

THE

# LIVING

# CHURCH NEWS

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## Cry Out for the Gifts of the Spirit

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Pentecost is coming soon! This 2011 Pentecost season is one of the most exciting in years because of the greater speed at which prophetic events are occurring. All across the Middle East and around the world, there are—more than in decades—various “rumblings” of *big changes* in governments and in the shaky world economy. The living Christ is guiding world events to line up so that His Second Coming will surely occur within the lifetimes of most of you dear brethren who are reading this.

*So, as God's people, we must act!*

For we, in the Living Church of God, are called to perform a truly powerful Work *before* the Great Tribulation and *before* Christ's return. If we do not truly warn our peoples of what lies just ahead, then *who will?* Let us regularly focus on Ezekiel 33:1–7. For, as Herbert W. Armstrong explained, this is *our* collective responsibility as the true Church of God. Notice especially verse 6, “But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; *but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.*”

“Since we are so small,” some may wonder, “how can we possibly accomplish this great Work effectively?” Most of us know the real answer: “Not by might nor by power, *but by My Spirit*” (Zechariah 4:6).

Remember, dear brethren, Jesus told us to: “*ask*, and it will be given to you; *seek*, and you will find; *knock*, and it

will be opened to you.... If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:9, 13).

If we, as a unified Church, genuinely “*cry out*” to our God for more of His Holy Spirit—and for more **power** to accomplish the Work over the few remaining years before the Tribulation—can *anyone doubt* that God will hear? Remember, God inspired the Apostle Paul to describe the Spirit that He has promised to us: “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:6–7). So, we are promised, first of all,

the Spirit of “**power.**” We are told to *seek* that Spirit, and to “stir up” the Holy Spirit. I hope that each of you who reads this will begin to **do this**, with all your heart, more than ever before! Please carefully reread and **study** the book of Acts. Note carefully how God—through His Spirit—intervened powerfully again and again to help His Church have a great impact on a confused society. Notice especially: “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29–30).

These early Christians prayed *together* that God would pour out His Spirit and grant them boldness—“by stretching out your hand to **heal**, and that **signs** and **wonders** may be



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done.” Brethren, I deeply feel that it is now time that *we* in the Living Church of God begin to pray that way, more than ever!

So, as Pentecost approaches, I urge all of you to begin to seek God as never before. Please begin to regularly study and to “drink in” God’s word—the Bible—the very “mind of God” in print. As you read through the book of Acts, note how even relatively unknown brethren were sometimes given visions, and how God *used them* to help and to warn His Apostles (Acts 9:10–20; 21:4, 10–11).

Dear brethren, as we “feed on Christ” and mentally “picture” ourselves working in harmony with the original Apostles, we should begin to exercise the living faith which they had at that time—and which is still *very much available to us* now, if we seek God with all our being! For, as we all know, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

As we think about the *reality* of living by faith, I must refer you again to my favorite Scripture, written by the Apostle Paul under divine inspiration:

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, KJV). As we meditate on this, we must fervently ask God to help us walk by the faith of Jesus Christ Himself—not just our own, weak human faith! We must constantly think, day by day and hour by hour, “What would Jesus *really* do?” So many young people a few years ago had their “WWJD” bracelets, but they did not *thoroughly study* their Bibles to find out what Jesus *really* did when He was here on this earth, *setting us the example*.

So, we need to constantly and continually meditate quietly on this thought: “What would Jesus *really* do?” in each and every situation that comes up in our lives. As we all know, God tells us, “Let this *mind* be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Brethren, please *take time* to carefully think through all these concepts! For, as we *deeply* and *prayerfully* meditate on them, we will learn to grow in the

entire approach of wanting to *think* like Christ thinks, *act* like He acts and *want* what He wants. *This is vital!* Then, once we genuinely learn to do this, we will have a profound concept of perfect union with God the Father and with Christ. We will have a *radiant faith* that will energize our lives, for we will **not** have fears and doubts about following Christ, or about asking Him for what we rightly need.

Though many brethren have lost much of the childlike faith they may have had in the earlier days of this Work, we can still go on to build *an even deeper faith* by applying the above concepts thoroughly. For God wants us to **grow** in *faith*—and in every aspect of Christianity. As the final events of this world’s history crash in upon us, we should be *shaken* to realize that we really are near the end of human civilization, and that we *must cry out to God* for a depth of understanding, knowledge and **faith** beyond what we now have—or have ever had!

To have the kind of faith the Apostles displayed on the original New Testament Day of Pentecost, we must *move beyond* our present fears and frustrations. We must not dwell on a sense of guilt over our own human nature—we must be busy **overcoming** that nature, **confident** that we have received the **forgiveness** we have asked for, boldly coming before the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

Also, we must not let ourselves become distracted by the many problems that have beset the “greater Church of God” over the last few decades. Yes, mistakes have been made by the Church as a whole—and *by each of us individually*. But we must heed what God inspired the Apostle Paul to state, “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14).

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# EDITORIAL

## A Neglected Character Trait

By Roderick C. Meredith

It is my hope that by the time you read this, all of you will have experienced a *positive* and deeply meaningful Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread.

As we begin to think about the upcoming Holy Day of Pentecost, our minds turn in a special way to meditating on the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. With God's Spirit, we human beings can overcome our carnal human nature and live Christ's life in our own flesh, to the degree we *yield* to Him and use the Holy Spirit.

God's Spirit gives us the power to do even what is humanly uncomfortable. It allows us to carry out our Christian responsibilities to grow and to change. One of those responsibilities is particularly difficult for many people—it is something they often do not like to face up to. But, to enter God's Kingdom, we **must** understand and build into the very fabric of our lives one seldom-thought-of character trait that makes possible our further growth and change. This trait must become an important part of what we are—part of the way we think, feel and act.

This character trait is the *willingness to take correction*.

Is it simple? Is it easy?

No! To humble the self and genuinely receive correction is one of the hardest things for most human beings to do. For it cuts right to our pride, our sense of self-importance and our basic self. Oh, my! How hard it is to admit that we are really, truly, totally **wrong!** *That hurts!*

Yet, as each year of our Christian conversion goes by, we must become *even more willing than ever* to let God fashion and mold us—clean us up and scrub us out. For *genuine* Christian maturity will come no other way.

Each of us has to be willing to ask God—fervently and sincerely—“Father, please clean me up. Please help me to see myself as **You** see me! Please cleanse me even from secret sins. Knock me down, if need be. Rebuke and chasten me as **You** do every son **You** love. But **help** me! Fashion and mold me that I may



reflect Jesus Christ's very character. Make me in **Your** image so that I may be in **Your** Kingdom, in **Your** Family and *bear **Your** name forever!*”

God's word tells us: “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” (Hebrews 12:5–7). *Why* does God “chasten us” and put us through these trials and tests that come upon us so often in this life? “That we may be partakers of His holiness” (v. 10).

Brethren, if we deeply want to be in God's Kingdom so much that we can “taste it,” then we should be willing to go through every trial, surmount every obstacle, suffer every indignity and even suffer physical **death** in Christ's service—if that is what it takes. But all too often we have various “idols” that can come between God and us. We have pride and vanity. We let our “feelings” become hurt very easily because God is really **not** the very center of our lives. Yet God says, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and **nothing** shall offend them” (Psalm 119:165, KJV).

However, when we are corrected, some of us **do** become offended. We only want correction if it is easy to take and preferably is “sugar-coated”! But much of the book of Proverbs is telling us that the way to wisdom—*the way to God's Kingdom*—is to be willing to take instruction, to take correction and to take rebuke.

God says, “Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning” (Proverbs 9:8–9).

Again, we are told: “The wise in heart will receive commands, but a prating fool will fall” (Proverbs 10:8). And again, “He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses **correction** goes astray” (v. 17).

Often the “idol” of our own vanity is the thing that prevents us from humbly *listening* and *heeding* when we are corrected. All of us have some kind of idol or idols in our lives. *Anything* that comes between us and *total surrender* to God must be **smashed!**

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong found—on a number of occasions—that he was making a virtual idol



out of his business or his desire for importance and esteem in the eyes of successful men.

In his *Autobiography*, Mr. Armstrong tells us:

“So let me say right here something about conversion I find most people do not understand.

“The REPENTANCE required as a *condition* to being truly converted by receiving God’s Holy Spirit is something far different than most people suppose. It is infinitely more than merely “seeing” God’s TRUTH, or some of it, and being good enough to embrace and accept it. It is something altogether different from merely *agreeing with certain doctrines*.

“Whoever you are, you have, or you *have had*, an IDOL. You have had another “god” before the true living Almighty God. It might be your hobby or your habitual pastime. It might be your husband, or wife, or child or children. It might be your job. It might be your own VANITY, or the lipstick you paint on, or your business or profession. Very often it is the *opinion of your friends*, your family, your group or social or business contacts.

“But whatever it is, that idol must first be CRUSHED, SMASHED—it must be literally *torn out of your mind*, even though it hurts more than having all your teeth pulled out and perhaps a jawbone, too! I don’t believe that many people experience this painlessly. I don’t know of any anesthetic that will render it pleasurable. Usually it seems like something more excruciating than the agony of death by the cruelest torture” (*Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, Vol. 1*, 1986, p. 593).

God tells us: “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). Personally, I have learned that even when the correction is not given in a “nice” way and even when the motivation of the one giving the correction is questionable, it is **far better** to truly “listen” to the correction, *think* about it and *act* on it than it is to cry about “hurt feelings” or to refuse to listen. Through the trials and tests of more than 61 years in the Church of God, I have learned that it is wise to consider carefully even what my enemies are saying. For *sometimes*, strange as it may seem, they may point out problems in my life or in my approach that even my friends have not told me about!

So, if you truly **long** to be in God’s Kingdom and Family forever, it should not make any difference *where* the correction originates, or even if it seems to be given in a wrong spirit. Rather, you will want to think about it, perhaps learn from it and certainly **act** upon it if you find that even part of the correction is true.

Try to **never** allow your “feelings” to be hurt when you are corrected. And especially never allow yourself to become **bitter** when God corrects you—whether through His ministers or through *anyone* or any circumstance! For that bitterness may not hurt them at all. But, if allowed to continue and to grow, it will **destroy you!**

As the inspired writer of Hebrews warns us: “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any *root of bitterness* springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (Hebrews 12:14–15).

Even if it “hurts,” even if you have to literally **cry out** to God for help, be absolutely sure that you never fall into a spirit of **bitterness!** For once you become bitter, you usually *cannot be reached* by logical reasoning. Often,

even God’s Spirit cannot reach you! For your own carnal pride and bitterness will simply block out the influence of God’s Holy Spirit.

*Brethren*, that is *extremely serious!* For, in all sincerity, I have to tell you from the bottom of my heart that my entire experience in God’s Church has shown me that if you allow yourself to become totally bitter, you may have, *in that very moment*, chosen **death** rather than *eternal life* in the glorious Kingdom of God!

So learn to genuinely humble the self. Learn to take correction and rebuke. Meditate deeply on these inspired words of the Apostle Peter: “Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:5–7).

Truly, God *does* care for you. He has made you in His image. He wants you to become His *full* son in the resurrection. He wants you to become like He is forever. But, in order for that to occur, He has to work with you over a period of years. He may need to knock the “carnal crust” off of you. He needs to fashion you, correct you when you are wrong and chasten you when necessary. Then, God will “know” that you will really fit into His eternal Family which is based upon giving—not “getting”—upon genuine humility and service, on love and outflowing concern and on the inexpressible joy of being in total union with God Himself.

*There is no other way.*

So let us all be willing to let God work with us, correct us and fashion in us the perfect character He wants us to have. Then, as Peter tells us, “*after you have suffered awhile*,” God will, “perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:10–11). ■

# Your Gold Medal

By Dibar K. Apartian (1916–2010)

**I**s there something in life that you would fight for with all your might? Is there something at which you would do almost anything to succeed? Is there a battle you would win—a prize you would obtain? Do you strive for a medal—a gold medal? Which gold medal?

The Olympic Games represent the pinnacle of glory for many athletes—the ultimate achievement. We have seen remarkable athletes compete in them. Personally, I will never forget the young and petite 16-year-old champion, Mary Lou Retton—a first-class gymnast. She had worked hard. She was extremely tired, but she had yet to win the last round—her last battle, so to speak—to obtain the gold medal. Everything was against her. I remember listening to the words of her trainer over the radio: “Go for it, little one. Go for it. Give it all you have. It’s now or never!” His words were engraved in my mind. How could she accomplish a challenge so insurmountable?

Success requires determination. We all have a goal that keeps us going forward. For some it is a sports competition; for others, it is a battle against a grave disease. It can also be overcoming a personal weakness—a victory all the same. In Mary Lou Retton’s case, a superhuman effort was required of her. With whatever strength she had left, she kept hearing her trainer’s voice, “Go for it, little one. It’s now or never.” To millions of viewers’ satisfaction, she won the victory. She obtained the gold medal in a moment of extraordinary effort. If you have never heard her story, research it on the Internet or in a sports book. It will encourage you.

Even when all doors in life **seem** closed, there is **always** a way out. It is a pity that many work so hard in life to obtain a perishable or temporary medal while neglecting what is permanent. In reality, all of us in God’s Church are fighting for a medal—not a gold medal, but an imperishable crown. This requires as fierce, hard and determined an effort as the pursuit of an Olympic Games gold medal. But our battle is a spiritual battle. It is a battle for life—eternal life.

The Apostle Paul wrote with strength these words of determination: “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become

disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). Brethren, there comes a point when we need to give all we have, when we reach our last battle—our last effort to arrive at the finish line.

Each of the seven churches of Revelation received a promise of victory. Each was to set its eyes on the goal—and never to avert them. “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:10–11).



Brethren, what efforts are you making to overcome your weaknesses? If you do not know your weaknesses, get down on your knees and ask God to **show them to you**. Of course, for most of us, we have no difficulty learning them, because often our friends will point them out.

Our lives should be full of joy, but we must also take things seriously. Take life seriously. Take your calling seriously. Christ shows us in the Bible all the responsibilities that a member of God’s Church must assume. He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can succeed. Put plainly—we have **no excuse** to fail. However, like the petite athlete, we must be **willing** to give it our best at all times to succeed.

Remember the words, “It’s now or never!” That is how the Apostle Paul lived after his conversion. He worked day and night to accomplish the Work God entrusted to him. Did he face trials, adversities and setbacks? Yes! He had his share—and more than his share: “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” (2 Corinthians 11:24–29).

What a life Paul lived! What sufferings! What trials! Yet, through each of his experiences, he fought as though it were now or never. He worked hard to set us the right example. He allowed the Holy Spirit in him to strengthen him and guide

him, and never gave in to despair. How was he able to do this? By focusing on the power of the Holy Spirit: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). And it is this Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God—the Spirit of love and wisdom—that enabled Paul to achieve his life’s mission: “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).

Do you understand these words of encouragement? Paul’s life is an example to all of us. His reward will be ours if we follow his example. It all depends on the goal you are chasing. Is it perishable or eternal? Is it selfish or to help your neighbor? What do you seek to achieve in this world? If you are on a quest, what exactly are you seeking? What sort of gold medal are you after? Christ said, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:44–46).

Certainly, life is not always easy. No doubt, the adversary—Satan the devil—will strive to prevent us from doing our part, from resisting and from remembering the phrase, “Go for it. Give it all you have. It’s now or never!”

We read in the book of Romans, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.... What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:18, 31–39).

Those are words of truth. God is our Father and Sustainer—our Trainer. He is telling us at every instant, “Give it all your strength. Go for it. It’s now or never!” We do not know what can happen from one moment to the next. Yet, we know that God is always righteous, always good, always ready to help us—to remind us, “Go for it. It’s now or never.”

We are living in the last days. More than ever, we can see the signs of the end of this age, as Christ declared them in Matthew 24. We will increasingly have wars, catastrophes and sensational events, which will show us that Christ’s return is close—perhaps closer than we think.

Satan and his demons are enraged against humanity (Revelation 12:12). They would like to destroy—if they can—those whom God has called today. But do not fear. God is stronger than any adversary. With God’s help, we will always have our incorruptible gold medal guaranteed. If God is your Father—and if Christ is your Master and your Lord—you need not fear. You will always have the strength to succeed—and you will have God’s guarantee of success. Read James 4:5–8. These are indispensable instructions to achieve

our supreme goal. They are words of life that will help you succeed, regardless of the difficulties you face.

The days go by quickly. Humanity is both discouraged by unprecedented trials, and stirred by astounding scientific discoveries. Never before have human beings made so many technological advances as in the past century. A child today is not shocked to hear of inventions that would have dumbfounded our grandparents. Travel to the moon, or speaking with someone on the other side of the world—these are now a reality! In a way, people today are immensely blessed, but they often feel that something is lacking—and what they feel is lacking is what is most essential.

Never before has human society experienced so much mental disease and anguish and stress. For millions, violence and suffering and pain are commonplace. But if we have our eyes set on Christ—if we are convinced that Christ is with us, that He will never abandon us—we will always have the victory guaranteed. Always remember that Christ—He who gave His life for us—is your life. He is our Trainer, who guides us and tells us, “Go for it. It’s now or never. Give it all you have.”

Remember Christ’s words, “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.** These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you



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# Birthdays and God's Church

By Rod McNair

Should Christians celebrate birthdays? What does the Church teach on this topic? What does your Bible say?

It is a fact of life that everyone grows older, and on one day a year we are considered a year older than the day before. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging the passage of time, as another year of life goes by. We know, for example, that Moses certainly knew his birthdate. Scripture records that, toward the end of his life, he told the Israelites, "I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan'" (Deuteronomy 31:2).

Did "one hundred and twenty years old today" mean that Moses was making this statement on the exact anniversary of his birth? We do not know. But what we do know is that there is no hint of a "birthday party" marking the anniversary of Moses' birth, like those in the household of Pharaoh (cf. Genesis 40:20–22).

Moses simply acknowledged his age. By contrast, many in the world today have grown used to the idea that their day of birth is an occasion on which friends, family members and co-workers are expected to lavish them with attention, gifts and revelry.

What can we learn from Scripture about observing birthdays? Jesus Christ did not

mark the anniversary of His birth, nor did He make reference to it in any such fashion. Nor did any of the Apostles so much as even



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mention Christ's birth date or their own. The Bible mentions only two specific instances of birthday celebrations, both of which ended in tragedy (Genesis 40:20–22; Mark 6:21–28). One was a major festival for Pharaoh's household, which could have included hundreds of revelers. The other was King Herod's celebration, in Galilee, for all the nobles of his domain. On these occasions of carousing, which included massive consumption of food and alcohol, individuals were put to death for the celebrants' amusement.

Does the book of Job indicate that Job's sons observed their birthdays? Some point to this verse to support that idea: "And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day" (Job 1:4). Is "his appointed day" a vague reference to a birthday? Scripture does not say. However,

we should also note that, if this is a "birthday" example, it is **not** entirely positive regarding the idea of birthday celebrations—we see that Job offered sacrifices afterward, on the assumption that his sons may have "sinned and cursed God in their hearts" while feasting (v. 5).

## RELIGIOUS ROOTS

People are sometimes surprised to discover just how many secular traditions have non-Christian religious roots that are contrary to God's ways. In his *Living Church News* article, "Should Christians Celebrate Birthdays?" Mr. Rod Reynolds pointed out a number of these startling facts (May-June 2002, p. 16). But even some casual observers have noticed that the early Church taught against participation in such birthday celebrations as are so common in our world today. As writer Norm Schneider points out: "During the Christian era, the early followers of Christ didn't believe in celebrating birthdays, preferring—as was the case in earlier eras—of honoring one's death. Their belief was that only in death was there true deliverance worthy of honoring one's 'death day' [a reference to Ecclesiastes 7:1, where Solomon asserts that the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth]. They also believed that Egyptian and Greek birthday celebrations were

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# How God's Names Reveal His Nature and Power

By Wyatt Ciesielka

What does it mean to honor God's name? Is it sinful to choose not to call God by a certain "sacred name" such as *Yashua*, *El Shaddai* or *Jehovah*? And, if it is, then by *what name* should we call Him? Some have advanced the theory that a certain "sacred name" must be used to properly honor God. But what is the *truth* about the "sacred name" doctrine? How do God's names reveal His power and His purpose? How must faithful Christians honor His name?

Jesus Christ commands us to *honor* God's name (Matthew 6:9). Also, when the Apostle Peter addressed the gathered religious leaders of his day and powerfully proclaimed about the divinely healed man, he said, "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the *name* of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole... Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10–12).

To blaspheme or profane God's name is a violation of the Third Commandment, which expressly states: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Indeed, in ancient Israel, those who blasphemed the name of the LORD were stoned to death! "And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death" (Leviticus 24:16).

Since Jesus Christ commands us to hallow (or "honor") God's name, and Peter proclaims that salvation comes by no other *name* than that of Jesus Christ, and the Third Commandment forbids us from taking the *name* of the LORD our God in vain,

then do we sin if we do not utter a particular name in a particular language?

Is there only one name we should use for God? Or does He have many names that reveal His nature, his power and what He does with that power? This article will describe the importance of God's *many* names and what His names reveal about Him, will consider *seven key principles* that "sacred name" advocates fail to understand, and will explain how Christians are to *honor* God's name.

## HIS NATURE AND HIS WORK



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Scripture reveals that names are very meaningful to God. God gave a *new name* to Abram, calling him Abraham, the "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5). He changed Jacob's name to *Israel*, meaning "prevailer" or "overcomer with God" (Genesis 32:28). In Isaiah 14:12 we read of a great being named *Heylel* ("Shining One") in Hebrew. Like *Lucifer* ("Light-bearer") in Latin, *Heylel* is an epithet for the morning star. When *Heylel* or *Lucifer* rebelled, God changed his name to Satan—

meaning "adversary" or "enemy" (Luke 10:18; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 20:2).

Scriptures such as 2 Samuel 7:22–24 and Jeremiah 32:20 show that through God's great works, He makes a *name* for Himself, and the Scriptures reveal that God actually has *many* names. But before reviewing some of His biblical names and what they mean, it is helpful to review the relationship between God, Christ and man. This is important because God's many names all indicate His Being, His character and His work, as well as the relationship between the Father and the Son.

When in Deuteronomy 6:4 Israel is commanded, "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one" the "uniplural" noun *Elohim* is paired with the word "one" (the Hebrew *echad*, which means *unified*, as in when a man leaves his father and his mother and becomes *echad* with his wife. The two become "one" in marriage). From before time began, the preexistent



Father and the preexistent Logos were spiritually “one” on the God-plane, united in mind and of the same essence.

These two divine personages preexisted together forever (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:17) as “one.” The Father was the Supreme Being, along with the pre-incarnate Word (John 10:29–30; 14:28), the “Son,” who became the Christ (Matthew 26:63–64; Mark 1:11; Philippians 2:5–6; Colossians 2:9). The Son is the *charaktēr tēs hupostaseōs autou* of the Father (Hebrews 1:3)—meaning “the express image of His [the Father’s] person,” or “the exact representation of His [the Father’s] nature” (NASB), and they are one in the Holy Spirit, which is their essence, mind and rational faculty (Isaiah 40:13; Proverbs 20:27; Acts 5:32; 1 Corinthians 2:10–16; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Jesus would be *Immanuel*, meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:23; cf. Isaiah 7:14).

An example of how God’s names describe His nature and His work is found in the prophet Jeremiah’s use of one of the *names* that would be attributed to Christ at His Second

Coming (Isaiah 41:10).

*El Shaddai*, meaning “God Almighty,” occurs 48 times in the Old Testament, including in Genesis 17:1; Ruth 1:20; Job 6:4; Joel 1:15. *Adonay* (in form a “plural of majesty”) is a name that denotes God’s absolute sovereignty as “Lord” or “Master,” as in Genesis 15:2. It is used nearly 300 times in the Old Testament to refer to God and Him only. By comparison, the singular *Adon* is used 215 out of about 330 times to refer to men, such as in Genesis 24:65 where Isaac’s servant tells Rebecca that Isaac is his *adon* (master). Both words are combined in such passages as Deuteronomy 10:17: “Lord of lords” (*adoney ha adonim*).

*YHWH Ro’i*, meaning “The LORD my Shepherd,” is found in Psalm 23 and *YHWH Tsevaot*, or “LORD of Hosts” is first introduced in 1 Samuel 1:3, then re-used in Isaiah 1:24, Psalm 46:7 and elsewhere. This appellation denotes the vast power at the disposal of the Commander of the angelic

**Scripture reveals that names are very meaningful to God. God gave a new name to Abram, calling him Abraham, the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5). He changed Jacob’s name to Israel, meaning “prevailer” or “overcomer with God” (Genesis 32:28).**

Coming. In Jeremiah 23:5–6, the prophet foretells that His name will be called *YHWH Tsidenu*, meaning “The LORD our Righteousness.” Here, we see one of God’s many names—in this instance, one specifically ascribed to Christ. God reveals His Being (“The LORD”) in the first part of His name, and His work (“Our Righteousness”) in the second part.

### EXAMPLES OF GOD’S NAMES

Proverbs 22:1 reveals that “a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.” Clearly, a “name” is used to describe one’s character and reputation. What are some of God’s many names and how do they describe Him?

In the Old Testament, *El* occurs 235 times (cf. Genesis 28:3; Numbers 23:22; 2 Samuel 22:31; Isaiah 9:6; Ezekiel 10:5; Hosea 11:9; Micah 7:18; Malachi 2:10), and means *mighty, strong* and *prominent*. The name *Elohim* occurs more than 2,600 times in the Old Testament (cf. Genesis 1:1, 17:7, 6:9, 9:16; 1 Kings 8:23; Isaiah 40:1). *Elohim* signifies all and everything that God is. He is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. His dominion encompasses all the nations (Deuteronomy 2:30; 3:22; Isaiah 52:10). He establishes laws (Deuteronomy 4:2; Jeremiah 11:3) and all He does is an expression of love (Deuteronomy 1:31; Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 3:23). The use of *Elohim* often refers **both** to God the Father *and* the Word who became flesh, as described in John 1:1–3. These “two” were and are “one” (Deuteronomy 6:4; John 10:30) from before time began. Throughout the creation account, the *Elohim* conversed (cf. Genesis 1:26;

armies. In Isaiah, Jesus Christ—as the returning Messiah and King of kings—is named “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). *YHWH Rofekha*, “the LORD your healer” is found in Exodus 15:26.

*El Elyon* means “God Most High” or “God the Highest,” and describes His preeminence over all things. The name *El Elyon* is used in Genesis 14:18–22 and Psalm 78:35, and the shorter *Elyon* is used in many other passages. Lucifer addressed God with this name when he proclaimed that he would ascend to heaven to overthrow Him and to become like God. Lucifer boasted, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High [*Elyon*]” (Isaiah 14:14). In his rebellion, Satan did not choose to call God by one of His other names, such as *YHWH Ro’i* (The LORD my Shepherd) or *YHWH Rofekha* (The LORD your Healer).

*El Elohey Yisrael* is found only in Genesis 33:20 and denotes the unique relationship between God and His chosen nation. *El Olam*, meaning the “Everlasting God” or “God from Everlasting” is found in Genesis 21:33 and Isaiah 26:4. God is also referred to as *Melekh*, meaning “King” (Psalm 5:2, 29:10; Isaiah 41:21; 43:15; 44:6), as *Shafat*, meaning “Judge” (Genesis 18:25), as *Palet*, meaning “Deliverer” (Psalm 18:2) and as *Qadosh*, denoting “The Holy One” (Psalm 71:22; Isaiah 43:3; 48:17).

### THE TETRAGRAMMATON

*YHVH* or *YHWH* (and its various proposed expansions, such as *Yahweh*, traditionally substituted as *Jehovah*) is known

as the *tetragrammaton* and is often the source for some of the most intense “sacred name” debates. Discussing it in his *Living Church News* article, “What Does it Really Mean to Hallow God’s Name?,” Mr. John Ogwyn cites the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* which notes: “Critical speculation about the origin and meaning of ‘Yahweh’ seems endless... but the Bible’s own explanation in Exodus 3:14 is that it represents the simple (Qal) imperfect of *hawa* ‘to be,’ I am [is] what I am. The precise name Yahweh results when others speak of Him in the third person, *yahweh* ‘He is’ (vol. 1, p. 211)” (July–August 2000, p. 6).

The most common scholarly view is that the *tetragrammaton* is a form of the triliteral Hebrew verb *hwy*. Yet some scholars interpret it as an extension of the exclamation *ya*. Others consider it a combination of *ya* and the third-person pronoun *hu*, forming an adulation roughly translated as “O, He!” Despite intense scholarly debate—there is even controversy over whether *YHWH* must be pronounced with three syllables rather than two—the fact is that we **just do not know**. There is no scholarly consensus, nor has clear biblical proof been established, of any one pronunciation of the *tetragrammaton*.

Yet the *tetragrammaton* is part of many of God’s names. In 2 Samuel 7, God sends Nathan the prophet to disclose that long after David’s death, the Messiah would arise from David’s lineage (2 Samuel 7:12–13; Hebrews 1:5). Deeply humbled, David leaves Nathan’s presence to pray to the LORD (2 Samuel 7:18). David addresses God as *Adonay YHWH* five times in this prayer (2 Samuel 7:18, 19, 22, 28–29). This prayer is the *only* instance in all of Samuel or Chronicles where this particular compound form of the name of God is used (Kaiser, Walter C., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 80). *Why* does David choose this particular appellation and repeat it those five times in that single prayer? Strikingly, *Adonay YHWH* is the same name that Abram had used centuries before, when God made the same Messianic promise to him (Genesis 15:2, 8). Centuries later, King David is acknowledging the *continuation* of this same promise, from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and now through him (2 Samuel 7:12). Again, God’s names have *profound* meaning and describe His nature and His work!

In the New Testament, Jesus uses the Aramaic name *Abba*, meaning “Father” in Mark 14:36. Paul pairs *Abba* with the Greek word for Father; *Patēr*, in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. By Jesus’ day, *Abba* had developed beyond the childish English-language equivalent rendered “daddy” and was used by both children and adults equivalent to the modern appellation, “Dear Father.”

Jesus refers to Himself as “I am” in John 8:58, denoting His preexistence and oneness with the Father. He is also called *Kurios* about 600 times, meaning “Lord” or “Master” throughout the New Testament. *Despotes*, also meaning “Lord” or “Master,” is found less frequently, and occurs in passages such as Luke 2:29, Acts 4:24, 2 Peter 2:1, Jude 4 and Revelation 6:10.

*Hupsistos*, meaning “The Highest,” is used in Matthew 21:9, and *Pantokrator*, meaning “Almighty,” is used in 2 Corinthians 6:18 and Revelation 19:6. Christ is referred to as *he Logos tou Theou*, meaning “The Word of God,” in John 1:1 and Revelation 19:13.

**True Christians avoid disrespecting any of God’s names in any way, which is one reason why reverent Christians will even avoid using euphemisms such as “gosh” or “geeze.” But true Christians also understand that honoring God’s name goes far beyond verbal utterances. They show their deep love and respect for God’s name by their entire way of life.**

## SEVEN “SACRED NAME” ERRORS

Some brethren are occasionally confused by arguments of those who insist that we must always refer to God by a particular combination of Hebrew or other foreign-language sounds. Let us briefly consider *seven key points* that such “sacred name” advocates fail to understand:

**First**, as this article has shown, God has *many* names—not just one sacred name. All of His names are holy and profound in their meaning.

**Second**, although some insist that we must always use a variation of *YHWH* or *YHVH* (the “*tetragrammaton*,” traditionally indicated by “*Jehovah*”), there exists no indisputable guidance as to how to pronounce the *tetragrammaton*. Phonetic variations range from “Ya-hweh” to “Yahu” and many more! Yet, Paul records that the Jews were responsible for preserving the “oracles of God” (Romans 3:2), meaning literally His “words *and utterances*.” In this same verse, the Apostle Paul refers to God as *theos*. If it were absolutely essential to God that one certain sacred name “utterance” were to be preserved, then it would have been!

**Third**, as shown above, even **after** the time of Moses, the righteous prophets and priests *continued* to refer to God by *numerous* names. For example, the “greatly beloved” Daniel (Daniel 9:23) even prayed to God in Aramaic, calling Him ‘*elahn*’ (Daniel 2:19–20).

**Fourth**, Jesus Christ Himself used various names to refer to God. He taught the Apostles to address God in prayer as “Father” (*Patēr*, in Matthew 6:9). While on the stake, Jesus called out to the Father in *Aramaic*, transliterated into Greek as, “*Eloi, Eloi*” (Mark 15:34). Jesus was the Son of God, “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22, KJV). It would be foolish—even heretical—to assert that Jesus was either confused, or intentionally chose not to use a particular, required “sacred name” for God. Yet those who contend that *their* preferred “sacred name” is *the*

only proper name by which to refer to God are implying just that!

**Fifth**, we find that in Acts 4:10, Luke uses the Greek form “*Iesous Christos*” for Christ’s name. This passage records the Apostle Peter’s defense of the faith, in which he states that salvation is only through the *name* of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:5–12). As Paul wrote, all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16)—and here Scripture uses one of many correct names for Christ. Would the meticulous Luke (Luke 1:1–3), a faithful companion of Paul (2 Timothy 4:11), have transcribed Peter’s Aramaic utterance in this way if it were not proper? Ironically, Acts 4:10 is the very verse that many “sacred name” proponents cite to argue for the use of their own preferred, *different* sacred name, as the exclusive and somehow better name for God.

**Sixth**, not only does the Bible contain many diverse names for God, but the Creator even revealed His name in different *languages* at different times. In John 10:34–36, Jesus Christ cites Psalm 82:6, which uses *Elohim*. But, then, in Revelation 1:8, Christ spoke to the Apostle John in the Greek language, *translating* one of His names from the Hebrew to the Greek! Additionally, Hebrews 1:8 is a direct quotation from Psalm 45:6, where the Old Testament Hebrew word *Elohim* has been translated into the New Testament Greek, *Theos*.

Furthermore, in Deuteronomy 32:39 the Eternal gives His name in Hebrew as “I am He (*ani hu*).” But in John 8:58, the Aramaic-speaking Jesus would have given it as *ana itay*, and John translated this into Greek as *ego eimi*. Clearly, the Eternal Himself, as well as the inspired writers, used various names in various languages to refer to God. It is obvious that God does not require His name to be uttered only in a specific foreign language, since He personally uttered it to Moses in Hebrew—but then thousands of years later uttered the same name to the Jews in their Aramaic vernacular, and then had John render it into Greek!

**Seventh**, to honor God’s *name* goes much deeper than language—it means to honor His attributes and His authority in all we say and do. As we have seen, the Bible plainly shows that God has *many* names, which are descriptive of His many righteous attributes. Merely making a futile attempt to select one name as “correct” would divert our attention from what God’s people *really* must do to honor His name.

### HOW TRUE CHRISTIANS HONOR GOD’S NAME

True Christians avoid disrespecting *any* of God’s names in *any* way, which is one reason why reverent Christians will even avoid using euphemisms such as “gosh” or “geez.” But true Christians also understand that honoring God’s name goes far beyond verbal utterances. They show their deep love and respect for God’s name by their entire way of life. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

Those with *false ideas* who *reject* God’s law or any of the clear commands of Scripture “reproach” God and “blaspheme” His name (Psalm 74:10). In addition to keeping God’s commandments, true Christians honor God’s name by working together in love (1 John 3:11) within the body (Ephesians 4:16) to do the work of proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God; the same Work that Christ preached 2,000 years ago (Mark 16:15; John 4:34). God’s true servants worship God in righteousness and thus *glorify* His name (Psalm 86:9; Revelation 15:3–4).

True Christians look to Jesus Christ and the Apostles as examples of righteous worship (1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:15), and their examples on this issue are abundantly clear. Furthermore, once the facts are understood, “sacred name” advocates are in danger of promoting *their* understanding and *their* “righteousness” above that of the heroes and heroines of the faith, the patriarchs, the prophets, the Apostles and even Jesus Christ Himself! Thus, we see that honoring God’s name is about much more than making certain vocal utterances. True Christians “honor God’s name” by their very *life*.

Christ simply was not, and is not concerned that people carefully utter a certain “sacred name” to worship Him. Instead, Christ warned about *false teachers* who would attempt to do away with God’s law and who would obscure the message of the coming Kingdom of God. In his article, “What Does It Really Mean To Hallow God’s Name?,” Mr. John Ogwyn addressed this point: “Now notice the warnings about false teachers that Christ gave to His disciples. Did He say that some would come using false names? **No!** He said: ‘Many will come in **My name**’ and would deceive many people (Matthew 24:5). The deception would involve a message of lawlessness, that obedience to God’s law is no longer required (cf. Matthew 7:21–23). The problem is the message, not the name!” (*Living Church News*, July–August 2000, p. 6). For more detail on the subject of the “sacred names,” please contact the Regional Office nearest you and ask for a copy of Reprint 112, “What Does It Really Mean to Hallow God’s Name?”

God does not place on His people the burden of having to know Hebrew or Greek grammar or the proper pronunciation of His names. In fact, it is **not possible** for us to know all of Jesus Christ’s names! We read in Revelation 19:11–13 that when Christ returns to make war on a rebellious world, He will bear a name that no one knows. Then, He will take on another of His *many names*—a name that will again be reflective of His nature, His role and His work: “He has on His robe and on His thigh a *name* written: **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS**” (v. 16). And there is a final encouraging truth about God’s names. The resurrected firstfruit saints, who have overcome the world and entered into the God Family, will *also* receive *new names* (Revelation 2:17) when as kings and priests in the Kingdom of God they teach and rule with Him (Revelation 20:6). God speed that day! ■



# FROM PASSOVER TO PENTECOST: Lessons for the Christian Journey

By John H. Ogwyn (1949–2005)

The first two of the three festival seasons that God gave to His people are connected in a special way. Pentecost is the **only** festival that is not celebrated on a specific day of the month. Rather, its date can only be calculated by counting from the day of the Wavesheaf—the Sunday that falls within the Days of Unleavened Bread. Why did God connect these two spring festivals in this way? Are there spiritual lessons that He wants His people to learn by focusing on this count?

When God established the congregation of Israel, He introduced His festivals in the year of the Exodus. The circumstances of the original Passover and Unleavened Bread season were tied in with God's redemption of His people from Egyptian slavery. On the night that began the 14th day of the first month, Abib, God passed through the land of Egypt at midnight, killing the firstborn males. The only firstborn spared from death were those in houses that had the blood of a lamb smeared on the lintel and doorposts (Exodus 12:22). This, of course, pointed forward to Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God—who came to pay the penalty for sin by shedding His blood in our stead (John 1:29).

During the daylight period following the Passover, as they prepared to gather at the treasure city of Rameses and begin their journey out of Egypt, the Israelites had gifts thrust upon them by the frightened Egyptians. Beginning on the night after the Passover, the Israelites started on their journey toward freedom. Throughout the seven Days of Unleavened Bread that followed, the Israelites journeyed until they finally came to the Red Sea. There they appeared trapped between the sea, the mountains and Pharaoh's rapidly approaching army. With

Pharaoh's pursuing army held back by a divinely appointed pillar of fire, the Israelites crossed between the divided waters of the Red Sea through the night that began the seventh and final Day of Unleavened Bread. When the Egyptians tried to follow the next morning, they were all drowned in the attempt.

Over the next six weeks, the Israelites continued their journey until they came to Horeb (Mount Sinai), the mountain of God (cf. Exodus 3:1). Here God communed with Moses and proposed a covenant with the fledgling nation of Israel. The day on which God thundered the words of the Ten Commandments and made the Sinai Covenant was the day we know as Pentecost. When God gave Moses the Leviticus 23 information about His annual festivals, He explained how to determine the date of Pentecost. It was to be counted each year, rather than celebrated on the same calendar date. The count began from a special celebration first carried out when the Israelites actually entered the Promised Land (Leviticus 23:10–11). During the years in the Sinai wilderness, Israel was fed with manna because the people could not raise crops or otherwise provide themselves with food. However, when they entered the land of promise, there would be crops to harvest.

God told the priesthood that on the Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread, they were to begin the harvest cycle by waving before Him the first *omer* (about a quart) of grain, taken from a sheaf they had cut at sunset the previous evening. Once this ceremony was completed, the people could commence their harvest and begin eating of the new crop. The priests were instructed that beginning with the day of the Wavesheaf they were to

count forward seven Sabbaths. The day after the seventh Sabbath they were to consecrate as the Feast of Firstfruits Harvest, otherwise known in the Old Testament as the Feast of Weeks and in the New Testament as Pentecost (cf. Leviticus 23:6–21).

During the year of the Exodus, the approximately seven weeks between Passover and Pentecost were marked by a journey, as the Israelites moved toward the mountain of God and entered into a covenant with their Creator. After Israel's entrance into the land, the time between these two festivals was marked by the countdown of 50 days. There are vital lessons we can learn by focusing our attention on this intervening period. It is the journey from redemption to covenant. It is the countdown from the beginning of the first harvest until its completion. Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread focus on Jesus Christ and His role in salvation. Passover pictures His atoning sacrifice, and emphasizes His role as our Redeemer. During the Days of Unleavened Bread, we are to focus on feeding on Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life. The day of the Wavesheaf, always coming during Unleavened Bread, puts attention on Jesus Christ as the firstborn from the dead—the firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest.

The day of Pentecost puts a focus on the Church, God's firstfruits harvest. This was emphasized even in the Levitical offering made on that day: two leavened loaves of bread that represented the entirety of the firstfruits grain harvest. The Church consists of those individuals who have entered into a covenant with their Creator. Under the New Covenant, begun on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2, God's Holy Spirit is imparted to true believers to let us share in God's very nature (2

Peter 1:4) and to write His laws in our hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10).

### FROM THE RED SEA TO SINAI

We can learn vital lessons from the account of Israel's journey to Sinai. Israel confronted several points of crisis in its journey from redemption to covenant. It is important that we examine this journey and the lessons that God would have us draw from it.

Though the Israelites came out of Egypt with “boldness” (Exodus 14:8; Numbers 33:3), they did not need to go very far in their journey to confront discouragement. The celebratory song recorded in Exodus 15 shows the people's excitement and exuberance after God had saved them miraculously at the Red Sea. Yet, after just three days' journey into the wilderness, the people had not found any fresh water to replenish their supply. Then, when they finally came upon a pool of water, they found that it was undrinkable. At this point, their discouragement came to the fore and they began to murmur and complain. The location was named Marah, meaning “bitter.” Moses, at God's instruction, cast a tree into the pool, and its water became sweet and drinkable. At this point in the journey, God introduced Himself to His people as their healer (Exodus 15:23–26).

One month into their journey, the children of Israel entered the Wilderness of Sin and found their food supply running out—with no way to get more. Once again, they began to murmur and complain—disregarding the pattern of love and compassion God was showing by meeting all their needs and redeeming them from slavery and death. God commanded Moses to tell the Israelites that—beginning that evening—they would be fed. From the next day onward, God sent manna every morning except the Sabbath, to provide sustenance during their time of wandering. The manna not only nourished them; it was also designed to teach them to remember God's Sabbath (cf. Exodus 16).

As the people continued their journey, they again found their water

supply depleted—with no wells or rivers anywhere to be found. Once again, they complained. This time, they began to accuse and blame Moses for their plight. When Moses went to God for guidance about the problem, the Creator told him to strike the rock with his rod, after which water sufficient for all of the people's needs would gush forth. Again, God supplied the needs of His people (Exodus 17:1–7).

Shortly afterward, the Israelites confronted a hostile army of Amalekites coming to attack them. Moses quickly organized an army under Joshua and



stood upon a hilltop to watch the progress of the battle. Whenever Moses held up his arms in supplication to God, the Israelites prevailed. After a while, however, he grew tired and was no longer able to hold up his arms. At this point, the tide of battle began to turn in favor of the Amalekites. Aaron and Hur came to his aid by holding up his arms throughout the afternoon, and by sunset Israel had triumphed (Exodus 17:8–13).

In 1 Corinthians 10, the Apostle Paul alluded to this period of the ancient Exodus, pointing out that it contains important lessons and examples for Christians. “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all

ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (vv.1–4).

God's people today are reminded annually—at the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread—that it all begins with recognizing our Redeemer. However, we must proceed through a series of personal encounters with God as we journey toward the mountain of God and the covenant relationship with our Creator. These encounters will introduce us to God as our healer and as our sustainer. We learn that He is our provider and our protector. Unless we truly come to know Him and to rely on Him in these ways, how will we enter into a covenant with Him and remain faithful to that covenant? Israel had encounter after encounter with God, but never learned to believe and trust Him. Their example of unbelief is recorded for us so that we might learn from their failure. The journey from Passover to Pentecost is one in which we have opportunities to truly come to know God and to develop the trust and dependence that is to be the basis of our ongoing relationship.

### SEVEN LESSONS FOR MEDITATION

There are seven weeks from the day of the Wavesheaf during the Days of Unleavened Bread until Pentecost. Let us look briefly at seven lessons that would be good to meditate on during this period of counting. Those who learn these lessons will succeed where Israel of old failed. While they made the journey physically, they never made it spiritually! While they came to the mountain of God in a physical sense, in their hearts and minds most had never left Egypt. Our acceptance as part of the firstfruits harvest will, in great measure, depend upon whether we put into practice in our own lives the lessons that the Apostle Paul outlined to the Church at Colosse. The seven weeks between Passover and Pentecost will provide us with a good

opportunity to meditate and focus on these lessons.

The **first lesson** is necessary for the success of everything that follows. Without it, we will never achieve anything else of lasting value. Colossians 3:1–2 tells us to “seek those things which are above... set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (KJV). What is important to us, and what do we love? What are we spending our time, effort, and energy seeking? The answer to these questions holds the key to virtually everything else. What we love and cherish we will hold on to and guard. If our affections are truly set on the things of God, then we will seek those things—and we are promised that we will appear with Jesus Christ in glory at His return (v. 4).

The **second lesson** is brought out in verse 5: “Then put to death those parts of you which belong to the earth—fornication, indecency, lust, foul cravings, and the ruthless greed which is nothing less than idolatry” (NEB). When we were baptized, we symbolically died (Romans 6:3–4). Here in Colossians, Paul admonished his readers to make this death to the old life real in their day-to-day practices. Notice what the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* brings out concerning this verse: “The verb *nekrosate*, meaning literally ‘to make dead,’ is very strong. It suggests that we are not simply to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes. We are to wipe them out, completely exterminate the old way of life. ‘Slay utterly’ may express its force.... Both the meaning of the verb and the force of the tense suggest a vigorous, painful act of personal determination” (vol. 11, p. 211). The very opposite of slaying these ungodly desires is to feed and nourish them. When we watch the wrong kind of movies and television, for instance, we are feeding rather than starving our immoral impulses. In what other ways do we allow these carnal tendencies to remain part of our lives?

Paul exhorts his readers to “put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out

of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:8–9). “Put off” is a metaphor from dress, and refers to taking off dirty clothes. In addition to slaying the life-controlling passions of the old man, as Christians we are to put off certain types of conduct and behavior, recognizing that they are inappropriate “garb” for a Christian to wear! This is the **third lesson**.

When we get rid of the “old clothes,” what are we then to do? The answer to



that question provides a **fourth lesson**, found in Paul’s admonition that we must “put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (v. 10).

Our “new clothes” are the result of an ongoing renewal of the mind that brings us closer and closer to the image of Jesus Christ. The new self is not intended to grow old and decay. Rather, by constant renewal, it is to take on more and more the image of the Creator. In 2 Corinthians 4:16, Paul emphasized that the inward man, the new spiritual nature, is to be renewed day by day. We do this through daily prayer, meditation and Bible study, and occasional fasting. What will this continual feeding of the inner man allow us to put on and wear? “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender

mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12).

How will this affect our relationships with one another? In verse 13, Paul defines the results of the new attitudes we have put on in our life—this is our **fifth lesson**. We are admonished to bear with one another and to forgive one another. Rather than being quick to get our feelings hurt and to hold grudges, we will have a desire to extend to others the very qualities we seek from Christ. Undoubtedly, we all have our little irritating ways—yet God reminds us to bear with one another and to be very quick to forgive.

What should be the controlling inner attitudes of a mature Christian? This **sixth lesson** bears meditating upon. In verse 15, Paul explained that peace and thankfulness are to rule in our hearts. This peace comes from God, not from the world around us. Our life of faith and trust in the Creator makes us thankful and generates a true inner peace. Among the greatest benefits that flow from a close relationship with God are the quiet confidence and trust that bring peace of mind in the midst of turmoil.

Verse 16 brings out the **seventh lesson** on which we should focus. Here we are told to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom. The “word of Christ” refers to His teachings. Christ’s message must be so deeply implanted in us that it comes to control our thoughts and responses in every situation. Our whole life is to be guided by God’s word, and is to be a credit to our Savior, whose name we now bear as Christians.

At the Passover season, we are deeply reminded of God’s great love for us and of the redemptive act of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Yet, this is not a stopping point. Passover is inextricably tied to Pentecost, and we are to **count** the seven weeks in between. As we do, let us reflect on our Christian journey and the lessons that we must incorporate into our lives. These lessons are necessary if we are to approach the mountain of God and enter into a covenant with our Creator that will endure forever. ■



# The Pain of Change

**W**hen the Father called us, He expected us to make many changes in the way we conduct our lives. He knew it would be a long struggle, because carnal human nature resists change—and we are the weak of the world (1 Corinthians 1:26–31). Despite our weakness, Scripture teaches us that we must come out of this world’s society and give up its evils.

Many of us—those who had not grown up avoiding unclean meats—had to alter our diets when we came into God’s Church. Some of us had to modify a hairstyle. Some had to change the way we dressed. On a deeper level, as we came to understand God’s ways, we realized that we had to change the ways in which we relate to the people around us. Though our human nature counsels selfishness, God commands us to love Him above all else, and to care about our neighbor’s welfare as much as we care for our own (Mark 12:29–33).

To one degree or another, these changes can be painful. Yet, they all must be made, because we are to live by every word of God (Luke 4:4; Proverbs 30:5–6). God’s word—the Bible—is our textbook for the school of life. If we follow its lesson plan, we will graduate to the highest level of existence, and become a member of the God Family—a Spirit being—serving God the Father and Jesus Christ in ruling the universe!

The question is: “How are we doing with our coursework?” Are we keeping up with our lessons, making the needed changes, and gaining the wonderful results that come from passing the tests in our lives? Or are we failing to take advantage of the amazing opportunity God has placed before us?

By ourselves, we would fail in our studies. But, as Pentecost approaches, we can be grateful that, before Christ ascended to Heaven, He asked the Father to send His people the Holy Spirit to help us grow and overcome (John 14:15–18).

In May and June of each year, many young people graduate from school, having successfully completed a course of study that has prepared them for success and fulfillment in their future lives. We in God’s Church, however, are enrolled in a class that will “graduate” at Jesus Christ’s return—pictured each year by the Feast of Trumpets.

Over the past 6,000 years, scores of thousands of people have been called into this class, training to become “firstfruits” who will graduate into the God Family. Sadly, all too many have dropped out along the way—and, even now, some of us are on “probation.” Many are called, but few will endure (Matthew 22:1–14; Luke 8:5–8).

So, how are we doing? Are we studying to show ourselves approved (2 Timothy 2:15)? Are we striving with all our might to take advantage of the priceless calling we have been given (2 Thessalonians 1:11)? Will we succeed?

## GOOD WORKS REQUIRED, BUT WHOSE?

People sometimes misunderstand the importance of works in the Christian life. Of ourselves, we cannot do any “good work” that will “earn” us deliverance from eternal death. Our salvation is a gift from God, by His grace. The Apostle Paul described it this way: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of

his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. **For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:4–10, KJV).

Do we sometimes become proud of our own supposed righteousness and good works? We must remember, any “good works” that spring from supposed personal human goodness are as “filthy rags” to God. What is found in the unconverted human heart? Notice: “But

we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities” (Isaiah 64:6–7).

So, what should we do? Scripture explains that our reward will depend on our effort, regardless of ability (Luke 19:11–27). Yet, by ourselves we can do nothing worthy of reward. It is the Holy Spirit in us that lets Christ’s good works become manifest in and through us. Our part is to yield to Christ, so that our carnal human will can be overcome by His Spirit, and God can use us as He sees fit.

## FALLING AWAY

Many professing Christians have the idea, “once saved, always saved.” They believe that if you “accepted Jesus

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Christ” many years ago, you will go to Heaven to be with Him forever when you die. God’s word, of course, teaches no such thing. In fact, Christians **can** fall away. Notice: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4–6).

God will not force salvation on us. His Spirit is a free gift, but we can reject it by our conduct. If we reject the gift of the Holy Spirit, we cannot be saved. But once we have accepted His gift, what are we doing with it? Are we “investing” the talents God gives us, multiplying them through good stewardship—developing ourselves personally and serving others (Matthew 25:14–30)?

Personal development is not enough. We must have outflowing concern for those around us. Are we seeking to enter the God Family for our own glorification? Or is it because we want to become a servant? Some years ago, one Evangelist described how he evaluated candidates for ordination into the ministry: “The first question I ask is, ‘Do you love people?’”

Ask yourself: Do you love people—even those with spiritual warts, spots and wrinkles? Or do you shy away from others? Since the attitude of outflowing concern is unnatural to carnal human nature, we as Christians need to ask God to place in us that kind of love, so that we can build an attitude of service toward every human being. Do you think that God will use you simply because you are a “good speaker” or because you “know doctrine” or because you have a “nice family”? Those are good attributes, to be sure, but they are useless unless one key element is present. As Paul wrote: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1–3).

Yes, God is calling us to become kings and priests. But we need to understand that we are called to service, not to selfishness. As we progress in the “school” of life, we must never lose sight of this lesson. Sometimes it may be “inconvenient” to serve. At other times, some kinds of service may push us outside of our “comfort zone.” It is not that “service” must mean pushing yourself beyond the bounds of

good health—Jesus Christ Himself found appropriate time to tend to His personal needs for quiet time and reflection (Matthew 14:13). But our orientation should be that we are preserving our health and taking care of ourselves—not for our selfish benefit, but to become more profitable servants of those around us. It is this attitude that God seeks to develop in His future kings and priests.

## THE GLORY OF GODLY KINGSHIP

What will it be like to be a glorified member of the God Family? God showed the Apostle John, in a vision, the very throne room of the universe. He saw Jesus in all His glory, and the beloved disciple heard his Master speak. We read: “Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace,

and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen’” (Revelation 1:12–18).

Later, John was given another vision—this time revealing the triumphant, glorified Christ returning to begin His millennial rule on planet Earth. “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. [See John 1:1] And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:11–16).

Can we in our present state begin to conceive of such glory? As members of the God Family, the resurrected firstfruits will share the glory of their Elder Brother, Jesus



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Christ! Yes, we will look like Him, as John tells us: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2–3).

How can we receive this amazing reward? Not by our own might! We can only receive it through Christ living in us, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ Himself said, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but **the Father who dwells in Me** does the works” (John 14:10–11). We must be one with God the Father and Christ—and the Holy Spirit is what makes this possible. This is our hope. “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

The firstfruits are destined for glory, but the exact degree of that glory will depend on how well we have yielded to Christ and used the Holy Spirit that He has given us. Paul reminds us: “There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam [Jesus Christ] became a life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:40–45).

### OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Will Christ do everything for us? No! We each must cooperate with the process of being saved. Sadly, generally speaking, we do not give up our old human ways without a fight. Paul well understood the battle that rages within each of us whom God has called. “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my

members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:14–25). Paul, however, knew that God has mercifully given His Spirit for Christians to use (Romans 8:1). Paul asked God for mercy, as did the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14).

As long as we are in the flesh, we have free moral agency; we can choose to turn away from our Savior and return into the world from which we were called. But if we do that, there will be a difference between us and those who were never called. If we extinguish the Holy Spirit within us, we are putting ourselves at risk of eternal death. “For if we sin willfully [Strong’s G1596 *hek-oo-see’-oce* adverb, from the same as G1595; *voluntarily*: willfully, willingly] after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:26–31).

Of course, even when we no longer “practice sin”—when we have repented and turned our basic orientation toward God and His ways—we have moments of weakness and we sin. Even those who have been called and baptized have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23–24).

So, then, who can be saved? The struggle can seem insurmountable at times. “And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, ‘How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ And those who heard it said, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But He said, ‘The things which are impossible with men are possible with God’” (Luke 18:24–27).

### THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

Yes, there is hope! What we cannot do for ourselves, God can do for us—if we do our part and cooperate. Those who “practice sin” see no need to repent. We, who are striving to live God’s way, can repent when we discover sin in our lives. And we need to come boldly before the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). No sin for which we seek repentance is “too awful” for God to forgive. Scripture gives us the parable of the



prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21–35) and the account of the man who had been committing adultery with his father’s wife (1 Corinthians 5:1–5; 2 Corinthians 2:3–11). God is gracious and merciful to those whom He calls. He does not save us “in our sins”—but He is able to save us from the penalty of our sins!

There is only one “unpardonable” sin—blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. “Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation” (Mark 3:28–29). It is the Holy Spirit in us that makes our salvation possible and lets us receive our reward. To reject—blaspheme—the Holy Spirit is to reject our very salvation.

Each year, when we take the Passover, we reflect on our growth as Christians. We all continue to transgress, in one

way or another. But we can take heart. “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). As long as we do not turn our backs on God, He will continue to work with us. “Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole (Job 5:17–18).

That correction may sometimes be painful. But we should be “happy” when it comes, because it brings us closer to our God—and to the reward He has promised us. Let us never lose sight of the goal, which puts all of our present pains into perspective. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans 8:18–19).

—LCG Editorial Staff

## Your Gold Medal

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will have tribulation; but **be of good cheer, I have overcome the world**” (John 16:32–33).

Consider Job’s trial. He loved God and had a comfortable life. Suddenly, Job was struck with a series of terrible tragedies and he did not know the reason. Scripture describes his attitude as he suffered: “Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’ In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong” (Job 1:20–22).

Those are words of courage and determination. Job did not ever want to give up. He could see God’s hand and remember His blessings during the trial. When Job’s friends arrived to see him, they were so moved by his condition that they were speechless for seven days, so severe was Job’s suffering. Even Job’s wife reached the point where she told him to give up his battle, to abandon God and no longer believe in Him. Yet Job answered, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” In all

this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:10).

Job realized that he had to tap all his strength to stay the course, and that he would be required to exert a superhuman effort. He knew he could not afford to let

**Paul’s life is an example to all of us. His reward will be ours if we follow his example. It all depends on the goal you are chasing. Is it perishable or eternal? Is it selfish or to help your neighbor? What do you seek to achieve in this world?**

himself be discouraged, and that he had to go forward with determination.

God was always with Job. He helped him through his trials and tests. He knows the future better than any man. When we do God’s will—when we remember His ordinances, His laws, His commandments and put them into practice—we will always be victorious, as was Job.

Job was in a spiritual battle for an imperishable gold medal. He could not afford to give in to weakness and quit. He lived as a true servant of God, despite

his suffering, pain and loss. Once his spiritual eyes were opened—when his spiritual ears were able to hear God’s admonition—he recognized his sins, faults and weaknesses, and then he was doubly blessed. He recovered all he had lost—and more—but not before he had cried out, “You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:3–6).

Brethren, let us remember ancient King David’s words, “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.... Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Psalm 37:4–5, 8–9).

God has called those of us in His Church to strive toward victory, toward an imperishable gold medal. Now is our time to work—to drive ourselves and move forward with all our strength: “It’s now or never!” ■

**Birthdays and God's Church**

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pagan festivals and should not be duplicated” (“The Strange Origins of Our Modern Birthday Customs,” August 13, 2008, [www.associatedcontent.com](http://www.associatedcontent.com)).

**HONORING A KING**

Schneider goes on to observe that by “the fourth century, Christians—having generally agreed on the date of Christ’s birth—began celebrating the event, ergo Christmas.”

Indeed, the observance of Christmas and the celebration of birthdays went hand in hand as the vast majority of professing Christians fell into apostasy. Today, billions of people who call themselves “Christians” are keeping Christmas to have, in effect, a sort of “birthday party for Christ.” However, when we read what Scripture tells us about the young Jesus Christ, we find no precedent for such celebration.

What do we find? When they saw the young Jesus, the wise men from the East “fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11). This was a momentous event, but it was **not** a birthday party—these were prominent men coming to visit the King. The custom of bringing a gift when coming before a king is still in practice today.

**MARKING MILESTONES**

How should we view the milestones in our life, as we make progress toward the Kingdom of God? The Bible reveals that God places far more importance on the development of spiritual character and our eventual spiritual birth into His Kingdom than on observing the beginning of our physical life (Ecclesiastes 7:1; Revelation 21:7; Romans 2:7; John 12:24–25). Accordingly, God does not want His people to become involved in worldly practices that lead to the destruction of character. Worldly birthday festivities, under the guise of a “party spirit,” are often focused on greed—the desire for gifts and attention—as well as on vanity, selfishness and a wrong spirit of competition. Such attitudes are inappropriate for Christians as part of any celebration, not just birthday celebrations! God makes it plain that Christians are not to take part in “lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (1 Peter 4:3). We know from Scripture that covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

**BALANCE AND THE BIG PICTURE**

A balanced perspective on this issue can be found in an example cited by our Presiding Evangelist, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, in the January-February 2011 *Ministerial Bulletin*: “...we also know that Mr. Armstrong gave his mother a dozen red roses on her birthdays, occasionally, and sometimes took her out for a nice dinner at the restaurant simply to honor her on such an occasion. It was not a ‘birthday party’ with candles, exchanging of presents and so forth. It was simply noting that

God had given her another year of life and encouraging her and honoring her in that way. Often, we have stated that our own people may have a special meal prepared by the mother in the home for a child on his or her birthday and express thanks that our child has had another year of life” (p. 2). Certainly, it can be appropriate for parents to reminisce with their children about past joys and challenges of a child’s life, as well as future plans and goals, when the child grows a year older.

As for his own example, Dr. Meredith mentioned in his July 21, 2008 sermon, titled “Building Faith and

Courage,” that he had just turned 78 years of age, but without a birthday party. On the other hand, as noted above, he has acknowledged that it can indeed be appropriate for families to acknowledge a child’s growth and development on a birth date, just as it can be worthwhile to honor an elderly person at a milestone in his or her life—in a Christian spirit of true love and respect, without getting caught up in the spirit of carnal celebrations that often go far beyond what is appropriate.

In the Living Church of God, we recognize and encourage activities that will enrich our lives with unity of purpose, the family spirit, the attitude of service—all of which are encouraged and exemplified in the Scriptures. As we come out of a sinful and self-focused world, we must each strive to develop God’s mind, so that we may make good decisions, as a wise Christian whose “heart discerns both time and judgment” (Ecclesiastes 8:5). And we must always keep our focus on the bigger picture, too. As Dr. Meredith wrote in his *Ministerial Bulletin* column: “We are called to preach the inspiring message of a wonderful Tomorrow’s World and the basic way of God as the Bible explains it... [We are to] concentrate on the Big Picture of things involving the Ten Commandments as they are magnified throughout the Bible, the major prophecies about Christ’s coming and the end of this age and the need for all of us to work together to ‘reach out’ to the world and help them look forward to Christ’s coming Kingdom.” As each year of our lives goes by, this zeal for the Work should be where we as true Christians increasingly place our hearts. ■

**In the Living Church of God, we recognize and encourage activities that will enrich our lives with unity of purpose, the family spirit, the attitude of service—all of which are encouraged and exemplified in the Scriptures.**

**Cry Out for the Gifts of the Spirit**

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Each of us must know **deeply** that God *understands* our human problems, and genuinely *forgives us*—if we repent and serve Him wholeheartedly, perhaps as never before. This attitude of accepting God’s forgiveness—and of “not looking back,” as the Apostle Paul warned us against—will help us to overcome one of the greatest enemies of faith: **doubt**. For God also inspired the Apostle Paul to tell us, “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; *for whatever is not from faith is sin*” (Romans 14:23).

So, each of us must strive to **overcome** doubt. We must remember everything God has done in the past for His people, and appreciate what He *will do* for us if we build on that foundation and **grow** in faith beyond what we have ever experienced.

Many of us who were part of God’s Church in the 1950s remember how there were often *great long lines* of people waiting to be anointed each day during the Feast of Tabernacles, the Festival of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. *Hundreds* of brethren back then were **healed** of serious flus and viruses, and some were even healed from withered limbs, heart conditions, cancer or tuberculosis. For there was a sense of “expectancy” back then—*much more* than today. Remember, as Jesus asked, “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find **faith** on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

It is obvious that in these very latter days, we have mostly **lost** that overwhelming atmosphere of sincere, childlike faith that was so pervasive among God’s people in the early days of this Work! Brethren, we must earnestly try to “recapture” that **living faith**! We must pray earnestly that God will put within His Church the “gifts” of the Holy Spirit—gifts of **faith**, of **healings**, of working of **miracles**, of **prophecy**, of **discerning spirits**, and of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to many more people in many more languages (1 Corinthians 12:9–10). And always remember, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members,

but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (vv. 11–12).

Dear brethren, I hope that we all fully realize **that Christ has not changed**. It is **we** who have changed. Today, we are literally **surrounded** by all kinds of distractions in our technological society, by all kinds of gadgets and devices that so often draw us **away** from the reality of God that Abraham and David experienced when they quietly looked up into the heavens during a much more peaceful time, millennia ago. Each of us must think carefully and determine **how** we personally can recapture that simplicity and sincerity of faith, and develop an even deeper sense of the **reality** of God and all the things of God. If we do this with all our hearts, we will

experience in the coming weeks and months an outpouring of God’s Spirit upon the Living Church of God—and upon God’s people everywhere—so that we can move forward together **in power** and finish the Work that truly glorifies God.

The Great God showed His mighty power in helping the ancient Israelites cross the Red Sea—letting them walk right down across the sea bed as He held back towering tons of water—and He **destroyed** their vengeful foes. About this great intervention, God’s word tells us: “So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in

Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses” (Exodus 14:30–31).

If we truly **seek** the gifts of the Spirit—**not** for own self-aggrandizement, but in order to *help* and *inspire* human beings everywhere—then God will begin to show us more than ever how **real** He really is! Then, increasing numbers will “believe” the Lord and His human servants today. And then we can genuinely help them and serve them more than ever, as we learn to genuinely “walk with God” in this way as Pentecost approaches.

With Christian love,



**Each of us must know deeply that God understands our human problems, and genuinely forgives us—if we repent and serve Him wholeheartedly, perhaps as never before. This attitude of accepting God’s forgiveness—and of “not looking back,” as the Apostle Paul warned us against—will help us to overcome one of the greatest enemies of faith: doubt.**



# LOCAL

## CHURCH NEWS

### In Loving Memory

*Mr. Richard H. Sedliacik, Sr.*, died on December 23, 2010 at the age of 77 years. He is survived by his wife of 53 years, Elva Russell Sedliacik; three sons, Richard (Alisa Bardo), Roderick, and Joseph; and two nieces. He was preceded in death by both of his parents, four brothers, and one sister. Mr. Sedliacik was born June 11, 1934 in Chicago and moved to Pasadena, California, to attend Ambassador College in 1956. A long-time faithful member of God's Church, he served under Dr. C. Paul Meredith in developing the first A.C. Bible Correspondence Course, and was the head of the Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course Department after Dr. Meredith's death and until after the death of Mr. Armstrong. He also served as writer and editor for many other publications of the Church over the years. Mr. Sedliacik's work touched the lives of people from many nations around the world and helped many to have a better understanding of God's word.

*Mrs. Eva Naoma Chasteen* died December 31, 2010, at the age of 86 years. She was born in Douglas, Georgia, February 12, 1924 and was baptized into God's Church in the mid-1960s. Mrs. Chasteen is survived by three sons, Wayne Allen (Connie) McCarty, Ronald H. McCarty, and Michael K. (Judy) McCarty; one brother; seven grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; and several nieces, nephews, and other relatives. Dr. Scott Winnail and Mr. Joseph Brown conducted her funeral.

*Mr. Camilo Ubaldo* of the Quezon City congregation in the Philippines, died January 16, at the age of 80 years. He is survived by his wife, Presentacion Ubaldo; his children, Julius, Myrna, Ella, Butch, and Virgilio; and fifteen grandchildren. Mr. Ubaldo was baptized in 1988 and his life has been a testament of dedication to serve God and His people in every way possible, always ready with a smile, a story, and a word of encouragement. He served as an inspiration to the younger generations as he endured trials and tests with a smile and a positive

outlook. He will be remembered and sorely missed by family, friends, and the brethren, until the restoration of all things.

*Ms. Lois Marie Pickerill*, 73, a long-time member of the Church of God from Wheatland, Wyoming, died January 18. She was born September 14, 1937 to Thomas and Alice Pickerill and was raised and educated at the family ranch in the Laramie Peak area. She had lived in Wheatland since 1986, where she enjoyed attending services with the brethren and being a part of God's end-time Work. She is survived by two sisters, Alice Jean Martin and Dorothy Ann McDonald, both of Wheatland; a brother, Thomas Pickerill of Laramie Peak; three nieces and four nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents and one nephew.

*Mrs. Soledad Homeres*, 86, of the Quezon City congregation in the Philippines, died on January 21. She is survived by her daughters Melanie, Teresita, Elizabeth, Liberty, Leilani, Carmelita, Elenita and Rizalina, and 22 grandchildren. Mrs. Homeres is remembered for her active participation in the choir and every Church activity. Baptized at the age of 60, her energy and zeal never failed to inspire both the old and the young. She has been a constant reminder of staying true and faithful to God despite the setbacks of old age.

*Mr. John Hendrick*, a faithful long-time Church member in the Peoria, Illinois congregation, died on February 1. He was 76 years old. John will be well remembered for attending Sabbath services faithfully along with his wife Dorothy until his health no longer permitted their attendance. Funeral services were conducted at the Butler Funeral Home in Springfield, Illinois by Peoria's Associate Pastor, Irv Woelfle. Known to many as "Tom," John is survived by his wife, his son John, his daughters Debi and DeeDee, thirteen grandchildren and twelve great-grandchildren.

## Weddings

*Rod Coons*, a deacon in the Sacramento, California, congregation, and *Marilyn McMullin*, who worked in the mail room at LCG Headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina, were united in marriage by Mr. Harold Way on November 28, 2010. A small group of family and friends joined them for the wedding at Rod's son's home, on the dock overlooking a beautiful pond with a fountain. The couple will reside in Elk Grove, California.

A double wedding ceremony was a joyous occasion at the Gaston Courts, Lange Park, in Chaguanas, Trinidad, on Sunday, December 26, 2010. *Miss Collette Greeman* was united in matrimony with *Mr. Don Bethelmie* and *Miss Dionne Greeman* was united in matrimony with *Mr. David Grant*. The brides' father, Mr. Fitzroy Greeman, Area Pastor, officiated.



## Jury Service Exemption Forms

Living Church of God adherents who are summoned for jury service may wish to make use of the Jury Service Exemption Request form and documentation provided by the Office of Legal Affairs & Risk Management. Your local minister should be able to give you copies of the form, which includes legal precedents as well as a ministerial affirmation that you adhere to the doctrines of the Living Church of God, and have a sincerely-held religious

objection to jury service. If your request for excusal is denied, please send a copy of your original jury summons, the signed first page of the executed Jury Service Exemption Request form, and the denial, to the Office of Legal Affairs & Risk Management by fax at (704) 844-1976, or by e-mail at [legal@lcg.org](mailto:legal@lcg.org). For more information, please see our document, *Steps in Seeking Jury Service Exemption*, available through your local minister.

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

## Ordinations

*Mr. and Mrs. Al and Sue De Koning* were ordained as deacon and deaconess at the Feast of Trumpets 2010 by Canadian Regional Pastor Mr. Gerald Weston and Area Pastor Mr. Winston Gosse. Mr. and Mrs. De Koning serve in the Barrie, Ontario, Canada, congregation.

*Mr. Paul Kendall* was ordained a deacon on Sabbath, January 8 by Regional Pastor Mr. Rand Millich and elder Mr. James Wells. Mr. Kendall serves in the Kansas City congregation as well as in the Springfield, Missouri, area.

*Messrs. Ismael Hernandez and Michael Thomas* were ordained as deacons on Sabbath, January 15 by Area Pastor

Mr. Dexter Wakefield and elders Rick Thomas and Terrence Kennell. Mr. Hernandez and Mr. Thomas serve in the Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, congregation.

*Messrs Ronald Gall and Austin Gill* were ordained as deacons on January 23 by Area Pastor Mr. Fitzroy Greeman. Mr. Greeman commented that these gentlemen have been faithfully serving God's people in Barbados for a long time.

*Mrs. Williana Mallett and Mrs. Mary Miller* were ordained as deaconesses on January 23 by Area Pastor Mr. Fitzroy Greeman. Mr. Greeman commented that these ladies are dedicated, loyal, and cheerful servants of God's people in Barbados.

## Births

Dan and Rachel Contardi are pleased to announce the birth of their fourth child, *Jason Kyle Contardi*. He was born May 20, 2010, weighing 7-lbs, 2-oz. Elizabeth, Daniel, and Benjamin are happy to have a new baby brother. The Contardi family attends the Asheboro, North Carolina congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Leif and Jennifer Kareliusson of Fairfax, Virginia, are elated to announce the birth of their first child, *Eviana Lyn Kareliusson*. "Evie" was born August 27, 2010. She weighed 8 pounds, 11 ounces, and was 20¾ inches long. Grandparents Bud and Gale Kareliusson, and Ray and Rhonda Clore, are overjoyed!

Ed and Susie Sheret of Orange, California, joyfully announce the birth of their second child, *Allison Layne Sheret*. Born October 10, 2010, she weighed 9 pounds, 3 ounces, and

was 21 inches long. Since the arrival of Alli, two-year-old Evan likes to say, "We're a family."

*Mikayla Isabel Moody* was born December 11, 2010, to Michael and Ximell Moody of the Boise, Idaho congregation. Two-year-old big sister Kaitlyn Abigail Moody, grandparents and brethren all rejoice with the new arrival.

Mr. and Mrs. Tim and Jessica Wilson of the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation are happy to announce the birth of their third son on December 28, 2010. He weighed 7 pounds, 14 ounces and has been named *Benjamin Edward Wilson*. His brothers Alan and Jonathan welcomed him home.

Dwight and Angie Mullis of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation are happy to announce the birth of their firstborn son, *Aiden Wayne Mullis*. He was born December

29, 2010, weighing 7½ pounds and was 19½ inches long. Grandparents Wayne and Suzanne Pyle share in their happiness to have their first grandchild.

Ricardo and France Colón, of the Auburn, Massachusetts, congregation, are delighted to announce the birth of their firstborn son, *Ricardo Xavier Colón*, on January 25. He weighed 6 pounds, 9 ounces, and measured 20¾ inches long. Both mother and baby are doing very well. Grandparents Raúl and Annie Colón from Cidra, Puerto Rico, and José and Ruth Rovira, from Caguas, Puerto Rico, are delighted with their new little grandson.

Belibet and Rosa Evelia Rosales, of the Queretaro, Mexico, congregation, are happy to announce the birth of their son, *Aziel Rosales*, on February 7. He weighed 4 pounds, 13 ounces, and was 19½ inches long. Both mother and son are doing well.

**United States:** P.O. Box 3810, Charlotte, NC 28227-8010, [www.TomorrowsWorld.org](http://www.TomorrowsWorld.org), Phone: (704) 844-1970 • **Australasia:** PO Box 300, Clarendon, SA 5157, Australia, Phone: (61) 8-8383-6288, Fax: (61) 8-8127-9667 • **Canada:** P.O. Box 409, Mississauga, ON L5M 0P6, Phone: (905) 814-1094, Fax: (905) 814-7659 • **New Zealand:** P.O. Box 2767, Auckland, New Zealand, Phone/Fax: (09) 268 8985 • **Philippines:** PO Box 492, Araneta Center Post Office, 1135 Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines, Phone: (63) 2-871-4921, Fax: (63) 2-414-5349 • **South Africa:** Private Bag X7, Hatfield, Pretoria, 0028, Phone: (27) 58-622-1424, Fax: (27) 58-623-1303 • **United Kingdom:** BM Box 2345, London, WC1N 3XX, Phone/Fax: 44 (0) 844-800-9322.



# COMMENTARY

## Who Are Your Teachers?

My family and I watch our share of nature documentaries, and we are always entertained by scenes of newborn animals—gazelles, giraffes, etc.—struggling, mere moments after birth, to walk. As they struggle on their wobbly legs, instinct pushes them to walk and run as soon as possible, lest they fall as quick prey to predators or become a burden on their herds.

For human babies, however, it is totally different. Over time, Mom and Dad coax little Sammy or little Sarah to roll over, then to crawl, then eventually—on average almost a full year after birth—to walk independently.

While most animals are dominated by instinct, God designed people to require teachers so that we may learn skills and principles to care for ourselves and our families. Our own senses and thoughts are not enough to bring us fully into the world of adults. This need is present especially in the most important area of life: our spiritual life.

This, too, is by God's design. When Jesus Christ began building His Church (Matthew 16:18), He and His Father designed a structure in place within it—apostles, evangelists, and other ministers and teachers—so that God's laws and way of life might be learned and communicated properly, passed down from generation to generation (Ephesians 4:11-16; Ezekiel 44:23). These ministers do not have the authority to violate the law of God or teach their own ideas (Mark 7:6-13; Deuteronomy 12:32);

rather, they are to help faithful Christians understand His law (cf. Nehemiah 8:8) that they may follow it fully, and in unity with His people (1 Corinthians 1:10). Without such faithful teachers, the Body of Christ would descend into disunity and chaos (Ephesians 4:13-14), as opposed to the peace, order, and harmony God wants in His called-out people (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).

Jesus Christ has given us guidance in how to choose our teachers. "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" (Matthew 7:16-18).

Who have you chosen as your spiritual teachers? Are you simply picking individuals who agree with you or make you feel good? Prophecy says that this will be the dangerous tendency of people at the end of the age (2 Timothy 4:3). Rather—whether they agree with our own ideas or not—are we comparing the fruits of our prospective teachers to the fruit of God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and examining them in the light of God's laws (Isaiah 8:20)?

The world offers us teachers galore. As important as they will be to our lives, and the lives of those we care about, are we taking the advice of Jesus Christ to heart and choosing them wisely?

—Wallace G. Smith