

Living

Church News

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The Power of God's Spirit

Dear Brethren and Friends,

As this age comes to an end, you and I will really *need* God's Holy Spirit more than ever! For we humans cannot fully imagine the sense of absolute desperation that *hundreds of millions* of our fellow human beings will soon begin to feel. Indeed, many *are already there*.

As my wife and I watch the *BBC World News*, we are often deeply moved by the vivid scenes of mass starvation, torture, rape and brutality. More recently, we have all beheld the sad images of bulldozers scooping up *thousands of corpses* of our fellow humans after the earthquake in Haiti—nameless, faceless people “made in God's image” just as we are. But now, in the crush of events, their bodies are treated as *so much rubbish* because of the enormous chaos and suffering caused by the recent earthquake.

Do we somehow imagine, “*It can't happen here?*”

Dear brethren, *think again*.

For if you carefully *read* and *believe* all of the inspired biblical prophecies found in Leviticus 26:14–46, Deuteronomy 28:15–68, Ezekiel 5:1–17 and other scriptures, you will certainly soon *understand* that, yes, the very type of *utter devastation* now afflicting Haiti **will happen** here in years to come!

That is *why* Jesus Christ directly warned us about the soon-coming Great Tribulation. He said, “For in those days there will be **tribulation**, *such as has not been since the beginning of the creation* which God created until this time, nor ever shall be” (Mark 13:19).

Of course, many worldly people—including *false ministers*—will say, “Why would a just God allow such awful things to happen?” We need to think through and *fully understand* the “mind of God” on *all* these things, brethren. Remember that the word of God declares, “*A curse without cause shall not alight*” (Proverbs 26:2).

There is a genuine **reason** why we humans end up with so much suffering and anguish. And, regarding the very events of the coming tribulation described by Mark, God says, “Because you have multiplied **disobedience** more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments, nor even done according to the judgments of the nations that are all around you”—therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of

Inside:

How Deeply Do You KNOW God?3

What Is The Holy Spirit?6

Is God's Church Ready?9

From Loneliness To Oneness11

Are You Preparing for God's Spiritual Gifts?15

Pentecost: Lessons from The Old Testament Church18

Local Church News23

Commentary24

which I will never do again, *because of all your abominations*” (Ezekiel 5:7–9).

Abominations?

Many young people who read this or who hear about our warnings to the American and British-descended peoples may say, “*What abominations?*”

For the minds of untold millions of our youth have become *so desensitized* to absolute evil that they honestly think there is “no problem” when they see images or read about the thousands of leading politicians, actors, singers, sports personalities and others living openly in fornication, adultery, homosexuality or other sins. It will take *many* truly awful events to finally **wake them up!**

But as God’s powerful but loving **correction** comes down hard on a sarcastic, smirking, God-rejecting society, even we in God’s true Church *will* be tried and tested as **never** before! Remember that our forbears in ancient Israel were allowed by God—even though they were His “chosen people”—to **suffer** through the first three plagues *right along with the Egyptians*. You can read about this in Exodus 7 and 8. For no doubt this suffering humbled them, and helped them more fully understand the **power** of the great God who was beginning to deal with them. Also, this probably helped them to have more of the *right kind* of human compassion for the Egyptians—who would go on to suffer even more the full wrath of God.

Brethren, everything in the Bible indicates that *we* in God’s Church will also soon be facing *hunger*, disease, *earthquakes* and no doubt **serious persecution** as this society continues to disintegrate and turn further and further away from God—with many around us actually **hating** God and anyone associated with His true teachings! Will you and I continue to remain faithful to God who has *opened our minds* to understand His Plan and the very reason for our existence—the God who is even now fashioning and molding us and preparing us to become His **full sons** in the soon-coming resurrection from the dead?

Our God tells us, “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small” (Proverbs 24:10). Yet God’s word also reveals to us that—*except* for Joshua and Caleb—*every single one* of the older Israelites who came out of Egypt with Moses **perished** before they entered the Promised Land! Only Joshua and Caleb remained truly faithful to the Eternal God during those 40 years of trial and test.

What about us?

Jesus Christ tells us, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; *for without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5).

Truly, without Jesus Christ actually *living within us* through the Holy Spirit, we can do **nothing**. We cannot and will not

Continued on page 22

Living Church News

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How Deeply Do You KNOW God?

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

“How good it is to know the Lord this morning!” cried the emotional preacher. “Amen,” echoed several in the congregation, their arms waving in the air.

Most of us have seen mainstream “Christians” expressing in such glib manner their relationship with their God and Creator. Many honestly believe that they are glorifying the Eternal God in this way. These people are—on the whole—quite evidently sincere. But non-Christians and those of less emotional beliefs just smile to themselves and perceive that these people have been misguided into using religion as a means of “letting off steam.”

Other less emotional sorts think that in the name of “Christianity” they can form a committee—perhaps called a “Curia” or a “presbytery”—and force God to work through their human will, no matter what form He has consistently shown He uses to guide His Church over the ages.

Still others fancy themselves as “prophets” or “apostles” or scholars who “know better” than their own teachers who came before them. Do these people truly know their God?

Putting all personal feelings and preconceived ideas aside, how can we as Christians *really* “get to know” our God—our Creator and Savior—deeply?

God Reveals His Nature

One way to begin to understand God’s nature is by carefully studying the things He has produced—His creation—that we sometimes call “nature.” The Apostle Paul knew this, and so was inspired to write, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood *by the things that are made*, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

Yes! So evident is God’s supreme intelligence in His creation, that the atheist is totally **without excuse** for denying God’s existence (Psalm 53:1). We live in a *law-abiding* universe. God is clearly revealed in nature as a God of law and order—of supreme wisdom and purpose behind every creation.

Try to break the law of gravity sometime! The unity of nature and the constancy of inexorable laws point to the nature and character of the Creator. God’s creation *did not “evolve”* from some primordial ooze! Its laws remain the same. Charles Darwin’s own son said, “*We cannot prove that a single species has been changed.*” God decreed (Genesis 1:25) that every plant and animal should bring forth “after his kind.” Not once in 6,000 years has this decree been violated.

God’s laws do not change! All nature thunders forth this truth. This principle applies to *spiritual* as well as physical things. *Study God’s creation if you truly wish to*

understand your Creator. The Bible and “nature” both teach that God’s plan and His laws are not variable. “*The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness*” (Psalm 111:7–8).

Further Witness Needed

In contrast to the united testimony of nature, which testifies even to the honest pagan that there **must** be a God, human beings are divided and confused in their ideas about that God. It has been said, “Man creates God in his own image.” In the *majority of cases*, that is *true!*

People of every nation and tongue have always worshiped something. But their “god” was usually a product of their imaginations—a god that would conform to their current *human* standards, laws, and ways of looking at things.

Even today, most professing “Christians” *read their own idea of God into the Bible.* We all know of “sweet old ladies” who think of God as a kindly, sentimental, and *very prudish* old fellow who would be shocked to tears and completely upset if any of His children should go to a movie. Their conception of God is just as narrow and limited as their own environment, training, and mental outlook has been.

Other people go to the opposite extreme. They think of God as a far-off spiritual power with little or no direct concern with the human family. They imagine that

God is “wise” enough to *let us alone* to choose our own amusements, society, laws—*our own religion* the way we want to have it. They think they are philosophic, cosmopolitan—“modern.” *So they make God in their own image!*

The Holy Bible is the *revealed* word of the Creator God. It was written to show us the nature of God, and how we should live and worship Him—that we could be His children. Diligently *studying* your Bible is the way to truly come to know God. It is what is needed to dispel mankind’s confusion in its ideas of God. Are you *daily* saturating your mind with the word of God? Do not assume that you “already know” everything God wants you to know. God reveals Himself to those who fervently seek Him!

The Bible Carries Authority

We in God’s Church, who should have proved and really *believe* that the Bible is the inspired revelation from God to man, should *more than anyone else* clearly realize that God’s word is not to be argued with—or falsely interpreted to promote pet doctrines.

We may have had our own preconceived *human* idea of God. We may know what “we want” to do. But if we really want the *truth*, we need to put our biases aside and search God’s word to find out how He *reveals* Himself to us. Remember, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for *doctrine*, for *reproof*, for *correction*, for *instruction* in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is to correct and reprove us—to show us where we are wrong. Will we let it?

God says, “I am the LORD, I *do not change*” (Malachi 3:6). We find that Jesus Christ is, “the *same* yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The Father and the Son do not whim-

sically change their plans and principles, or *their laws*. They “change not.”

At this point, it is important to remember that Christ *was* the God or “Lord” of the Old Testament! In John 1:1–5, we find that Christ *was* the “Word” or “Spokesman” who was with the Father from the beginning. All things were created by Jesus Christ (v. 3 and Colossians 1:16). Christ was the spiritual “Rock” that went before and protected the children of Israel, and *that gave them the Ten Commandments* (1 Corinthians 10:1–4).

Remember, God—in *the person of Jesus Christ*—gave the law that most mainstream “Christians” *hate* today! Why do people—even most who claim to be preaching Christ’s message—hide their eyes from the Christ who is supreme Law-Giver? Do they think Christ has changed?

Your Bible says **He has not!**

God’s methods and laws are consistent from Genesis to Revelation. Apparently not realizing this, many self-appointed “Christian” preachers will tell you about the “God of the Old Testament” in contrast with Christ in the New Testament. They go on to say that Christ preached the Gospel, and the Apostle Paul preached a *different* gospel. They are in **confusion**.

In Revelation 17:5, God names this mixed-up, divided system of churchianity “Babylon the Great”—which literally means “*Great Confusion*.” God’s true people are commanded to *come out* of that system (Revelation 18:4). Why?

Because *the people in that system do not know the true God!* Satan has his own *false* ministers who *appear* to be ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:15). These *false* ministers are deceiving people, “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

How can people be so easily deceived? *First*, because they blindly

follow human tradition and its false ministers, and therefore have a **false** conception of God. *Second*, because they are spiritually too **lazy** to *study* their Bibles and come to know the true God and *His way*. Sadly, even in God’s Church, men sometimes think they “know better” and can change God’s long-established plan, replacing it with something “better” or “safer”—something that appeals to their carnal human reasoning. We must not fall victim to such flawed human reasoning!

The Bible Is Consistent

From Genesis to Revelation, God is revealed as the *Creator*, the *Ruler*, and the potential *spiritual Father* of mankind. In Genesis 2:17, God *commanded* the first man *not* to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Adam willfully *disobeyed* this command, following his wife’s example, and incurred the death penalty. God had shown himself as **Ruler**, and man had disobeyed.

Long before the Old Covenant was instituted, Abraham was blessed because he *obeyed* God’s laws and *kept* His commandments (Genesis 26:5). He recognized God—he knew God—as Supreme **Ruler**.

After the Israelites had come out of Egypt (symbolizing sin) to become an independent people, God gave them His commandments—which they had *lost* since Abraham’s time. They were to be *ruled* by God’s laws—which alone can bring happiness. Having the same human nature as we do, they *disobeyed* God and were driven into captivity.

Why? Because they refused to recognize God—to **know** God—as their Supreme Ruler. Is God *really* your Ruler? Or do you sometimes just pay Him “lip service” and go on doing things “your way”?

Jesus Reveals the Father

Jesus came in the flesh to “*reveal*” the Father. He showed that God’s law would be in force until heaven and earth should pass away (Matthew 5:18). He did not come to destroy God’s law, but to *fulfill* it. And *fulfill* means to do or *perform*, not to do away with. When a young man came to ask Jesus how to be saved, he was told, “*keep the commandments*” (Matthew 19:17).

Jesus taught that His disciples were no longer to carry out the administration of the *civil* statutes and *judgments* for breaking the law (John 8:1–8). True Christians are no longer to execute judgment on evildoers (Matthew 7:1–5). Punishment of evildoers is the responsibility of this world’s rulers (Romans 13:1–6). Yet although the *rituals*, sacrifices, and *carnal ordinances* were nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 7:27), God’s spiritual commandments were *never* to be broken (Matthew 5:19)!

Indeed, Jesus’ whole ministry was one of revealing God as the supreme Lawgiver and Ruler. He preached the good news of the coming kingdom or **government** of God (Mark 1:14). That is the *true Gospel*—the good news of God’s government, God’s **rule**.

The very foundation of Jesus’ teaching was that, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of *God*” (Matthew 4:4, KJV). What *word*? What *God*? Those Jews knew very well that Christ was referring to the God of the Old Testament—the Law-Giver—the God who was to **rule** Israel. The only “word” of the *true* God, at that time, was the “Old Testament”! Jesus referred to the Old Testament writings as *scripture*, and He said, “*the scripture cannot be broken*” (John 10:35).

We are commanded to live by every word of the *true God* as revealed in the New *and* Old Testaments. Do you really *know* that God? Do you continually *seek* Him?

Christ: Our Example

Most professing “Christian” ministers talk about Christ as some sort of hero and savior, but they *refuse* to acknowledge His *Gospel*, His *teach-*

Most professing “Christian” ministers talk about Christ as some sort of hero and savior, but they refuse to acknowledge His Gospel, His teachings, and His example. They picture Jesus as a sweet but helpless little baby at Christmastime, and as a savior who has gone “way off to heaven” at Eastertime! Their belief is that He came to die for men, but that His teaching carries no authority today!

ings, and His *example*. They picture Jesus as a sweet *but helpless* little baby at Christmastime, and as a savior who has gone “way off to heaven” at Eastertime! Their belief is that He came to die for men, but that *His teaching carries no authority* today!

As we in God’s Church know, the Bible says the *exact opposite*!

In John 1:4, we see that Jesus’ life was the “light” of men. It was to show them *God’s way* to live. Peter was inspired to write, “Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example*, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Speaking of Christ, John wrote, “He who says he ‘remains in him’

ought to be living as he lived” (1 John 2:6, *Moffatt*).

Jesus is our *perfect* example! If we say we are Christians—that we “remain in Him”—we ought to be **living** as He lived! Are you? Most professing Christians do not genuinely try to follow Jesus’ example, and do not understand *what kind* of God the *true God* is. They are *ignorant* of how to worship and obey the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

What was Jesus’ example?

Jesus’ entire life is a perfect example of **obedience** to God’s law and His rule! He said, “I have *kept* my Father’s commandments” (John 15:10). His own teaching was simply a magnification of God’s law (Isaiah 42:21). Actually, He came in the flesh to magnify *His own law*—the Ten Commandments! Remember, He *was* the God of the Old Testament who *gave* the Ten Commandments and dealt with Israel (1 Corinthians 10:1–4).

When He came in the flesh, Jesus *kept* that law *to set us an example*. He was our “light”—our *example*. He is the *one* who has set all physical and spiritual *laws* and *energies* in motion. He has an overall plan for this earth.

A *true Christian* is one who follows Christ—*who follows His example*.

The Word came in the flesh, as Jesus Christ, to preach the good news of God’s coming Kingdom—or government. Jesus always preached that Gospel. Philip preached it (Acts 8:12). The Apostle Paul preached it all throughout his ministry—even *to the Gentiles at Rome* (Acts 28:31). What was the Gospel they preached? They preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. That Kingdom is a **real Kingdom**—it has a Ruler (Jesus Christ), laws (the commandments

Continued on page 21

What Is the Holy Spirit?

By Rod Reynolds

One important question we must consider in order to understand God's nature—and our own nature—is, “What is the Holy Spirit?”

In answering this question, we may first want to ask, “What is ‘spirit’?” In any good dictionary, you will find several distinct but related definitions. It is important to recognize that in the Bible, too, you will find the word “spirit” used in different senses. Common dictionary definitions of “spirit” include:

“**The vital essence or animating force in living organisms...**” (all definitions from the *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1966). God breathed into Adam the “breath of life” (Hebrew *nishmat*) and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). Scripture also uses the Hebrew word *ruach* to denote the “breath of life”—the animating force that distinguishes a living being from a dead body, whether human or animal. Without an animating force, we would be just a collection of chemicals. Yet, unlike non-human life, only human beings have the “spirit in man”—an animating force given by God that imparts human intellect to our mammal brain (1 Corinthians 2:11).

- “**The part of a human being that is incorporeal and invisible, and is characterized by intelligence, personality, self-consciousness, and will; the mind.**” In his statement, “God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son” (Romans 1:9), Paul is implying that his will, his mind, his inner being is actively engaged in serving God. Christians are told to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:23). The link between the spirit and will is also illustrated in Jesus' statement concerning His disciples, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

From this we can conclude that one's spirit is expressed through his personality, will and mind. The indication is that the spirit in man working through the brain and related sensory faculties produces personality, mind and will.

- “**In the Bible, the creative, animating power or divine influence of God.**” The psalmist wrote: “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth” (Psalm 104:30). God's creative, animating power was at work in the renew-

ing of the face of the earth and the restoration of life upon it as recounted in Genesis 1 (cf. Genesis 1:1).

Also: “But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding” (Job 32:8). In this verse, “spirit” is from the Hebrew *ruach*; while “breath” is a translation of the Hebrew word *neshamah*. However, in this instance, *neshamah* should also be translated “spirit,” because it is through God's Spirit that He imparts to us spiritual understanding (1 Corinthians 2:11–14).

By searching the spirit in man, God uncovers the very thoughts and intents of our hearts (Proverbs 20:27). It is through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us that God is able to impress within us His character, as we submit to His will (Romans 8:4, 13–14; Galatians 5:22–23). Through His Spirit we are able to have fellowship with God, and become one with Him (2 Corinthians 13:14, Greek: *koinonia*, communion, fellowship, communication). Through that same Holy Spirit, God imparts not mere temporary, physical life, but *His life*—eternal life (Romans 8:11, 23; 2 Corinthians 5:1–5; Galatians 6:8)!

The Holy Spirit is promised to those who obey God (Proverbs 1:23; John 14:15–16; Acts 5:32). To have the gift of eternal life imparted through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit requires believing the Gospel, repenting of sin and being baptized by immersion in water (Mark 1:14–15; Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1:13–14). Holy Spirit, expressing God's nature in all its power, vitality, perfection and purity, is distinct from other categories of spirit—such as human spirit, animal spirit, angelic spirits, or evil spirits.

- “**A supernatural or immaterial being, as an angel, demon...**” Scripture explains that “God is Spirit” (John 4:24; cf. 2 Corinthians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 15:45). Angels are also spirits (Hebrews 1:13–14). Satan, an archangel who rebelled against God, is now a spirit who is evil (Ephesians 2:2). Other demons are also spirits who are fallen angels (Matthew 8:16; Revelation 12:3–4, 7–9). God is eternal (Romans 1:20). But Satan and the other angels are spirit beings who were created by God (Ezekiel 28:13–15; Colossians 1:16).

- “**A state of mind; mood; temper: Success raised his spirits.**” Paul wrote of the presence and

actions of certain individuals refreshing the spirits of others (1 Corinthians 16:17–18; 2 Corinthians 7:13).

- “True intent or meaning... the *spirit of the law*.” Paul wrote of being circumcised in heart, representing the true spirit of circumcision (Romans 2:28–29). He wrote of serving God in the spirit of the law, its true intent, and not the mere letter (Romans 7:6). The New Covenant incorporates the law of God applied in the spirit, and not merely the letter, according to its full intent and meaning (2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:10).

- “The emotional faculty of man; the heart: Great poetry stirs the *spirit*.” After a disturbing dream, Pharaoh’s “spirit was troubled,” implying he was emotionally upset (Genesis 41:8; cf. Daniel 2:1). The psalmist wrote of his being “troubled” in a time of adversity to the point that his “spirit was overwhelmed” (Psalm 77:3). Daniel wrote of being “grieved in my spirit” due to visions he had been given (Daniel 7:15). As Jesus testified to His closest disciples that one of them was about to betray Him, “He was troubled in spirit” (John 13:21).

Body and Spirit

God created human beings in His own image (Genesis 1:26–27). Man has a body and, as we have seen, a spirit. Is the spirit of a man a different person from the man? Paul wrote to Timothy, “The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (2 Timothy 4:22). Was Timothy’s spirit a *separate person* from Timothy? The notion is absurd! Why, then, would we think God’s Spirit is a separate person from or within God? Paul said he was absent in body but present in spirit (1 Corinthians 5:3). Was Paul’s spirit a separate person? Of course not!

Paul, a mere human being, had the capacity to be present bodily in one location, but present in spirit elsewhere. Is God less capable?

In many places, the Bible reveals that God has a body—despite what the world’s philosophers have speculated. We read that “there is a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44). Jesus Christ was resurrected with such a body. The disciples saw Jesus bodily after His resurrection (John 20:29–21:1).

John later had a vision of how Jesus appears bodily in His glorified state (Revelation 1:12–16). Although the description in John’s vision is partly figurative, it nonetheless gives us an idea of how the glorified Jesus appears. We are told that, in the resurrection, Jesus “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

In Christ “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). Before He became flesh and blood Jesus existed “in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6).

“Form” is translated from the Greek *morphe*, which signifies the essential attributes as shown in the form. The “form by which a person or thing strikes the vision; external appearance” (*Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*). This implies that God—both the Father and Jesus Christ—has form.

Jesus’ statement concerning the Father, that no one had “seen His form” (John 5:37), also implies that the Father has form, and hence a body. The Greek in this case is *eidos* (denoting the external or outward appearance, form, figure or shape), derived from *eido*, meaning “to perceive with the eyes, to see” (*Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon*).

Jesus sits bodily now in the third heaven at the Father’s right hand (Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33–34; Hebrews 10:12). But, through spirit, God is capable of being everywhere at once (1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139:7–10; Jeremiah 23:24). However, it is not a separate person from or within God who can be everywhere in spirit, and who specifically dwells in those who have received His Spirit, but God Himself, in the persons of Jesus Christ and the Father (John 14:23; 15:26; Romans 8:9–11; Galatians 2:20; 4:6).

“He” or “It”? Pronouns and Gender

Some have been misled by English translations of John 14:16–17 and 14:26, which use English pronouns—he, him and whom—when referring to the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Why is this?

In the Greek language, each noun is assigned a gender, which does not necessarily imply sex or personhood. *Hamartia*, for example, is a feminine noun meaning sin, though sin is neither male nor female. *Hamartolos*, on the other hand, is a masculine noun that means sinner, though a sinner can be either male or female.

The Greek word for “Comforter” or “Helper” is *parakletos*—a masculine noun. Where the Greek text uses a pronoun referring back to *parakletos*, it follows the masculine gender of its antecedent. The Greek word for spirit is *pneuma*, a neuter noun. Pronouns in the Greek text referring back to *pneuma* are neuter. In the original Greek, in the verses in question, most of the pronouns referring to the Holy Spirit are neuter, since most refer to *pneuma* as the antecedent. Literally rendered into English, these pronouns would be translated as “which” or “it.” Yet most translators have chosen to use he, him and whom because of their preconceived idea that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person within a Trinity.

We find that in John 16:5–15, masculine pronouns are used several times in reference to the *parakletos*—Comforter or Helper—as would be expected for a masculine word. Yet, elsewhere, neuter pronouns are used in reference to the Holy Spirit. *Nothing definitive about the nature*

of the Holy Spirit can be determined by the gender of pronouns.

If we read carefully what Jesus said, and compare other scriptures, the truth becomes clear. Because Christ was with them bodily, the Spirit that would later be sent was **already with them** (John 14:17). Moreover, the Father Himself was already at work, granting them understanding through the Spirit (Matthew 16:17).

But after Jesus' departure, the same Spirit—Christ's Spirit—would be in them (v. 17). The promise of the Spirit dwelling in them was to be sent from the Father through Jesus Christ (John 14:16, 26; Acts 1:4–5; 2:33). "I will come to you," Jesus said (John 14:18). He would come to them, and dwell in them, through His Spirit (vv. 17–18, 23; cf. Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19). It is the Father and Christ who dwell in converted Christians through the Holy Spirit that they share, and that we share with them (John 14:23; Revelation 3:20; 1 John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 13:14). It is Jesus Christ Himself, and the Father, who comfort us through the Scriptures and through the Spirit they have given (Romans 15:4–5; 2 Corinthians 1:3–5; 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17).

Figurative and Symbolic Descriptions

Why, then—if the Holy Spirit is not a person—do we find references to it speaking or being lied to (See Acts 1:16; 5:3; Hebrews 3:7)? Just as the biblical writers wrote of wisdom in such terms, without conceiving of it as a person, so too did they describe the Holy Spirit in such terms, without conceiving of it as a person separate from or within God. Notice: "The mention of the 'Holy Spirit,' as speaking to individuals, is frequent in rabbinic writings. This, of course, does not imply their belief in the Personality of the Holy Spirit" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Edersheim, p. 139 n.). If even the rabbis could write of the Spirit in such a way, without im-

plying that it is a person distinct from the Father and Christ, so too could the authors of the New Testament. "The 'Spirit of God' . . . is not distinct from God, nor does the phrase imply a distinction in the God-head. The Spirit of God is God Himself, breathing, living, active, energizing in the world—'God at work.' The Spirit is personal because God is personal" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. VI, p.

255). Thus, Scripture clearly portrays the Holy Spirit as the instrumentality through which God expresses and accomplishes His will. It is an essential part of what He is—not a separate person!

The concept of the Holy Spirit as God's divine power in action is reflected in symbols of the Spirit used in Scripture. The primary word for spirit in the Old Testament is *ruach*, of which the primary meaning is "wind." The primary word for spirit in the New Testament is *pneuma*, with a similar meaning. Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is ubiquitous, invisible and powerful (Luke 4:14; Acts 1:8). And,

just as the air we breathe sustains physical life, the Spirit sustains spiritual life (John 6:63). Oil as a source of light-giving energy is another symbol of the Holy Spirit (1 Samuel 16:13; Zechariah 4:1–6, 11–14; Luke 4:18–19). Water, a source of power and life, also symbolizes the Holy Spirit (John 7:37–39). Another emblem of God's Spirit is the dove, connoting not only fluid movement and the power of communication and action from a distance, but also love, peace and purity (Genesis 8:8–12; Psalm 55:6, 68:13; Song of Solomon 2:14; Matthew 3:16; Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 Peter 1:22).

As we have seen, the Holy Spirit is not the "third person" of an imaginary Trinity, but rather is God's nature and power. It is His divine power in action. Through it, God creates, animates and influences. Through it, God can dwell in us and transform us. Through it, we have communion with God and can know Him and His mind. The Bible does not teach that the Holy Spirit is a separate person from God, any more than our spirit is from us! ■

If we read carefully what Jesus said, and compare other scriptures, the truth becomes clear. Because Christ was with them bodily, the Spirit that would later be sent was already with them (John 14:17). Moreover, the Father Himself was already at work granting them understanding through the Spirit (Matthew 16:17).

Is God's Church Ready?

By Dibar Apartian

All of us in God's Church have been waiting for Christ's return for years. Some have even set dates. Does the Bible predict Christ's return? The answer is absolutely yes. Does Scripture give details about His return? Once again, the answer is an absolute yes. Christ *will* return, most assuredly. He has promised it—and He never lies (Titus 1:2).

Was the Church ready for Christ's return when Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong began to proclaim the good news around the world? No, it certainly was not! I personally am among the first-hand witnesses who can testify to this fact. But, most importantly, is the Church ready today? Are we ready to complete the mission for which we have been called? We must each answer that question individually (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Grow Spiritually

If, as the Bible commands, you have been baptized by immersion after genuine repentance (Acts 2:38), are you *growing* each day in grace and knowledge? Are you being faithful to the commitment into which you entered at baptism? Are you drawing closer to your Creator every day? How much progress have you made since you were called? Can you affirm that you have grown significantly ever since a minister laid hands on you for the reception of God's Spirit? Are you, today, less carnal—less selfish? Have you grown in understanding of God's word and His plan for mankind? These questions demand answers—and proofs. All of us need to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:17–18). All of us need to grow in the love of God (Jude 20–21).

I remember a friend—a philosopher—who interpreted the Bible in his own way. He was convinced that his

way of understanding God's teachings was right. It made more sense to him because he thought it more "reasonable" and easier to put into practice. He took certain Bible verses out of context—verses that were more pleasing to the human mind and easy to understand—and based his religion on the principles contained therein.

My friend firmly believed in Christ's teaching, "whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Certainly, this is the basis of all **commandments ruling human relationships**. But although many people in the world *say* they believe in these words of Christ, they usually apply them *in their own way*. They do unto others *on their own terms*, and love others according to *their own* definition of love.

Many years ago, during one of my Radio Luxembourg broadcasts, I told the audience that love is the foundation of true Christianity. One listener wrote to me with great joy: "You are right, Mr. Apartian, love is what matters. To enjoy life, we should think with love, act with love and make love"! That man did not really understand what I had explained on the air, but he was satisfied with his "logical" interpretation of "love." It was his belief—his conviction, his religion—based on his own interpretation of the Bible. That was how he adapted God's definition of love to his own carnal understanding. The type of love he believed in was rooted in the physical realm. He ignored totally the spiritual aspect of love.

Family Love

Before our conversion, none of us could understand the *true* meaning of love in our human relations—including the meaning of love in marriage,

which Paul describes in his epistle to the Ephesians. We did not comprehend that physical marriage is a parallel of the spiritual marriage between Christ and His Church. Yet we learned these truths when we entered God's Church and began to walk on the road of true conversion.

In Ephesians 5:22–33, the Apostle Paul vividly describes true love in the context of marriage. Sadly, there are not that many couples today in which the husband and the wife love and respect each other in the profound way Paul described. They do not consider their marriage as a commitment that will help them to grow spiritually. For many, these days, marriage is a stumbling block that tempts each mate to focus on the flaws of the other. Instead of growing in love for each other, husbands and wives drift apart. This is not how to have and maintain peace and joy in marriage and the family!

Parents should teach their children the way to follow, and should correct them when necessary. Remember that all correction must be given in love, and be accompanied by an explanation the child can understand—this is a biblical principle!

Notice God's command to children: "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth'" (Ephesians 6:1–3). This injunction also applies to adults in God's Church, since those who have been baptized and have received the Holy Spirit are the children of God. We will be transformed into spirit beings at the resurrection of the dead—one of the reasons why Christ's return is so awaited and desired. "But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter, and all

we are the work of Your hand” (Isaiah 64:8).

Christ’s Example

Christ did not come to this earth to “get” something, but to *give* everything—including His very life—so that you and I could one day share in His eternal glory (John 10:27–30). That is true love—pure and unselfish. After their conversion, the Apostles also laid down their lives in service to God, teaching and proclaiming the true Gospel of the Kingdom of God. They set for us the example so that we could follow the right way that leads to the goal for which we were born. Regrettably, not long after Christ’s death and resurrection, some in the Church began to drift away from the Truth, instead of growing spiritually in grace and knowledge. Today, similarly, in the final era of God’s Church, false teachings abound in many groups of God’s people, and are accepted by those who are not careful to prove the Truth for themselves (1 Corinthians 11:18; 2 Peter 2:1–3).

Of course, true Christianity is rejected by the world today. There are thousands of different churches, all proclaiming to be the true Church, while preaching opposing doctrines. But where are we in God’s Church, nearly 2,000 years after Christ’s death and resurrection? True Christianity is proclaimed by a very few, believed by a very few, and practiced by a very few. As Christ said: “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

When Will Christ Return?

The Apostles—including Paul—thought Christ would return during their lifetimes. Yet, in retrospect, they should have known better; Christ revealed to His disciples an outline of *specific prophetic events* leading up to His return (Matthew 24:3–31). Today,

there are wars and rumors of wars. The human race has the means to put an end to all life on Earth. Christ said, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (vv. 21–22). Thankfully, Christ will return just in time to put an end to human madness and to stop global cosmocide.

Over the last few years, subtle and not-so-subtle events relating to end-time biblical prophecies have fallen into place with increasing speed and frequency. What was unthinkable even a decade ago is now a reality. Even in the world, people talk about the prophecies of “the end of the world,” and of predictions concerning calamities that will change the world as we know it. Many talk about Christ’s return—but few really believe in it! The nations have turned away from God. People reject the authority of the Bible in their lives (Jude 8).

Is Christ more important to you than your life or death? Paul wrote: “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again” (Philippians 1:23–26).

A tireless worker, Paul was willing to endure the consequences of his total submission to Christ. He did his part. He certainly accomplished his mission. Near his death, he declared: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but

also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6–8).

God’s Church is a team—a body, a family—of members, working to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world, and teaching those whom God is calling to escape the world’s evils. We are the temple of God. We must grow in grace and in knowledge, and we should seek above all to help our fellow human beings fulfill the purpose for which they were born. If we spend more time with our Bibles, and if we seek to know ever more deeply how to practice the love of Christ, our waiting time for Christ’s return will be easier and shorter.

We must open wide our eyes. We must each be seeking to do our part to accomplish the mission for which we were called. Study the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1–13) and learn its lessons as they relate to Christ’s Second Coming.

As God’s people, we ought to grow in love for—and unity with—one another. As Peter wrote, “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For ‘He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil’” (1 Peter 3:8–12).

Many of us have awaited Christ’s return for decades. But our wait for Him *will* soon be over. Let us press on to, and be diligent to have, an intimate relationship with Christ, our Creator. Let us press on and be increasingly converted, to have a better attitude, and overcome our carnality, to be ready for Christ’s return. ■

From Loneliness to Oneness

By Phil Sena

If you are lonely, you know the deep pain you have inside. Perhaps it is a gnawing feeling of having no friends. Maybe you spend each day as a single, living alone and eating each meal by yourself. Or perhaps you are a widow or widower who now finds yourself alone after your beloved spouse's death. Either way, the reality for you is that you battle the very real emptiness of loneliness every day of your life.

Everyone feels lonely at times. Yet, for far too many, loneliness is a way of life. They yearn for companionship and pray for friends, but for one reason or another they have not connected with others in a way that takes away their persistent pain.

Is that God's will for you? How could it be, when God wants all His children to feel the joy of close relationships? In this Satan-influenced world, **many** lack the close relationships they seek. Loneliness is a by-product of the competitive, greedy and selfish society in which we live, where many feel they have been bypassed and forgotten by others. Sadly, even some in God's Church are touched by loneliness.

If loneliness is not God's will for you, what can you do to break out of its grip? Read on for the answer!

Different Kinds of Loneliness

It is important to recognize that there is a difference between *loneliness* and *being alone*. We sometimes *choose* to be alone, such as when we seek solitude. Even Jesus sought times to be alone, especially for prayer (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35). Being alone is essential for recharging our batteries. It is often positive and helpful.

Loneliness, on the other hand, can be called *unwanted solitude*. From the time we are born, we seek attachment and connection with others. Loneliness is the feeling of isolation, alienation and being disconnected from others—and there are different kinds of loneliness, such as situational, emotional or chronic (*Biblical Counseling Quick Reference Guide*, Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, p. 143).

Examples of situational loneliness include life events such as our parents' divorce, the end of a close relationship, or a move to a different town. Situational loneliness can occur whenever intimate relationships are severed, changed or disrupted.

The death of a loved one is perhaps the most significant cause of severe situational loneliness. Because of the utter finality of death, we understand we will never again in this life have the opportunity to share time with the person we now miss. This leaves in our hearts a gaping hole that our loved one had once filled, and the resulting pain we feel is unavoidable and real. Situational loneliness is a natural result of such a loss.

The good news is that coping with situational loneliness tends to become easier over time, as we grow to accept the reality of our loss. There is no avoiding the initial pain, but when we face this type of loneliness we can be reassured that the pain will indeed lessen in time.

Emotional loneliness can be situational, too, but it includes a different element. It occurs when we feel the pain of *emotional* separation from others—even those around us. Emotional loneliness is something we may feel even when we are with a group of people. Perhaps because of past hurts, we have learned to withdraw our emotions to protect ourselves. The problem with this attempt to cope is that it begins a vicious cycle—we pull away from people, which in turn leads them to pull away from us. The end result is more loneliness.

At its core, emotional loneliness tends to be driven by how *we believe* others view us—whether or not they accept us. At some point, people can begin to consider themselves as “odd” or “weird” or “different” because of parental, sibling or peer ridicule or abuse. To mitigate the emotional pain, attempts to find acceptance can lead to destructive behaviors—including sin—that ultimately make us feel worse.

We may occupy our time with empty pursuits such as watching hour after hour of television, mindlessly surfing the Web or playing video games, overspending due to constant shopping, or overeating to

make us feel better. Because such pursuits can never satisfy our deep need for acceptance, these attempts to “escape” from our reality can escalate to include the abuse of alcohol or other drugs, or even to committing fornication or adultery in a desperate search for companionship. However, these short-term bad choices can lead to an even greater problem: *chronic* loneliness.

When we experience persistent feelings that something is inherently wrong with us—that we are *incapable* of belonging or being understood—deep despair can result. Besides affecting our health with maladies such as high blood pressure, diabetes or cancer, our mental health can become beset by depression, anger, violent outbursts and even thoughts of suicide. If this describes your present frame of mind, you should seek counsel *right away*. It is dangerous to allow yourself to continue down this path, because it leaves you especially vulnerable to Satan’s influence (Ephesians 4:26–27; 1 Peter 5:8).

Someone Can Relate

One problem we commonly face when we are lonely is that we tend to believe that no one fully understands how we feel. In our self-pity, we may reject the notion that anyone has ever felt the utter rejection we are experiencing. Yet not only is this belief false—it is a reaction that tends to cause more loneliness, because when we feel this way we repel any who try to help.

The Bible, however, reveals that no matter the pain of our loneliness, there is One who can relate. A prophecy written of the Messiah more than 600 years before His birth gives us a sense of the struggles our Savior endured as a human being, describing Him as one who “has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isaiah 53:2). Christ did not come as some type of super-hero who could not be touched by the same feelings we experience. Indeed, Isaiah tells us, “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (v. 3). One who was “despised and rejected” certainly knows the pain of loneliness! The words “sorrows” and “grief” can mean “pains” and “sickness,” which indicates how deeply Jesus felt the full human experience. Isaiah goes on to reveal that the people “hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 describes in excruciating detail the depth of suffering Jesus Christ endured at the hands of the people He came to save. Yes, our Savior is acquainted with situational and emotional loneliness that comes from being despised and rejected!

Beyond this pain, He also experienced deep loneliness as a result of His disciples’ weaknesses. During what He

knew was His last night, Jesus was in emotional anguish because of the suffering He faced. Yet this was the moment He most needed the support of His closest friends: “Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch’” (Mark 14:32–34).

Even though He tried to share His distress with Peter, James and John, these close disciples were unable to stay awake while Jesus prayed. Three times they disappointed Christ when He asked them to watch with Him. At this crucial moment, when He needed His friends’ support the most, they let Him down.

But that was not all. When Judas Iscariot arrived at the behest of the Jews’ religious authorities, accompanied by a heavily armed mob, Jesus found that His disciples “all forsook Him and fled” (Mark 14:50). This did not surprise Him, for Jesus had told them earlier that “indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone” (John 16:32). Despite their strong protestations that they would not deny Him, they all left Him alone when trouble came (Matthew 26:35). Yes, Jesus Christ Himself knows the loneliness that we can feel when we are abandoned by friends.

But even this was not His last experience with loneliness. After He was taken into custody, and was sentenced to crucifixion in an illegal trial, Roman taunters mocked and then mercilessly scourged Him as He was taken to Golgotha. As the taunting and ridicule continued around Him, Jesus writhed in immense physical agony caused by the metal spikes driven through His hands and feet. Finally, at about 3:00 p.m., “Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” (Matthew 27:46).

At that precise moment, Jesus, as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” became the supreme sacrifice to cover our sins. This was what His entire life was pointing toward—the reason He came as a human being. However, this was also the very moment when He experienced *complete and total loneliness* for the first and only time in His eternal existence.

Here is how Dr. Roderick C. Meredith described that moment, in program 30 of his online Bible Study, *The Gospel of Matthew* (available at www.lcg.org): “Here, for the first time, He was cut off from His Father. He sensed the weight of our sins which were put upon Him, and He had no extra help at that moment. He felt that! ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?’ He became the sin-bearer for you and for me.”

In addition to the physical pain, the mental anguish and the humiliation Jesus experienced, try to imagine the overwhelming sense of loneliness He felt at that moment! He was completely cut off from the Father—with whom He had eternally shared a close relationship. For the first time, He was *completely* alone!

Yes, no matter your sense of loneliness, it is safe to say that He has been there—and beyond. Through Him, those struggling with their own feelings of abandonment can find help during their time of need (Hebrews 4:14–16).

We should recognize a key reason why Jesus was able to put into perspective His experience of loneliness. He understood that being cut off from the Father was a temporary necessity, but He knew that ultimately God *would not* forsake Him. Earlier, when predicting that His disciples would leave Him alone, He also stated, “And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me” (John 16:32).

This is a great lesson for the lonely. If you are one of God’s children, you are never really alone. In fact, God’s promise to those who remain faithful is, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). When we feel abandoned, do we really believe this promise from God? Jesus did, and in doing so He set for all lonely people an example of the strength we can feel when we need it the most.

The Power of Oneness

To understand what we can do to better cope with loneliness, we must go back to the creation of human beings. God’s original design for relationships reveals an important concept that is vital to our making connections with others.

Genesis 1 describes God’s process of creation. A variety of plants and vegetation were created on the third day, and various kinds of animals were brought to life on the fifth day (Genesis 1:11–13; 20–23). Though verses 26–31 show that God created mankind on the sixth day, we get a more complete picture of the chronology in Genesis 2:7–8, where we learn that “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of

life; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.”

Notice that God first created a *single* person! He certainly *could* have created both man and woman at the same time—so, what is the significance of His first creating a single human being? Perhaps a clue is in the first

task He gave that man: “Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field” (Genesis 2:19–20).

Scripture does not tell us what Adam thought while he was naming the animals, but it does describe a conclusion he drew from the exercise—that “for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:20). Through the process of examining each kind of animal, the man came to realize that *he was alone!* What a powerful way for God to drive the point home

that the man was *incomplete* by himself! Imagine the loneliness Adam felt after seeing all the other kinds of living creatures, and realizing that there was no one like him—no one to talk to, no one with whom to share discoveries, no one with whom to laugh. No one to love.

Of course, God understood Adam’s need for companionship. He said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” before He had Adam name the animals (Genesis 2:18–19). When God brought Eve to him, Adam immediately understood, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (v. 23). Unlike the other creatures, she was one with whom he could *connect* emotionally, intellectually and physically.

The concluding purpose of this original relationship is brought out in verse 24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” The key words here are “one flesh.” This is describing marriage, of course, but in a sense it can also give us a hint of God’s intent for all relationships.

This original marriage relationship was based upon another relationship that preceded it. “In the beginning

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was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1–2). John continues: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (v. 14).

The “Word” described in John 1:1 became the human being known as Jesus Christ. That Word was “with God”—with the Father—which implies a family relationship. Yet notice the key word Jesus used in describing the relationship: “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

It is no accident that the relationships of the first human couple, and of God the Father and Christ, are described using the same word: *one*. Oneness reflects the *togetherness* of mind, purpose and intent that we should seek in our closest relationships.

Oneness in the Church

Is oneness possible in a non-marital relationship? Yes, it is. In fact, the Apostle Paul reveals how the Church is designed to provide oneness. He writes, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4–6).

We see in subsequent verses that Paul’s context in this chapter is clearly the Church: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (vv. 11–16).

God designed His Church to provide a structure and environment that encourages oneness among the members, as each becomes more like Jesus Christ. Paul uses the analogy of a human body to show how the Church nurtures itself through the part each member plays, whom God Himself has placed into the body as it pleases Him (1 Corinthians 12:18). Therefore, each member—old, young, married or single—is important to the oneness of the body (vv. 20–22).

Paul emphasizes that members who have received greater blessings have a duty to give attention to members with special needs. Through extra care for “those members of the body which we think to be less honorable,” the Church ensures that the needs of each member are met (v.

23). Through this arrangement, God intends “that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (vv. 25–26).

God always intended that His called-out ones should fill the void of companionship for those who are lonely within the body. Psalm 68:6 reveals that “God places the lonely in families” (*New Living Translation*). Jesus told His disciples that “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time” (Mark 10:28–30). James wrote, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble” (James 1:27). God provides connections for the lonely!

But should lonely brethren expect other Church members to relieve their loneliness without any effort on their part? Not at all! Remember Paul’s insistence that “the members should have the same care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:25). Making connections goes both ways, and all members should use every available opportunity to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:19–25).

God’s Help for the Lonely

The sad fact is that loneliness can affect anyone. Life has a way of challenging us in ways we do not anticipate. At any time, circumstances in our lives can change, leaving us to wonder whether or not anyone cares about us. Even for some in God’s Church, loneliness is their present reality.

That does not mean that it is God’s will for anyone to despair over remaining lonely. God has provided ways for each of us to make the necessary connections that can help us appreciate the value of our lives, and the difference we can make in the lives of those around us. Look around your local congregation for those who are alone, and get to know them. If you are lonely, introduce yourself or start a conversation with others. As God’s people, we need each other—and we all have an opportunity to help one another during difficult times.

By developing relationships within the family of God, we fulfill Jesus Christ’s prayer, “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You” (John 17:20–23). Let us all strive to make the connections necessary to help us all move from loneliness to oneness. ■

Are You Preparing for God's Spiritual Gifts?

By Scott Winnail

The Apostle Paul wrote often about the “spiritual gifts”—manifestations of God’s power that He brings through His Holy Spirit. We know that the spiritual gifts are present, to some degree, in His Church today. But certain of the most profound and dynamic spiritual gifts—dramatic healings, signs from heaven, casting out demons, speaking in languages we have not learned—have not been poured out on God’s Church in great abundance since the first century after Christ.

Christ promised that after His departure, the Apostles and His Church would receive “power” when the Holy Spirit came (Acts 1:8). Peter made it clear that the Holy Spirit would come only after repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). In essence, this means that we must be committed to changing ourselves—conforming ourselves to God’s will—before the Father is willing to put His Holy Spirit in us to help us bring about that change. Each one of us has been given, or will be given, the opportunity to receive the amazing gift of God’s Holy Spirit.

God also chooses to give additional spiritual gifts as it pleases Him and according to His will (Romans 12:6–8). Furthermore, God actually *commands* us to wholeheartedly desire and pray for the “best” spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:28–31). And we must never forget Paul’s powerful reminder, that

the love of Christ must underpin these spiritual gifts. We may wield powerful spiritual gifts—working miracles, performing healings and speaking foreign languages—but if we do not have love for each other and for all human beings, the spiritual gifts are no better than noise and are good for nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1–3)! Christ noted that our love for each other is an indicator of our true discipleship (John 13:35). If God is going to pour out His spiritual gifts on His Church, His love in us must be evident to all, and must be the driving force behind the use of His spiritual gifts. Love is the foundation for all of the other spiritual gifts that God will choose to display through us.

We want to see more healings in the Church. We want to see the Gospel preached more powerfully than ever before. God can and will grant His Church the gifts that will make this happen. Dr. Meredith repeatedly encourages all of us to earnestly cry out to God for more spiritual gifts for the Church, so that we can be used more powerfully to do His end-time Work. We pray for these gifts. We beseech God in fasting. And we patiently trust that God’s timing will be perfect when He pours them out *en masse* on His Church.

But, what will happen if God starts pouring out His spiritual gifts through members of His Church tomorrow? Will we all be ready? Will we be prepared and have the faith to face the persecution, the media attention and the questions

that will most certainly come with such an amazing development? What are you doing personally, right now, to ensure that you are prepared for the time when God chooses to display His divine power so visibly to the whole world through His servants? What should all of us be doing, young and old, so that we are prepared to be God’s spiritual instruments—tools whom He can use—when He pours out these gifts on His Church *en masse*? And ultimately, what are God’s expectations for each of us in regard to preparing for the spiritual gifts?

As end-time events move into “high gear,” we have the potential either to become powerful instruments in God’s hands, or to fall away and potentially hamper the fulfillment of God’s will for His Church (Romans 6:13). A tremendous responsibility comes with the gifts of the Holy Spirit—so, what should we be doing now to prepare to receive these gifts?

The Gifts and God's Expectations

Why must we desire the spiritual gifts? Why did God not just say, “My grace is sufficient. Be thankful for what you already have”? God has a great plan for mankind—a plan in which He has called us to participate. In order to complete His plan, He requires the *good news* or Gospel of His coming Kingdom to be preached to the entire world as a witness (Matthew 24:14). And in order for His

Church to preach the Gospel effectively, powerfully, and in the most far-reaching way, God directed that the “accompanying signs” would follow His Church (Matthew 10:5–8; Mark 16:17–18).

God will not just give His spiritual gifts to anyone or without any reason. With God’s spiritual gifts come important requirements (Luke 12:48). The Parable of the Talents makes it clear that when God gives gifts He does expect something in return (Matthew 25:14–30).

As each of us grows and overcomes—as we strive to put on more of the mind of Christ, as we earnestly desire the best gifts—we need to clearly understand what God’s expectations are for us when He gives us His gifts in abundance. Then we can properly prepare for them!

God Expects Faith and Boldness

A godly atmosphere of faith puts a demand not only on those to whom God gives His gifts, but also on those who receive their benefits. What does God expect? Imagine that you had a severe health condition, which doctors had diagnosed as terminal. Because of it, the doctors told you to call your family together for the last time, as they expected you to die very soon. They said there was nothing more you can do, and you called your minister to ask for an anointing even as your health situation looked more bleak than ever before.

Now, imagine that you were suddenly healed—and all traces of the previous terminal illness were gone! The doctors and their equipment could not explain what happened—it was clearly a miracle! If this happened to you, how would you respond to questions from your doctor and the hospital staff? Would you run and hide? Would you try to push people away and deflect their questions

with vague and ambiguous answers? Would you just ignore their questions?

Or would you be prepared to be a light, and to let people really know why you were healed—and explain who was behind the healing? Individual brethren do have this happen from time to time. But just try to imagine how the attention—and the pressure—would be magnified if these miracles began to happen, again and again, to thousands of Living Church of God members and their families all around the globe! How would you react if the media became involved? Would you be willing and able to “bear your Christian cross” and allow God to use you as a witness for His truth (Matthew 16:24)? Or would you deny Christ and His power because you feel shy and do not want to be in the “spotlight?”

God warned: “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small” (Proverbs 24:10). Christ even asked, “Will the Son of Man find faith when He returns?” (Luke 18:8). Christ further admonished that we should not fear human beings who might persecute us, but rather should be sure not to deny Christ and His power (Matthew 10:19–33).

The Apostles showed us a powerful example of the type of faith and boldness that God expects when He powerfully pours out His spiritual gifts. After the Apostle Peter gave a profound sermon on the first Pentecost after Christ’s death, he and the Apostle John were thrown into prison and threatened, probably with the prospect of death, if they did not stop preaching in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:18–21). Upon their release from prison, what was their response when reunited with the rest of the disciples? Did they take the Church “underground” in order to avoid further persecution? Did they change the focus of the Church and omit “preaching of the Gospel” in

favor of the “safer” option of just “feeding the flock” or “preparing the bride”? No! They prayed for increased **faith** and **boldness** to do the will of God and further His Work. They even prayed for more spiritual gifts (Acts 4:23–31)! They were not afraid! They were excited to fulfill the commission of Christ—to preach the Gospel to the world as a witness (Matthew 24:14).

God states that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). When God begins pouring out His most dramatic gifts on His Church *en masse*, will we also have the love for our fellow human beings that will be needed to motivate us to press on with the Work? How much do we love the people of the world and want to share God’s truth with them? How much do we love God and His purpose and want to do His will? How much do we love the plan of God and have faith in our Father to bring it about? God promises that if we have the faith of a mustard seed, we can move a mountain, if it is His will (Matthew 17:20). Christ also illustrated the importance of prayer and fasting in order to develop the faith needed to powerfully use the spiritual gifts (Mark 9:27–29). Using God’s spiritual gifts takes godly faith and boldness. What are you doing now to build those traits in your character?

God Expects Humility

When God blesses His Church with abundant spiritual gifts, each of us must have the humility to fully acknowledge His backing of those gifts. Paul illustrated that humility is a key trait that must accompany the spiritual gifts (Romans 12:3–8). James also pointed out the obvious fact that “every good and perfect gift is from above”—it is God’s gift and not something that is humanly derived (James 1:16–17). Peter, when powerfully

used by God, made sure to place the proper focus back on Him (Acts 3:11–13). Both Christ (Matthew 7:15–20) and Paul (Galatians 5:16–26) taught that true Christians will be known by their godly fruits, which include meekness and humility. God will not grant His people abundant spiritual gifts until and unless they are humble enough to handle them. He will not let us “take the credit” for His abundant power. We must be ready and able to handle the power of miracles performed through us—or for us—and readily point any and all observers immediately back to God. We must also make sure to put the focus of any outpouring of spiritual gifts, including healing, on God and the power of His Holy Spirit. We must be sure not to make the mistake of giving credit for true healing to a doctor, practitioner, herbal remedy, or therapy—because every good and perfect gift is from God and God alone (James 1:16–17)!

The Gifts and the Gospel Go Hand in Hand

But why will the spiritual gifts come in abundance, and what is one reason they may not be here in great measure yet? The powerful truth is that *spiritual gifts facilitate the preaching of the Gospel*. Stated differently, *with spiritual gifts comes God’s expectation of the preaching of the Gospel*. We see this truth demonstrated in numerous passages of Scripture.

One example occurred on the Feast of Pentecost in 31AD. During this event, God used the sound of a rushing mighty wind, flames of fire dancing on the heads of the disciples, and the gift of tongues (the ability to speak in foreign languages) to draw the attention of the masses to the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostle Peter (Acts 2:1–39). Here we see that the dramatic combination of spiritual gifts augmenting the powerful preaching of

the Gospel resulted in the baptism of 3,000 people (vv. 40–47).

Another poignant example occurred shortly after the baptism of the 3,000. Peter and John met a man who had been lame from birth—for 40 years (Acts 4:22). After viewing the miraculous healing of this man, known widely for his lifetime paralysis, a crowd of 5,000 people was then ready to listen to the Apostle Peter’s sermon about repentance and the Kingdom of God (Acts 3:1–26; 4:1–4). Additionally, this powerful miracle resulted in an audience with the Sanhedrin and the opportunity for Peter and John to preach the Gospel to these powerful religious figures

accompanying signs” or gifts to “confirm” the legitimacy of the Gospel being preached (Mark 16:20).

One of God’s expectations for us is that as He distributes His spiritual gifts, He expects us to be “ready to give an answer” to those who ask the reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). When God pours out His gifts on us in abundance, He will expect us to have the boldness and faith to acknowledge His powerful intervention. He will expect us to have the humility to always and immediately direct people to Him. And, He will also want us to be prepared to “teach” about Him and His way, as people ask questions (Matthew 10:7). The question is, when God

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(vv. 5–22). God used this powerful sign to *pave the way* for the preaching of the Gospel to many people, including the Jewish leaders.

During Christ’s ministry, He assembled 70 of His disciples and commanded them to preach the Gospel *with* accompanying signs (Matthew 10:6–8). Christ Himself set the example of using such signs to draw attention to the Truth of God and to prove who He was. When Christ performed the powerful miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead after four days in the tomb, many Jews believed on Him and the miracle was undeniable, even to the Pharisees (see John 11).

God uses dramatic miracles like healings for two important reasons. First, He uses them to facilitate the preaching of the Gospel by drawing the attention of the audience to His message. Second, God uses the “ac-

chooses to pour out His spiritual gifts on you and His Church, will you be “ready” to teach or answer the questions that are asked? Will you be ready to “bear your cross” and live up to God’s expectation, or will you expect someone else to “stand in the gap”?

Jesus Christ promised, when He departed from the earth almost 2,000 years ago, that greater signs than the ones He Himself performed, would be possible through the power of His Holy Spirit (John 14:12). With the Holy Spirit comes a command to earnestly desire the *best* spiritual gifts. God uses the spiritual gifts to draw attention to and confirm the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. God prophesied through Joel and again through Peter, that the spiritual gifts would be poured out during the

Continued on page 21

Pentecost: Lessons from the Old Testament Church

By John H. Ogwyn (1949–2005)

Most Christians understand that the New Testament Church began on the Pentecost after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. However, every indication suggests that the Old Testament Church also began on Pentecost. This beginning, dated to the time of the Sinai Covenant, occurred seven weeks after the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt. Appreciating the many parallels can reveal much about the role and the history of God's Church.

A study of Pentecost reveals important Old Testament symbolism. What happened to ancient Israel was, after all, recorded for our benefit. The Apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 10:11 that many Old Testament events and situations were intended as types that are instructive for us today.

The term "Pentecost" itself is not used in the Old Testament. Rather, it is a Greek word referring to the 50 days counted from the offering of the wavesheaf during the Days of Unleavened Bread until the Holy Day that celebrates the harvest of the firstfruits. The Jews commonly call that day *Shavuot*, meaning "weeks." Comparing Exodus 23:16 with Exodus 34:22 shows that "Feast of Weeks" and "Feast of Harvest" were interchangeable terms referring to this Holy Day.

Old Testament Symbols

Two of ancient Israel's ceremonies connected with this particular festival are outlined in Leviticus 23. This chapter was written by Moses when Israel was beginning its wilderness journey, and includes (cf. Leviticus 23:9–17) instructions about some matters that could only be carried out after Israel's entrance into the Promised Land.

Israel was told that the priest must ceremonially present, as a wave offering to God, the grain from the first-cut sheaf of the harvest. This ceremony was to occur on the day following the Sabbath that came during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Only after that ceremony had been carried out could the people begin harvesting and eating their freshly ripened grain.

Traditionally, the first sheaf was cut at sunset when the weekly Sabbath ended. The following morning, an

omer (about two quarts) of the freshly harvested grain was waved before God for His acceptance. Later in the day, an unleavened loaf made from this grain was offered on the altar. After this offering, the Israelites were free to begin their harvest which—beginning with the winter wheat and proceeding to the barley—spanned a period of seven weeks. It culminated in the celebration of the Feast of Harvest of firstfruits, also known as the Feast of Weeks.

On the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), seven weeks after the first *omer* of the harvest had been presented to God, two loaves of bread were to be offered to Him (Leviticus 23:16–17). These two loaves were different from normal meal offerings in that they were leavened. What did these two different grain offerings symbolize? Why were the two loaves at the end to be leavened, and why were there **two** loaves offered on Pentecost?

The spring grain harvest represented the beginning, or firstfruits, of Israel's harvest cycle. This cycle began in the spring and culminated in the fall at the Feast of Ingathering, better known as the Feast of Tabernacles. We are clearly told what the two loaves offered on Pentecost represented, "They are the firstfruits to the LORD" (v. 17). Why two loaves? Because the symbolism of the firstfruits must include both the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church.

Jeremiah 2:3 makes plain that Israel represented the "firstfruits" of God's increase. Yet, in James 1:18 we are told that the New Testament Church represents a firstfruits. One is physical Israel and the other is spiritual Israel, but both are the Church. Remember, Israel was not only a nation; it was also the Congregation of Israel—the Church in the Wilderness (Acts 7:38). The loaves are pictured as leavened because the Church in both the Old Testament and the New Testament has been made up of imperfect people. In other words, it has contained leaven. The Pentecost symbolism of the Old Testament points toward God's harvest: the Congregation of Israel and the Church of God. That is why there were two loaves presented on Pentecost in the Temple.

Notice the contrast between these loaves and the loaf presented during the Days of Unleavened Bread at the beginning of the count toward Pentecost. That loaf,

made from the first grain harvested, pictured Jesus Christ, “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Christ was resurrected at the end of the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread, at the time that the first sheaf of grain was scheduled to be cut. Scripture gives us two accounts of His appearances to disciples on the morning after His resurrection, together demonstrating that He was presented to the Father at the same time as when the first *omer* was waved in the Temple. In John 20:17, still very early on Sunday morning, Jesus would not let Mary Magdalene touch Him, “for I have not yet ascended to My Father...” Matthew’s account makes plain that later on the same day He did allow Himself to be embraced (28:9). Clearly, in the interim, He had been accepted by the Father as the “firstfruits.”

Another important Temple-related symbol—God’s firstfruits—also pointed toward the Church. We read (Exodus 25:31, 37) that the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) contained a golden lampstand that was to remain in the Holy Place. This lampstand contained a central branch and six side branches—seven lamps that were kept burning around the clock in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. Scripture describes the Apostle John’s vision of the glorified Jesus Christ standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands (Revelation 1:12–13), symbolically representing the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3. Seven is God’s number of completion, and is so used throughout the book of Revelation. Clearly, the seven churches of Revelation must represent the entirety of the Church. We often use the term “Church eras” because the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3, successive stops on a Roman mail route, represent seven stages or eras through which the Church was to pass historically. The seven lamps are used because the Church was always intended as a light to the world (Matthew 5:14). Yet what is often overlooked is that, just as the seven lamp-stands of Revelation 1 picture the New Testament Church, similarly the Temple’s one lampstand with seven branches can picture the Old Testament Church. As there have been seven eras or stages in New Testament Church history, let us explore the indications that there were seven eras of the Old Testament Church. Indeed, we can find some remarkable parallels between the story of God’s Old Testament Church and of His New Testament Church!

Old Testament Church Eras

The New Testament Church began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost upon those who first embraced the New Covenant that Christ had come proclaiming. The Old Testament Church began at Sinai, on

the first Pentecost, when Israel received the Ten Commandments and accepted the terms of the Old Covenant. Remember, the difference between the Old and New Covenants was not the law, it was the hearts and minds of the people. Under the Old Covenant, God wrote His law with His own finger in tables of stone. Under the New Covenant, God set out to write His law (the *same* law) in the tables of our hearts through the power of His Spirit (Hebrews 8:8–10).

We can look at the Old Testament Church through a pattern of eras not unlike those outlined in Revelation 2–3. The first era of the Old Testament Church was led by Moses, Joshua, and the elders that outlived Joshua. In many ways, this time was comparable to the time of Christ and the Apostles. It was the era of beginnings and of great miracles. It was a time of a clear sense of mission and of the need for God’s power to carry it out. It was also the story of an era that ended because it lost its first love (cf. Revelation 2:4). We are told that Israel served God all the days of Joshua and the elders that outlived Joshua (Joshua 24:31).

A second era of the Old Testament Church can be traced in the period of the Judges. This was a time of persecution and poverty, in many ways comparable to the story of Smyrna, the second era of the New Testament Church. The period of the Judges was a tumultuous time for the Old Testament Church. Throughout this period, God raised up deliverers for His people and the nation survived, despite the incursions and threats of many enemies. This era was a period in which survival was the chief accomplishment. The people of God were faced from the outside with persecutions, and with attraction to the pagan world around them from within.

The third era of the Old Testament Church was the time of the united monarchy. The kingships of Saul, David and Solomon saw Israel being released from the constant enemy incursions which characterized the time of the Judges. Yet, toward the end of this period, King Solomon became involved in idolatry as a result of the enticement of his many wives. His sins in this regard brought about the end of the united monarchy (1 Kings 11:1–11).

When we look at the Church at Pergamos, the third of the New Testament eras, we note some interesting comparisons. Pergamos means “fortified”—and this New Testament era was fortified from much persecution by being located primarily in remote mountainous regions, first in Armenia and later in the Balkans. This era was warned about being enticed by spiritual fornication and idolatry. Similarly, in this “fortified” period of Israel’s history, we find that similar enticements proved its undoing.

The next stage, which we can call the fourth era of the Old Testament Church, was the period of the divided

monarchy. This era had its bright times, such as the reigns of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah, as well as its dim periods such as the time of Queen Jezebel's influence. Elijah and Elisha prophesied during the early part of this period, while Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea and others flourished in the latter part of this era.

Interestingly, the fourth stage of New Testament Church history, pictured by the Church at Thyatira, was a time of similar ups and downs. It was a time when spiritual Jezebel—the false church of which ancient Queen Jezebel was a type—sought to allure God's servants into compromise and idolatry. Though there were dim times, there were also bright spots such as the preaching of Peter Waldo, and the emergence of the so-called Sabbatarian Anabaptists who flourished in the sixteenth century.

The story of God's Old Testament Church continued after the end of the divided monarchy. In Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, we read of the time of Judah's restoration. Zerubbabel and Joshua led a contingent of Jews back from Babylon, and God's people had a fresh start. After the death of Ezra and Nehemiah at the end of the fifth century BC, however, there began a long and steady decline. Particularly after Alexander the Great overthrew the Persian monarchy in the fourth century and paved the way for inroads by Hellenism, the influence of the society around took a terrible toll on the Jews. During much of the third century and the first portion of the second, the Congregation of Israel "had a name that it was alive" but was for all practical purposes, spiritually "dead."

How similar this story sounds to what is related of the Church at Sardis in Revelation 3, the fifth era of the New Testament Church. There were a few among them who were spiritually pure, but most simply had the name without any sign of spiritual life (vv. 1, 4). That was the state of the Sardis era when Mr. Herbert Armstrong came among them in the 1920s.

The Old Testament Church was at its nadir, in the second century BC, when God stirred up an elderly priest by the name of Matthias, along with his sons, to revive His flagging Work. This is known in history as the Maccabee Revolt. Daniel prophesied of this event in Daniel 11. Describing the Abomination of Desolation in verse 31, Daniel describes the actions of Antiochus Euphianes in profaning the temple and stopping the daily sacrifice. In the next verse he speaks of a people who knew their God and were therefore strong and did great exploits. This is a clear historical reference to the Maccabees, and the work that they did that resulted in the cleansing of the Temple in 164BC.

The sixth stage of the Old Testament Church, the Maccabees, clearly did a Work that preserved the knowledge

of God's truth, which was at the point of perishing. In so doing, they played a vital part in the years following, setting the stage for the time when the Messiah would appear. There are many parallels that could be drawn between the time of the Maccabees and the Church at Philadelphia, the sixth stage of the New Testament Church.

The seventh and final era of the Old Testament Church was the time of domination by the Pharisees. In Matthew 23:1, Jesus Christ told the people that the Pharisees sat in Moses' seat. How did they attain that position? Josephus, the first-century Jewish priest and historian, records the answer. "So Alexandria [widow of the Maccabee King Alexander], when she had taken the fortress [in 76BC], acted as her husband had suggested to her, and spoke to the Pharisees, and **put all things into their power**, both as to the dead body [of her husband] and as to the affairs of the kingdom..." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, xvi, 1).

Christ rebuked the Pharisees of His day for their spiritual blindness (Matthew 23:16, 19, 24). The Pharisees considered themselves spiritually rich and in need of nothing, yet they were spiritually destitute. Christ told them that the harlots and publicans would enter the Kingdom before them (Matthew 21:31). The Pharisees maintained an outward form of religion, but were inwardly barren. Christ called them hypocrites—a term that referred to the actors who played parts in the Greek dramas of the day. Similarly, the seventh and final stage of the New Testament Church is pictured by the Church at Laodicea, described in Revelation 3 as a complacent church that has mistaken form for substance. It is also the most sternly corrected of the seven.

Looking at the Old Testament Church, we are struck by some remarkable parallels with the story of the New Testament Church. The seven lamps of both Testaments point to God's firstfruits and to their story through the centuries. Pentecost reminds us that God is calling out a firstfruits now, in this age. The great "ingathering" harvest pictured by the fall festivals lies yet ahead. The firstfruits are called out for a purpose, to accomplish a Work. In the course of carrying out God's commission (Matthew 24:14; Mark 16:15)—the purpose for our calling now—we are to be a light to the world.

Just as the seven lamps of the Temple could not burn without oil, neither can the Church today shine forth without the illuminating power provided by God's Holy Spirit. Pentecost certainly points to the Church and its calling into a special covenant relationship with God. It also points to the Holy Spirit, which is what makes it possible for us to fulfill our calling and our destiny. Let us be deeply thankful for God's offer of His Spirit. If we truly are thankful for that gift, we should be seeking to stir it up and use it daily. ■

How Deeply?*(Continued from page 5)*

and statutes), territory (the Earth, not some nebulous feeling in the heart) and subjects (human beings whom God has created to become His actual sons).

God's Character

Yes, God is a Ruler! If we become His children through *repentance, baptism* and receiving the *Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:38), we may be “born again” at the resurrection (John 3:1–8)—changed into, actually *born—of Spirit* as a *literal* son of God! God is reproducing Himself! He—the Creator and Ruler of the universe—is begetting human beings through His Spirit to be *born* as His sons—to be in His own family—to receive inherent eternal life. But we must *first* learn *how to live* before God will grant us eternal life and make us His own sons.

We must develop God's *wisdom*, God's *character*. We must “live by every word of God.” Realizing that our Creator knows best, we should *obey* Him. To deny this is to admit a profound *ignorance* of the Eternal

God's great wisdom and purpose! It betrays a lack of understanding of the *character* of the *true God*.

The Apostle John summed it all up when he wrote of Christ—the God of the Old Testament, the giver of the law—“*He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1 John 2:4, KJV).

God Himself calls such lawless ministers *liars* when they try to deny the authority of His rule, the wisdom of His law, and the very basis of His great purpose.

Are you keeping parts of your life separate from God while trying to “put on a show” of righteousness for others? If so, it is time to **stop**! May God help you to repent of defying His rule and *breaking* His laws, and may He guide you to live by every word of His! Then you may truly begin to develop the *character* of God, and prepare to be born of the Spirit as His son in the resurrection.

Talk to God

The more you come to really know the true God—the God revealed by Jesus Christ—the more you

will want to talk to Him. You may do this in prayer. This is the *third way* you may come to really “know” the true God.

As you grow closer to God in this way, you will more deeply realize that here, too, you need to *obey* God if you expect an answer. But you will find that God is *love*, and that He will gladly grant any request that is good for *you* under the circumstances. You will also discover that He has *power* to *heal* you when you are sick, to *deliver* you in miraculous ways from trouble and to *bless* you in a manner beyond human comprehension.

Always remember—the combined testimonies of *nature*, of the *Bible*, and of *answered prayer* all reveal the same *true God*. He is the All-Wise, All-Powerful, Law-Giving Ruler of the universe. And this awesome Supreme Being wants to have a close, personal relationship with you!

So, *get to know God* better by talking to Him often, and always doing what He says! Then, as you *acknowledge* His government and *obey* His law—truly living His Way, not merely “playing church”—you will truly be preparing to enter into eternal life at Christ's return as a Spirit-born child of God! ■

Are You Preparing for God's Spiritual Gifts?*(Continued from page 17)*

“last days”—before the return of Christ (Acts 2:17–21; Joel 2:28–32). Christ wants us (as individuals and as His Church) to experience and to use His spiritual gifts. But in order for these gifts to arrive in abundance, God has a few important expectations for us:

- We must have the faith and boldness to handle the consequences of the gifts being poured out.
- We must have the humility to handle the gifts, and always to point back to the Giver of those gifts.
- We must be ready to preach the Gospel and share God's Truth when the gifts draw attention to us and to God's Church.
- Ultimately, we must have the love of Christ in us, which will motivate us to share God's awesome Truth with a desperate world.

God gives us the tremendous blessing of His Holy Spirit—through which He can give us many great gifts. But are we truly ready to become more effective tools in His hands? Are we preparing in every way? Remember, prayer and fasting are key to this preparation (Matthew 17:21). We must all rise to the occasion! We must work hard to prepare for the spiritual gifts that God wants to pour out on us and on His Church.

As we grow in faith, boldness and humility, and as we spend time studying and meditating on the word of God—so we can be ready with an answer when the questions come—we *will* demonstrate to God that we as Christians are wholeheartedly preparing to receive His spiritual gifts. God's spiritual gifts are a tremendous opportunity for His people, and bring with them a tremendous responsibility. We must be preparing so that we are ready for them. How earnestly are *you* preparing for God's spiritual gifts? ■

The Power of God's Spirit

(Continued from page 2)

“make it” into the Kingdom of God on our *own strength*. Brethren, every one of us needs to fervently “cry out” for more of God’s Holy Spirit—probably more than we have ever done before! Jesus Christ described God’s elect as those who “cry out day and night to Him” (Luke 18:7). Does this accurately picture the way you pray and continually seek God?

Think about it.

Even though Jesus had known God from eternity, He realized the absolute **need** to literally “cry out” for help while He was in the human flesh. The book of Hebrews tells us this of Jesus: “In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:7–8).

When we gather for services on the Day of Pentecost, the *full meaning* of Pentecost should be explained in all of our congregations. But certainly we all realize the basic fact that Pentecost was when the Holy Spirit was *poured out* on God’s people for the first time. The same Peter who earlier denied Christ three times was now filled with courage and power! “Doubting Thomas” *no longer doubted*. And awesome *healings* and *miracles* began to take place!

Jesus had told His apostles that He would send a Helper, or Comforter, that would proceed from the Father, testifying of Him (John 15:26). And later we learn that God’s Holy Spirit will guide God’s people “into all truth” and will tell us “things to come” (John 16:13).

The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to “stir up” the Holy Spirit, which God had given him through the laying on of hands (2 Timothy 1:6). Greek scholars explain that this expression translated as “to stir up” is the *same expression* meaning “to kindle into flame.” Therefore we, brethren, must *kindle into flame* the “power” of the Holy Spirit—like stirring up a roaring fire! And Paul here tells us also that the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of “*power, and of love and of a sound mind*” (v. 7). For the *very nature of God* is imparted to us through the impregnation of the Holy Spirit.

In Peter’s final letter, he tells us of God’s “divine power” through which He “has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the **divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:3–4).

Just as surely as children receive a part of *their parents’ very nature*, we as God’s begotten children receive more of *His very nature* to the degree that we genuinely **surrender** to God, **seek** Him to live within us through the Holy Spirit, and so “walk with God” more and more each day of our lives.

Our Savior tells us, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). In plain language, Jesus is telling us that, unless we fully **drink in** of God’s very **nature**, we are spiritually **dead**. And Jesus goes on to explain, “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (v. 56). So Christ **must live** within you and me through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit!

The Apostle John records Jesus’ own magnification of this concept: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and *We will come to him and make Our home with him*” (John 14:23).

Brethren, the sometimes slow-moving, drawn-out, agonizing trials facing God’s people just ahead will make it imperative for each of us to go “all out” to **seek God** and to seek the **power** of His Spirit in our lives. *Only* in this way can we faithfully “*endure to the end*” (Matthew 24:13). In the years ahead, there will be many times when it will seem like we are “all alone” during the agonizing troubles and trials which will come upon us. But if you and I truly *seek God*—if we come to **know God** and constantly *walk with God* through earnest Bible Study and meditation, fervent prayer and regular fasting—we will **never** be truly “alone.” For Jesus has promised in His word, “I will **never** leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

Remember, Jesus experienced the *same kind* of trial—and showed us how to overcome it—when His disciples deserted Him in those awful hours before His death on our behalf. Jesus said, “Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And *yet I am not alone*, because the Father is with Me” (John 16:32). So both Jesus Christ—and *the Father*—will always be with us if we heartfully seek God and His Holy Spirit **now**.

Then, we will **never** be “alone,” but will be filled with and led by the awesome **power** through which God created the entire universe—the **power** of the Holy Spirit. At this Pentecost season, let us urgently seek that power!

With Christian love,



Local Church News

Births

Mr. Reynante Ravina and Mrs. Resiel Benitez Ravina are glad to share the happy news of the birth of their son, *Russell Francois Ravina*, on December 31, 2009. Grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Freddie Benitez. All are LCG members in the Philippines.

Michael and Kristin Wellborn of the Chattanooga, Tennessee congregation are happy to announce the arrival of their baby daughter, *Ariana Elise Wellborn*. She was born on February 8, weighed 5 pounds, 4 ounces and measured 17 inches long. Young Joshua Wellborn was glad to welcome his new little sister to the family.

Anniversaries

The Raleigh, North Carolina congregation recently recognized the 50th wedding anniversaries of both of their deacons. *Mr. and Mrs. William (Doris) Dobbin* celebrated 50 years of marriage on November 8, 2009. *Mr. and Mrs. George (Ollie) Little* celebrated 50 years of marriage on December 23, 2009. The congregation honored each couple with a buffet meal following services on the Sabbath closest to their anniversary date, presenting them with an anniversary cake and gifts of remembrance. Mr. Dobbin and Mr. Little were both pioneers of the Global Church of God in the Raleigh area and have been close friends and dedicated servants of God's Church for many years.

Ordination

Mr. George Banks was ordained a deacon on January 16 by Messrs. Bob League, James Sweat and Tex Malone during a combined Sabbath service in Manchester, Tennessee. Mr. Banks faithfully serves the Nashville, Tennessee congregation.

In Loving Memory...

Mr. John Michael Turner died Thursday, January 14 at his home after a short illness. He was 60 years old. Mr. Turner is survived by his wife, Barbara Hotz Turner; two daughters and sons-in-law, Sharon and James Paradiso of Dallas, Georgia, and Elizabeth and Frank Spencer of St. Paul, Minnesota; a sister and brother-in-law, Carol and Roger Smith of St. Joseph, Missouri; a sister-in-law, Bonnie Turner of Wisconsin; his mother-in-law, Nettie Hotz of Colorado; and many other relatives. He was preceded in death by both his parents and his brother. Mr. Turner served God's people as an elder for many years.

He graduated from Ambassador College in Pasadena, California. Before his retirement in 2004 he was a journeyman iron worker and foreman for a construction company. Mr. Rand Millich and Mr. James Wells conducted the memorial service on February 24 in St. Joseph, Missouri, where he lived, and interment was later in Valley Falls, Kansas.

Mr. James Alfred Thompson died January 23 in Palmer, Alaska. He was 71 years old and a member of the Anchorage, Alaska congregation. Mr. Gary Ullerick conducted the funeral service on January 29.

Mrs. Ramona Fernandes of the Edmonton, Alberta, Canada congregation died while on a trip to her native India on January 10. She was 87 years old. Mrs. Fernandes was baptized in January 2007 at the age of 84. She was very enthusiastic about the Truth and looked forward to God's Kingdom ruling on earth. She is survived by two sons, a daughter-in-law, two granddaughters and many friends as well as her Church family. She was predeceased by her husband Aleixo. A memorial service was conducted on January 27 by Mr. Stuart Wachowicz.

Commentary

In Pastures Green

By J. Davy Crockett, III

Even in this time when society is urging us to “go green” in every part of our daily lives, we can easily lose sight of the beautiful word picture painted in Psalm 23—probably the most-quoted Psalm in the Bible. I like the way it is expressed in the old English hymn by William Havergal (1793–1870), which appears on page 17 of our Living Church of God *Bible Hymnal*.

The hymn begins: “The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want; He makes me down to lie, in pastures green He leadeth me, the quiet waters by.” This powerful line from ancient Israel’s King David evokes a pastoral scene that is lost on most members of our modern, urbanized society. For those who have not experienced the peace and tranquility of animals grazing contentedly in fields of lush grass, the impact of the Psalmist’s words can easily be missed. As we rush about our hectic lives, often perplexed by daily problems, we can lose sight of this tranquil attitude, this sense of contentment, that everyone seeking true happiness needs.

Maybe this verse hits me a little more poignantly than most, because of my childhood memories of just such a pastoral scene. My grandfather, who died many years ago, was a cattleman—not a big-time rancher, but a man who raised registered Angus cattle on his beloved Valley Angus Farms in southern Arkansas. He found it a beautiful sight to see his cattle grazing in meadows of green grass. Sure, it was his business, but it also represented the blessings of life, peace and prosperity.

Have you found “pastures green” and “quiet waters by”? Even if you live in the heart of the city, you can find this peaceful condition. It comes from understanding the purpose of life and the knowledge of how God would have us live it.

The Apostle Paul told the brethren at Philippi: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6–7). Then in the next verses he gave the key to achieving this peace: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (vv. 8–9).

If we approach our daily lives with these timeless, godly principles in mind as we put them into practice, we can have the physical and spiritual blessings pictured by the words of this beloved Psalm.

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.