was a retired industrial mechanic and employee of the city of New Iberia, Louisiana, who enjoyed riding motorcycles, flying, and woodworking, but it was his family that meant the most to him. He is survived by his wife, Loretta, two sons, one daughter, one brother, and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Mr. Jonathan McNair conducted his funeral.

Mr. David Hilton, a deacon in the Montgomery, Alabama, congregation, died June 30 after a long battle with cancer. He was 77 years old. A member of God's Church since 1969, he was a loving husband and father. He is survived by his wife of 45 years, Rosemarie, a daughter, Annette McDaniel, and a son, Roger.

Mr. Jerry Dobbins, 61, of the Columbus, Mississippi congregation, died suddenly July 18. He was baptized April 18, 1986. Mr. Dobbins was known for his friendly attitude and he will be very much missed. He is survived by his wife, Wendy; his mother; one daughter, Kammi Turner; one

grandchild, Rylee Faith Turner; two sisters, Scottie Blaylock and Rena Pierce; and one brother, Billy.

Mr. George Akenge of the Ndhiwa congregation in Kenya, died July 27 after a short illness. He was 49 years old. Mr. Akenge is survived by his wife, Lona Akeyo, two sons and six daughters. He will be greatly missed by family and friends. His funeral was conducted by Mr. Simon Muthama on August 9.

Mr. Francisco Callejas of the Manizales, Colombia, congregation, died July 28. His health had been poor but he was spiritually strong in the hope of the resurrection. He appreciated all the prayers, encouraging words, visits, telephone calls and fasts of the brethren.

Mr. Robert John Moss of the Calgary, Alberta, Canada, congregation, died peacefully in his sleep August 3 after a battle with cancer. He was 97 years old. Mr. Moss was baptized in 2006 at the age of 93. He was known for his kind and gentle nature and he loved to be with his Church family. His memorial service was held on August 10. He is survived by his daughter, three granddaughters, four great-grandchildren, and three brothers. Mr. Moss will be greatly missed by his friends and family.

Mrs. Winnie Pennison, age 89, of the Lafayette, Louisiana congregation died August 14 after a short illness. Her funeral was Tuesday, August 18. Her family and friends and the brethren in Louisiana will miss this fine lady very much.

Commentary

2012: The Hype and the Truth

By Wallace G. Smith

As my wife and I walked into the local cinema, before us stood one of the largest movie advertisement displays I had ever seen. It depicted a coastal city being completely ripped apart by unprecedented seismic activity, with vast swaths of the city tossed into the sky and entire neighborhoods dumped into a hungry ocean. It was a scene of utter devastation that clearly would have taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. And it was a fitting advertisement for the movie *2012*, a new End-of-the-World epic movie coming out this November.

The producers of *2012* are capitalizing on a growing public fascination: the idea that the world will end on December 21, 2012. And a fascination it is. The end of the movie's preview trailer asks viewers to go to the Internet and search "2012." I did that at Google.com, and received 194 million hits.

Why 2012?

It seems the Mayans—the well-known and much-studied ancient Mesoamerican empire—kept many calendars, including one known as the "Long Count Calendar." This calendar will reach the end of a 5,100-year-long epoch on—you guessed it—December 21, 2012.

Is there anything to the hype? Should we expect doomsday—or perhaps some New Age paradise—to come on December 21, 2012?

The Mayans, themselves, said very little about it, though records show they certainly did not believe the world would end on that date. Many of their descendants today have complained that the current (and growing) 2012-related hysteria is simply a "gringo invention."

But this has not prevented New Age fantasists, astrologers and other occultists from latching on to the date with a passion. Some say it will be the end of the world, while others claim it will be the dawn of a new spiritual era. They point to (disputed) astronomical conjunctions claimed to occur on that day and to visions and theories "received" by mediums under the influence of psychedelic drugs and hallucinogens.

Yet the Bible powerfully warns against using astrology and other occult practices to divine future events (Deuteronomy 18:10–12; Jeremiah 10:2)—warnings that today's 2012-obsessed individuals ignore, or perhaps have never heard.

Given the economic distress, terrorism, global instability and natural disasters of powerful intensity all around us, interest in what the future holds and concern for the direction in which the world is going is understandable. But the answer is not found in a date on an ancient calendar, the conjunctions of astrologers, or the hallucinations of drug-using "psychonauts."

Rather, there is a proven source of knowledge about the future—a source that **does** warn of natural and supernatural disasters of unimaginable scale and intensity. That source speaks, as well, of a soon-coming new age of peace and prosperity across the globe—a time without war or needless suffering, when the nations will have learned to live with each other in harmony. That source is your Bible, and not only does it have a proven track-record of accuracy, it does something that a mere date on a calendar or a "galactic alignment" could never do: the Bible tells you not only the amazing details about what is ahead, but it also tells you *what to do about it!*

2012 may make for an exciting movie, but the astounding real truth about the future is right there in the pages of your Bible, waiting for you to discover it!

The above is adapted from one of the many commentaries, discussing vital topics facing our world, available at the www.lcg.org and www.tomorrowworld.org Web sites.