

# THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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## OUR COUNCIL OF ELDERS: ITS PURPOSE AND ACTIVITY

DEAR BRETHREN AND FRIENDS,

As most of you know, the Council of Elders of the Living Church of God meets several times a year, giving input and insight on doctrines, programs and functions of the Church. In this short letter, I want to give you some insight into the makeup of the Council—how we interact and function to strengthen God's Church.

Current members, pictured in the group photo on this page, (left to right, front row) are Mr. Bruce Tyler, Mr. Richard Ames, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, Dr. Douglas Winnail, Mr. Gerald Weston (back row), Mr. Rand Millich, Mr. Rod King, Mr. Lambert Greer, Mr. Dexter Wakefield, Mr. Stuart Wachowicz, Dr. Jeffrey Fall, Mr. Mario Hernandez, Mr. Wallace Smith and Mr. Sheldon Monson.

I should mention that we try to "rotate" some of the membership of the Council every two or three years, to give a wider range of our outstanding ministers the experience of serving on the Council, along with the insight and wisdom I am able to gain from some of our most senior ministers who serve on the Council and give input regarding doctrines, programs and functions of the Church.

Also, I want to note that we have many faithful and dedicated ministers who are no longer on the Council who are just as dedicated and loyal as they have ever been. They understand that we are giving others the opportunity and ourselves the insights of "new" members from time to time. Men such as Mr. Bob League, Mr. Ben Whitfield, Mr. Martin Fannin, Mr. Rodger Bardo and many others have been

extremely faithful members of the Council for a couple of years or more—and *may* be "reactivated" and put back on the Council in a few years if need be. We *deeply* appreciate their help, wisdom and continuing faithful service to God's people. The atmosphere of the Council is, consistently, *extremely* warm, loving and dedicated. Council members have

commented that they can virtually "feel" the love and warmth among the members of the Council, and their dedication to the Work of God.

The *main* purpose of the Council of Elders is to advise the Presiding Evangelist on doctrines, practices and important programs of the Church and Work of God. We have much hearty discussion on all of these issues. And we certainly do not encourage "yes men" in any

way. Although we do have open and frank discussions, the underlying dedication and obvious guidance of God's Spirit gives us an unusual unity of mind—for which we are very thankful. We want to fulfill the inspired comments of the Apostle Paul about *God's purpose* for the entire ministry: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,



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but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–15).

As you know, the ministry—and certainly the Council of Elders—is meant to do its part to help equip *all* of God’s people to play their parts in supporting the “work of the ministry,” getting Christ’s message to the entire world—and for the “edifying of the body of Christ.” This, of course, would be to build up and strengthen all our brethren around the world in the basic truths and way of life that God’s word instructs us. We are to do this as thoroughly and urgently as we can so that our brethren “should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine,” as many experienced some years ago in the apostasy of the Worldwide Church of God.

In the Living Church of God, we are doing all we can to *strengthen* our brethren, and help them understand “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Frankly, we are far better equipped to do this because most of the older ministers and those who *worked directly* with Mr. Herbert Armstrong came with us near the beginning of this Work! Men like Messrs. Dibar Apartian, Raymond McNair, Syd Hegvold, Carl McNair, Richard Ames—and others—were older, experienced ministers who worked with Mr. Armstrong or, as in Mr. Ames’ case, were even placed on the *World Tomorrow* telecast *directly* by Mr. Armstrong. We have had, collectively, *thousands of hours* of experience in meetings with Mr. Armstrong and the other leaders in God’s Work over a period of decades. We knew Mr. Armstrong, and we knew what he wanted for the Work. We *deeply respect* what Christ did through Mr. Armstrong and do **not** in any way intend to change—and **will not** change—any of the basic truths Christ revealed through him, such as the Sabbath, Holy Days, etc. Sadly, there are some former Worldwide members and ministers who, in order to advance their own particular agendas, have tried to portray a “different” Mr. Armstrong than the **real** one. We are grateful to have had a Council that has included a significant number of men who directly knew better than these self-appointed critics!

The present Council of the Church meets at least twice a year in person and once or twice a year additionally via

telephone. We send out a proposed agenda before each conference and encourage these dedicated men to pray and fast and *seek God’s will* about the discussions that will be undertaken during the actual meetings. So it is important that the brethren recognize that we are certainly following the pattern described in the book of Acts and other examples in this, and we should all understand and have **faith** that Jesus Christ—as the *living* Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22–23)—will lead and guide us in these discussions.

God’s inspired word tells us: “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:7–8). Brethren, I have **never** tried to “appoint myself” as an apostle or to any other high office. But many of

you realize that even throughout the extended Church of God fellowships around the world—there is **no one** who has had the depth of experience I have had as one who has spoken the word of God to you. In spite of my human weaknesses, Christ has used me to teach more Bible classes than any other human being in this age. I am the *only one* who has been Deputy Chancellor of all three colleges, and was Second Vice President of the Worldwide Church of God and Ambassador College for many years. I have written literally *hundreds* of articles and conducted *hundreds* of evangelistic campaigns all over the world. The living Christ *has used me* as a human instrument to do these things. Although I seldom mention this in such detail, I do want you to realize that Christ is in charge of our lives and has guided me—as He has guided all of us—in this way, so that I can bring this kind of experience of stability to the Church, which I have sincerely tried to do now for more than *20 years* of the Global/Living Church of God Work. As most of you know, my entire



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# EDITORIAL

## WORTHY IS THE LAMB By Richard F. Ames

We are living in one of the most exciting eras of human history. Why? Because we are nearing the “end of the world” or the “end of the age” referred to by Jesus’ disciples (Matthew 24:3). God has had a master plan since “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20). The Apostle Peter writes that we were not redeemed “with corruptible things, like silver or gold... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained *before the foundation of the world*, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (vv. 18–21).

Yes, we have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ! He paid for our sins, and the sins of the world. John the Baptist proclaimed to his audience, and to the world today through the Scriptures, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). At this season of the year, we humbly appreciate our own redemption, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

All baptized members will observe Passover this year on Sunday night, March 24, 2013. We celebrate the annual festivals and worship God with a depth of thanksgiving. How deep is our thanksgiving? It depends on the depth of our repentance. The woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair **profoundly appreciated** the forgiveness afforded her. The Pharisee who observed this action judged Jesus as consorting with a sinner. So, what did Jesus teach this self-righteous man? “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but

this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (Luke 7:44–47).

### OUR REPENTANCE

How deep is your repentance? Have you ever repented to the extent that you have truly begun to understand the

sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5–6).

Have you ever repented with that same degree of humility? Have you ever “abhorred” yourself—not because of self-pity, but because you saw the reality of God’s greatness? The Apostle Paul similarly saw his human nature, which he describes as “the law of sin,” contrasted to God’s love, patience and mercy. “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

**In preparation for the Passover, we annually examine ourselves in order to see our need to change, and also to confirm our commitment to God the Father and Jesus Christ. Are we truly in the faith?**

awesome love, grace and forgiveness God has for you? God’s kindnesses and goodness lead us to repentance: “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). The woman who washed Jesus’ feet profoundly understood this “for she loved much.” And as a result, Jesus told her, “Your sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:48).

Have you lived a “good” life? Many of God’s people have done so. But there is a danger in this. If you have lived a “good” life, you may not yet have faced clearly the reality of your human nature. You may not have begun to come close to the depth of repentance expressed by Job, or by the Apostle Paul.

After the younger man, Elihu, had focused on Job’s real problem (Job 32–37), and after the Eternal powerfully challenged Job (chapters 38–41), Job finally saw his own human nature, as contrasted with God’s power, eternity and greatness. What, then, was Job’s response? “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye

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!” (Romans 7:23–25). Paul acknowledges his weakness, and continues, “So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (v. 25).

Have you ever acknowledged your human condition by expressing to God something similar to what the Apostle Paul wrote? “O wretched man [or woman] that I am!” Such repentance is a strong foundation for a commitment to obey God and faithfully serve Him.

In preparation for the Passover, we annually examine ourselves in order to see our need to change, and also to confirm our commitment to God the Father and Jesus Christ. Are we truly in the faith? “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Our future—and our eternity—are at issue. We must soberly examine the depth of our dedication and our closeness to the Father and to our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. “Test yourselves. Do you not know



yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified” (vv. 5–6).

How do we know whether or not Christ is living His life in us? “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. *By this we know* that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit” (1 John 4:12–13).

### REMEMBERING THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

In addition to self-examination, we should reflect on the many scriptures emphasizing Christ’s sacrifice. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Romans 5:8–9). Notice that God loved us *before we were converted*—“while we were still sinners.”

Now God has called us to become kings and priests in His coming Kingdom. Along with that calling, He reminds us of the blood of the Lamb: “To Him who loved us and **washed us from our sins in His own blood**, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:5–6). Notice again in “the song of the saints” that we must acknowledge Christ’s sacrifice! “And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God *by Your blood* out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9–10).

God has redeemed us by the most priceless gift in the universe—not by silver or gold, but “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). How deeply do you appreciate that sacrifice, that redemption price?

Many of us have been emotionally moved by the music of Handel’s *Messiah*.

The Hallelujah Chorus is probably the best-known part of Handel’s work, but my wife and I have been moved as the lengthy oratorio crescendos to its concluding selection: “Worthy Is the Lamb.” The last three-and-a-half minutes gloriously present the final “Amen” to this inspiring oratorio, and my wife and I are often brought to tears when we hear it.

Scripture tells us that the heavenly hosts—millions of angels, the 24 elders, and the living creatures—proclaim for all ages this powerful truth of Christ’s worthiness. The Apostle John writes: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’” (Revelation 5:11–12).

### PREPARE FOR THE PASSOVER

The Lamb, Jesus Christ, was slain for you and for me! We will observe that awesome event at the Passover, an annual memorial of His sacrifice for us and for the world. God gives us the privilege of witnessing the heavenly acclamation in the Scriptures: “And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!’ Then the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever” (Revelation 5:13–14).

As Christians, we are to rejoice always in God’s awesome love for the Church and the world (John 3:16). God loved us when we were His enemies. Now that we have been reconciled through Christ’s shed blood, our loving, living Savior and High Priest (Hebrews 7:24–27) is actively saving us: “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having

been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:10–11).

Brethren, we must continually examine ourselves and our relationship to God the Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ. We must live with alertness and awareness of God’s willingness to guide us continually. “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). As we strive to live in the light of truth and reject the darkness of the world’s ways, we will constantly experience loving fellowship with our Father and Savior.

Christ will soon be returning to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Savior of the World (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14). The Church has a special relationship with our Lord—He gave Himself for “her,” the Church: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25–27). We look forward to the day when the Church will marry the Lamb: “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).

As you prepare for the Passover, be sure to meditate deeply on your relationship with your Savior. Examine yourself whether you really are “in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Rededicate your life to His service and rejoice in the glory we will share with Him and with our Father in heaven. “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). May we all praise our Lord and love Him forever. For “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” ■



# FOOTWASHING

By Dexter B. Wakefield

**O**n the evening of Sunday, March 24, 2013, the Church of God will observe the Passover, and we will be doing it at the same time and in the same basic manner that it was done in the Church of God in the 1st century AD. As a matter of history, the Roman Church in the 2nd and 3rd centuries called our brethren that did this “Quartodecimans”—meaning literally “fourteenthers” because they kept the Passover on the 14th day of the first lunar month, instead of keeping Easter. They kept it—and we keep it—at the same time and in the same manner that Jesus did and that Paul taught both the Jewish and the *Gentile* believers to observe it.

Passover evening seems different from all other Church gatherings. There is a strong feeling of love and unity, but in a different mood. The brethren seem somber, quiet and reflective. There is a sense of the *enormity* of what took place long ago—and a sense of the *profound importance* of the acts we do that evening beginning the 14th of Nisan. We need to approach the Passover in the right frame of mind—reflecting Jesus’ attitude of humility, love and obedience.

In the evening before his death, Jesus taught His Church to perform the *foot washing*. When we perform the foot washing ceremony, there are two things that we need to be very aware of as we perform them. We **wash** and we **are washed**. And both have important meanings—so important in fact that God has us *act out these meanings* as a constant, annual reminder. Let’s go over these things in this article, so we can think about them as we do them on Passover.

## PUTTING ON CHRIST

In the Apostle John’s account of the Passover service before Jesus’ crucifixion, Jesus knelt down and washed the disciples’ feet. Then He gave them important instructions, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you *an example*, that you should do as I have done to you.... If you know these things, *blessed are you if you do them*” (John 13:12–17).

Jesus made it very clear that we are to imitate His example in the foot washing—not only in the act itself,

but in its meaning also. In an important sense, Jesus did something in addition to the bread, wine and foot washing. He demonstrated... *humility, love and obedience*. The apostle Paul explained, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ **have put on Christ**” (Galatians 3:27).

When we are baptized and cleansed of our sins, we go down into a watery grave and rise out of it picturing Christ’s death and resurrection. We are entering a new life in Christ. “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

We are to “put on” something. Paul taught, “Do not lie to one another, since you have *put off the old man* with his deeds, and have *put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge* according to the image of Him [Christ] who created him” (Colossians 3:9–10).

What knowledge about Christ? Here are three of the things that God’s word mentions that we should know.

- **Humility.** What are we to “put on” and be “clothed with?” The apostle Peter admonished the Churches, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. 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” (1 Peter 5:5).

- **Love.** Here is something else we are to “put on.” Paul said, “But above all these things **put on love**, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:14). Christ set a very high standard of love when He said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; *as I have loved you*, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). How much did He love us? He said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). Christ died for us and His sacrifice makes possible the forgiveness of our sins. But we do not need to die for our friends to be the sacrifice that God wants. Paul explained, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies *a living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

- **Obedience.** Our love and humility lead us to obedience to God *in Christ’s example*. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made



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Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled Himself and became obedient** to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5–8).

### CHRIST’S EXAMPLE

“For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). At the footwashing, Christ set an example that we are to follow. So... *we wash each other’s feet at the Passover*. When **we wash** that person’s feet on Passover, we are *putting on Christ’s role—His humility, his love and His obedience*. **We need to think about that as we wash one another’s feet.**

At the Passover Christ observed with His disciples, He taught both them and us about the meaning of His sacrifice for us. “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many *for the remission of sins*’” (Matthew 26:27). It is through Christ’s shed blood that our sins are forgiven and we can be reconciled with the Father.

We are instructed to come to Christ in true repentance (Acts 2:37–38), and we know that we cannot truly repent of sin and break God’s commandments at the same time (1 John 3:4; Romans 3:20). Those who believe that they can are deceived. But while true repentance changes our *future* actions—it cannot change our guilty *past*. All the law-keeping and repentance we can do *in the future*—as desirable as that is—cannot change *what we did in the past*. Only one thing can remove the guilt of our past sins—the sacrifice and shed blood of Jesus Christ. That blood washes and cleanses us from the guilt of our past sins.

The Apostle John wrote, “And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who **loved us and washed us** from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5). What a great joy it is to be cleansed completely!

When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, Peter first objected, then changed his mind and asked to be completely bathed. “Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is **clean every whit**: and ye are clean, but not all” (John 13:10, KJV). When Christ washes us, we are *completely cleansed* of a guilty past, and then we have ongoing justification as we repent and forgive others (1 John 1:9–10; Matthew 6:14–15).

So when we **are washed** by someone on Passover, we are acknowledging that Christ washed us of our sins and continues to wash us of our sins. We re-assert that commitment and covenant that we have with our savior, and we do it every year as we remember Him *at Passover*. Washing of feet at any time of the year, in any other context, simply does not have the same significance.

### PREPARING FOR PASSEOVER

Footwashing is an important part of the Passover service, but there are things we should be doing *before Passover*. In other words, there are some practical ways that we can “put on Christ” in the overall season. One of the characteristics of Christ that we put on is His *selfless love for others*. John 13:1 says that “He loved them to the end.” Our love for each other needs to have that enduring quality also. But we have an adversary who injects his destructive attitudes into our Church relationships at every opportunity.

There are things in this season that we need to be especially careful about. We have to beware of a *spirit of offense* that can build up in any of us. Satan specializes in that, but God tells us how to deal with it. What is a spirit of offense? It can begin when you experience feelings like these:

“I’ve been mistreated.”

“I’ve been treated unjustly.”

“I’ve suffered unnecessarily and wrongly.”

“I am assigning blame and guilt.”

“I want justice to be done to that person.”

“I feel alienated—a barrier is between us. I feel cool towards them.”

Offenses certainly occur, and it is often not our own fault. What is important to God is *how we deal with them* when they occur. An offense is a spiritual trial for both the person who gave the offense and the person who is offended. Here are some questions we might ask ourselves when we feel offended as mentioned above:

Am I dealing with this in a spirit of humility and love... or in a worldly way?

Am I entertaining Satan’s original bad attitude—feeling unjustly treated?

Can I “put on Christ” with such a feeling? (Humility, love and obedience?)

Is my love “waxing cold” in this matter?

Is this *leaven* that I cannot rightly carry into the Passover?

As we examine ourselves in preparation for “putting on Christ” at Passover, we should remember God’s instructions in His word for dealing with offenses.

Some ministers call the following scripture “the least-practiced instruction in the Bible.” Christ said, “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15–17). When you feel offended, *go to your brother or sister* and resolve it (but not about every picky thing). If that does not work, come back with another witness. If that still does not work, take a minister along.

Someone might ask, “Well, how many times do I have to forgive this guy?” Jesus answered that question. “Then

Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’”

Jesus then proceeded to tell a parable about a man who was forgiven a large debt of ten thousand talents after begging for mercy from his master. But once he was forgiven, the man then went out and oppressed another person who owed him a much smaller debt. When his master heard of that injustice he was angry and “delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (Matthew 18:21–35).

The real question is how often would you like to be forgiven? (Most of us need at least “seventy times seven.”)

And if you have actually given offense to someone, **make a real apology**. It should not sound like, “*If anyone was adversely affected by actions that may have been taken, it is regrettable.*” Be sincere!

And remember that forgiveness can affect our salvation. “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. *But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses*” (Mark 11:25–26). That should be a sobering scripture for us all.

Be careful of the standard by which you judge. “Judge [condemn] not, that you be not judged [condemned]. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matthew 7:1–2).

In a sense, we have a measure of influence over how we are judged by God. *He judges us by the standard—and with the measure—that we judge others.* The world will be judged later, but our time is now. “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17), and most of us would like for judgment to be meted out with as small a measure as possible.

In the Church, we understand that the right actions that we commit—in *humility, love and obedience*—form the character of Christ in us. We *put Him on*—clothe ourselves with Him—and then He transforms us inwardly. This is a miraculous process caused by His Spirit dwelling in us. So, at Passover, we **wash and are washed**.

Every year, we have “dirty feet”—such as resentments, unforgiven offenses, or sins of which we need to repent. All of this is a reminder of why we came to Christ in the first place.

We saw ourselves in the mirror of His word. We truly repented of our sins. We were washed of our sins, cleansed by Christ’s shed blood and received God’s Holy Spirit. Having been cleansed and justified, we continue to put out sin from our lives. And God gives us His Spirit, which enables us to keep His law in spirit, because we now **desire** His way of life. That Spirit and our obedience transform us inwardly.

## Do Not Go Back!

The Apostle Peter gave us a vivid example. “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Peter 2:22). Some readers may be familiar with what an old-fashioned pig-sty is like. The pigs live in a small fenced-in area, which is filled with a smelly mire that results from all the mess that the pigs create there. The reeking mire is repulsive to all humans, but the pigs seem to love it and will spend their days wallowing in it. Our lives in the world must have seemed like that to God.

In Peter’s example, we can imagine a good farmer who is disgusted by the condition of a sow in his pen and decides to clean her up. But if he washes the pig while she is still in the pig-pen, she will simply roll over in the mire, rendering the good farmer’s effort futile. But we read that the sow *returned* to wallowing in the mire—so it is apparent that the farmer took her out to wash her. Merely taking her out of the mire does not make her clean—she is still filthy from the wallowing she had already done. She must be washed.

Our repentance is like that. Merely repenting of breaking God’s laws does not cleanse us of what we already did. We must be washed and cleansed by our Lord.

But in the case of the sow, she still went back, because she *liked* the mire that the farmer finds so repulsive. But what if the good farmer could somehow give the sow his own mind about the nature of the mire? Then she would look back with great distaste at the life she lived in the mire and would stay away from it in the future. She would only have to have her feet washed occasionally, and she would be “clean every whit.”

## AN ANNUAL RENEWAL

Passover is an annual remembrance and an annual renewal of our covenant with God. **We wash** (as someone who puts on Christ) and **we are washed** (by someone who puts on Christ). And then we continue to be justified and “clean every whit” in God’s sight. We are fully reconciled with Him. There are many things we can say about the Passover season—and many things we should be doing in it. But consider two important parts of the footwashing service and some practical things we should be doing in preparation for this great event. Please remember:

- What it means to “put on Christ.”
- What a true spirit of humility, love and obedience means.
- What a true attitude of service is... service in love.
- To ask whether we are carrying any offenses... leaven that needs to be put out.
- To study in your Bible the events surrounding Christ’s last Passover on earth—and, like Him, be **fully prepared** for that most meaningful night. ■



# HOW AND WHY WE DELEAVEN

By Dan Hall

Soon we will face the common challenge of removing yeast, baking soda, baking powder, leavened products, and bread crumbs from our homes. What utensils or tools do you use to delevain your home? Do you use a knife, screwdriver and vacuum cleaner?

What, specifically, will you use to clean the toaster? This repository “of all evil” sits prominently on our kitchen counters—defying our shakes and slaps and even the strokes of a toothbrush! Yes, a toothbrush! Perhaps your toaster will have 30 percent fewer cavities this year. Even the best of efforts seems to leave thousands of crumbs untouched inside this mechanical crumb scorcher.

Have you tried a hose? I have known of at least three brethren who used a garden hose! I am told it cleaned very well. But, I know of three toasters that will not work normally again!

Over time, these experiences in rooting out physical leaven impart in us wisdom and balance in God’s way. Why? Because “a good understanding have all those who do His commandments” (Psalm 111:10). While a thorough detailed cleaning is certainly a demonstration of zeal, we need not destroy our appliances, upholstery or homes. The scriptural command, during these days when we consume unleavened bread and cease from eating leavened bread, tells us that no leaven “shall be seen among you... in all your quarters (Exodus 13:7). However, while we perform our physical delevaining, we need to keep in mind God’s full purpose for these days. The substance of these days is **spiritual**. The spiritual lessons of delevaining should be our focus, while not “leaving the others undone” (Matthew 23:23).

## A SPIRITUAL FEAST

The Apostle Paul warned that in the end-time people would be self-absorbed, loving pleasures more than loving God, “having a form of godliness but *denying*

its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Timothy 3:1–5). Have the Days of Unleavened Bread become a physical drudgery for some of us—just a form and ritual practiced in the Church? What is the real emphasis of the Days of Unleavened Bread? Jesus answers this question: “But



the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24). God gave us His Feast to worship Him in spirit and in truth! The truth is that God’s Feasts are **spiritual**. But, **how** are they spiritual?

First, they are divinely revealed. Moses, speaking of this fact, stated: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things *which are revealed* belong to us and to our children *forever*, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Originally, God gave His holy Feast days to the ancient House of Israel (Exodus 12; Leviticus 23). Yet the Israelites never fully understood them. In addition to the Exodus, the Bible records four occasions where Israel kept the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (Joshua 5:10–11; 2 Chronicles 30, 35; Ezra 6:19–22). As a whole, Israel was never able to understand the “deep things of God” contained in His Feasts. They never understood God’s plan of salvation, because the Spirit of God was not made available to them. Their observance focused on the physical—similar to the

Pharisees of Christ’s day, who strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel (Matthew 23:24). Paul summarizes Israel’s understanding by stating: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3).

However, God’s Spirit-begotten children *do understand* (1 Corinthians 2:10). The Days of Unleavened Bread teach us that God can **only** form His righteousness—His character within us—if we truly hunger for it. We eat unleavened bread for seven days—picturing God’s righteousness that must come into us. Jesus said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of *this* bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:51). As God’s people, we should “feast” on Jesus Christ—the *living bread*, the Word that became flesh, and now is at the right hand of the Father. We must reaffirm our commitment to believe and obey *all* that Jesus Christ taught.

## PUT IN GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Feasting on this bread certainly includes finding the time for profound study and meditation on the “weightier matters... justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23). The purpose of such study and meditation is to become Christ-like. Jesus Christ was the perfect sacrifice, for sins. We are to become “living sacrifices,” transformed by God’s Spirit to be “God-willed” instead of self-willed. Jesus came in the form of a humble servant. We are to “let this mind” of humility and servant leadership come into us (Philippines 2:5). Christ has perfect judgment, limitless mercy, and powerful faith. We are to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior” (2 Peter 3:18). “Sin” in the form of leavened products has been

put out prior to the Days of Unleavened Bread. Though we may discover a piece of missed leavening during these days and remove it, the **real** emphasis is upon *putting in* God's righteousness! God's Feast is about *doing* God's will! (James 1:22).

Yeast spores abundantly float around in the air. They are ubiquitous. As soon as you think that your home is de-leavened, hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of them enter through the door or window. Circulating in the air, some of these spores land on the end of your nose. With yeast so pervasive, is it possible to put it all out? In most cases, it would take a miracle to attend to every nook and crack where leaven may be hiding. The knowledge of the nature of leavening reveals an important spiritual lesson regarding sin. Without God's help, we cannot save or cleanse ourselves from sin.

Apart from God, it is impossible to spiritually de-leaven our lives (Matthew 19:26). We need a powerful Savior and High Priest—Jesus Christ! The experience of preparing for the Days of Unleavened Bread teaches many such lessons. We desperately need God's help **and** His righteousness! Upon baptism, God gives us the supernatural help we need—His Holy Spirit, to daily lay aside “the sin which so easily ensnares us” (Hebrews 12:1). With God's help, we are to strive against sin—and *conquer it* (v. 4)!

### USE GOD'S SPIRIT

One purpose of the Holy Spirit is to “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). We are to use it to root out “evil thoughts” that corrupt and befoul the mind. Jesus said that it is what comes out of the heart that defiles us, not what goes into the stomach (Matthew 15:17–19). So, the *leavening* about which God is *most* interested is the leavening that breaks the **spirit** of His law, not just the letter of it.

For example, consider that Church members who are married to non-members face an interesting predicament. Their mates may want to keep toast, doughnuts or other leavened products in

the home. They may even **demand** them, or bring them into the house despite the pleadings of the Church member spouse. Is a Church member somehow less spiritual than his or her brethren because of having a mate who will not cooperate in the physical de-leavening of the home? Of course not! Even with an unconverted and uncooperative spouse, a Christian can de-leaven his or her own personal space, and can still observe the **spiritual intent** of these days—fully keeping God's Feast! God looks at our heart and intent. He sees the zeal and sincerity of the member trying to do the best he or she can. Therefore, by a submissive and obedient *attitude and intent—a willingness to obey God, doing his or her part the best that he or she can*—a Church member enters these days *unleavened*, not needing to worry about the contrary conduct of a non-member mate.

By His power, the true righteousness of God is being formed within us. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Jesus Christ imparts the living faith to love God and love our neighbors. It is this divine love that fulfills the righteous requirement of all of God's commandments and Feasts (Romans 13:8–10)! **What good would it do, if we perfectly cleaned our houses of physical leavening, yet entered the Holy Days harboring lust, resentment or bitterness?** Would we not be quenching the power of God's Spirit and His mercy—*denying the power*? Certainly! Our worship would indeed be in vain.

God's Holy Days, which are spiritually revealed, teach us to worship our Father and His Son *by the living faith of Jesus Christ* (Galatians 2:20). Living faith is backed up **by action**, because faith without works is dead (James 2:14–22). The Holy Days encourage us to think not only about love toward God, but also about love toward our neighbors. The focus is **away** from self.

### THE NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE

How did the Apostolic Church keep the Days of Unleavened Bread? The Apostle Paul's experience with the Corinthian brethren reveals the insightful answer. Gross immorality and factions permeated this congregation. Some were disgusted by the open display of adultery, while other members condoned the conduct. Such a situation, if allowed to continue, would have divided, corrupted and destroyed the entire congregation. So, Paul addressed these “puffed up” attitudes: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of

malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

From the context, it appears that the Days of Unleavened Bread had begun. The physical de-leavening had been completed. Yet Paul

corrected them, showing the need to put sin out of their lives **and out of God's House**. Notice another vital lesson. Not only should we remove physical leavening from our homes, but the *emphasis is also on the spiritual meaning*. We are commanded **not** to bring or allow *spiritual sins* into the House of God, **which is the Church!**

In addition, Paul describes **spiritual** unleavened bread as “sincerity and truth.” What does this mean? Paul explains: “Purge out the old leaven, that **you** may be a new lump, since **you** truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (v. 7).

True Christians are described as a “new lump” of unleavened bread. Jesus Christ, the Living Bread, is living within us by God's Spirit. Therefore, we should walk in “newness of life,”



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Most of us are familiar with Acts 2:38, which records the Apostle Peter saying, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” What a tremendous and unfathomable expression of love by the Creator God that all of our past sins can be *forgiven* if we truly repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. But, what about our sins *after* baptism? How can our sins *after* baptism be forgiven?

Romans 3:23 proclaims “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” and Romans 6:23 reveals that “the wages of sin is death.” Do these warnings only apply “pre-Acts 2:38” for those who are not yet converted? Or, do Christians sometimes sin, even *after* baptism and conversion? Of course, Christians sincerely strive to overcome sin, and should not be “practicing sin”—continuing in any patterns of willfully disobedient conduct. Naturally, one hopes that sincere Christians are not committing the types of obvious and egregious sins that they may have committed before conversion—but, as we will see, sin is sin—and, as we know, sin is worthy of death (Romans 6:23).

The reality is that, other than and apart from Jesus Christ, all human beings will sin from time to time. The Apostle Paul makes this point in Romans 7:20–22. He notes that *after* conversion and receiving the Holy Spirit, he continued from time to time to do what he did not want to do, because “sin” dwelt in him. Furthermore, Jesus Christ revealed that not only did He *not* come to destroy (or do away with) the Law or the Prophets, but rather He came to obey fully, or to fulfill (cause to abound) God’s law (Matthew 5:17). Christ stated that until the heaven and the earth pass away from existence, not one jot or one tittle of God’s law would pass away (v. 18). Then, He stated, “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (v. 19). Throughout His life, Christ demonstrated perfect obedience to *all* of God’s law, and clearly taught that God’s law has *not* passed away!

Jesus went on to expound on the *spiritual* nature of God’s law; that to be angry without cause is to murder (v. 21), that to lust is to commit adultery (v. 28), that Christians are not to swear (vv. 34–37), that Christians are to practice mercy, forgiveness, charity and service *without limit* (vv. 38–41), and that Christians must love their enemies (v. 44). In this passage, Jesus warns that we are not to break even *the least* of God’s commandments, and

He concludes by stating that we are to “be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (v. 48)! This is the high level to which a Christian has been called.

Do we fall short from time to time, in however small a way? Of course we do. But notice what the brother of Jesus points out about even being guilty in a “small” point of God’s law: “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in *one point*, he is *guilty of all*” (James 2:10). None have been perfect since baptism in every action and in every thought.

If, as with Paul, there is sin *after* baptism—even in our thoughts—are we then doomed to eternal death (Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15)? Or, as many Protestant teachers assert, are we somehow “once saved, always saved” regardless of how much we sin and regardless of our attitude toward sin? Hebrews 6:4–6 is one of many scriptures explaining that if a converted Christian “falls away” and turns to practicing sin after receipt of the Holy Spirit, then “it is impossible... 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). Clearly, “once saved, always saved” is a false teaching. For more on the false “once saved, always saved” doctrine, please see Mr. Richard Ames’ *Tomorrow’s World* articles “Obedience vs. Grace?” (July-August 2011) and “Have You Committed the Unpardonable Sin?” (January-February 2012). You may also want to read the brief *Tomorrow’s World* web commentary titled, “Of Grace and Obedience.”

So, then, how can our sins *after* baptism and *after* conversion be forgiven? The encouraging truth is that Christ—“the Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls” (1 Peter 2:25)—can lead and *restore* His sometimes wayward, but *repentant* sheep. A powerful illustration of this principle is found in Psalm 51, one of the psalms of ancient King David.

### THE DEPRAVITY OF SIN

Psalm 51 is one of six psalms commonly known as *penitential* psalms (the others are Psalm 6, 38, 102, 130 and 143), which David wrote under inspiration of God through the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). Not only is Psalm 51 a thoughtful study of the nature and effects of sin after conversion, but it also reveals four steps from sin to *righteousness*, from iniquity and separation from God to forgiveness and intimacy *with God*, from spiritual dirtiness to *spiritual cleanliness*.





In Psalm 51, David confronts the sins he committed relating to the Bathsheba incident. Remember that this incident occurred long after God's Spirit came upon David, long after "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13).

In this psalm, David acknowledges the seriousness of the sins he had committed, and he fully repents of them. It is important to note that his sins were multiple, and went far beyond lust and adultery. His sins included hatred and murder; coveting and stealing, malice and lying and putting his own desires before his fear of God. As James wrote, he who breaks one of God's laws is guilty of all (cf. James 2:10). Sin is ugly, and David's sins were many.

Three different Old Testament Hebrew words are commonly translated into English as "sin," and in Psalm 51 David uses each of these three words meaningfully. In Psalm 51, David fully prostrates himself before God in his guiltiness, accepts full responsibility, and does not in any way attempt to minimize how very serious his sins were. In verse 1, David labels his sins (plural) relating to the Bathsheba incident as *transgressions*, and uses the Hebrew word *pasha'* which implies *willful defiance* against God. How terrible is the reality of David's sin, and how truthful David was in his confession to God! *Pasha'* is used again in verses 3 and 13, and reminds the reader that David's sins were his fault. He was willfully defiant against his God and his Lord.

Verse 2 introduces David's use of the Hebrew word *hatta'*, which is repeated in verses 3, 4, 5, 9 and 13. *Hatta'* conveys an offense or a crime. *Hatta'* is sin or crime against authority. As Israel's king, David ruled with authority, but he was also under God's authority—as are all kings and queens, presidents and governors, fathers and mothers and every person on the earth (Romans 13:1; 1 Timothy 6:15). When David sinned against Bathsheba, her husband and her family, he also sinned against God's authority. In Psalm 51, David first acknowledges that his sin was *willful defiance* (*pasha'*) against God, and he then acknowledges that He sinned against (*hatta'*) the One who has authority over all.

Also introduced in verse 2, then repeated in verses 5 and 9, is the Hebrew word *avon*, which conveys religious iniquity and perversity against God. Not only were David's multiple sins willful and defiant, and not only were they crimes against God's authority, but they were also wrong and perverse.

Throughout the pages of Scripture, it is difficult to find a passage that confesses so severely—and so succinctly—the terrible and utter depravity of sin, as David does in Psalm 51.

### REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

Having committed the *numerous sins* associated with the Bathsheba incident, David records in Psalm 51 the path from sin to forgiveness—from being *in danger* of losing the Holy Spirit (v. 11) to becoming again clean, restored, and *intimately close* to God (vv. 10–19). While we may consider that we are not guilty of sins as serious as those King David committed, we

must remember James' warning that those who break even one point in God's law are guilty of breaking it all. Also, consider Jesus Christ's plain instruction that to transgress even in our thoughts is to be guilty of breaking the Ten Commandments (Matthew 5). Even if we want to try to minimize our sins as just a "little" lack of forgiveness—or a "little" lying, a "little" coveting, a "little" lust, a "little" pride, a "little" anger, a "little" murmuring... or just breaking God's Sabbath "a little bit," or just cutting corners on our tithes "a little"—then, according to Scripture, we are still sinners worthy of death.

While the steps outlined in Psalm 51 could be categorized differently, the following enumeration should be helpful in explaining the path from sin to forgiveness:

**AWARENESS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT:** In verses 1–3, David begins his psalm of penitence by *acknowledging* his sins, and by accepting how egregious his sins were before God. Awareness and acknowledgement before God of one's sins is the *first step* toward repentance and forgiveness. Also required, and supporting this entire process, is a deep, underlying faith in God's mercy and *lovingkindness* (Psalm 51:1). To help understand the profundity of God's *lovingkindness* toward those whom He is intimately working with, it is helpful to briefly explain the Hebrew word that David chose to use in Psalm 51:1. The love or *lovingkindness* that God has toward those whom He has entered into a *covenantal relationship* with is *not* simply the human love, or even the divine love expressed by the Hebrew word *ahab* which one can have for people or things, such as a love of God's law (Psalms 119:165), a love of wisdom (Proverbs 4:6), or even God's love toward people (Psalms 146:8, Proverbs 3:12). It is instead, the existence of a purposeful, loving, covenantal relationship between God and that individual. It is *lovingkindness* [KJV, NKJV], *great compassion* [NLT, NIV], *abundant mercy* [RSV], or *vast pity* [Moffatt], which God expresses toward those whom He has entered into a covenantal relationship with. It is the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is a purposeful, royal, *covenantal love* such as what God showed toward Abraham (Micah 7:20) and Joseph (Genesis 39:21), and which he will faithfully manifest toward *all those* who love Him and keep His commandments (Deuteronomy 5:10; 7:9). This conviction in God's mercy and love is threaded throughout each of the following steps.

**GODLY SORROW AND CONFESSION:** After acknowledging his sins in verses 4–6, David then confesses them to God, admitting that "against You, You only, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight" (v. 4). Clearly, David had also committed terrible crimes against Uriah and Bathsheba, their families, and against the very society over which he was ruler. David understood this, but he also recognized the more profound truth that his sins were, in fact: a) *pasha'* (willful defiance against God), b) *hatta'* (crimes against God's sovereign authority), and c) *avon* (spiritual iniquity and perversion against God). Devastated by the weight and the odiousness of his actions *against his Creator and his Lord*, David expresses more than just human sorrow. With godly sorrow, he confesses his guilt to God, and

expresses faith that in God's "lovingkindness" (cf. v. 1) he will be forgiven.

**SEEK FORGIVENESS:** Beginning in verse 7, David turns to God seeking to be purged, washed and cleaned. He understands and has deep faith that although he has transgressed and done "evil" in God's sight (Psalm 51:4), the Creator God is nonetheless *loving toward the repentant*. It is God who must grant mercy (v. 1), and it is only God who is capable of "blotting out" (v. 1) our sins. It is God who must "wash" (v. 2) us. To be "purged" by God (v. 7) may require momentary suffering, but it is nonetheless for our good, to make us *clean* again before God.

In verses 7–12, David turns his focus toward God as the One who forgives, washes, cleans, "blots out" all iniquities and "creates" a clean heart. The word "create" in verse 10 is the Hebrew word, *bara'*—a word reserved to describe God's creative ability. It is God who in Genesis 1:1 created (*bara'*) the universe from nothing. It is God who in Genesis 1:21 created (*bara'*) the great whales and all living creatures. It is God who created (*bara'*) man and woman (Genesis 5:2). It is God *and only God* who can create (*bara'*) in the repentant sinner a renewed and "clean heart" and a renewed "steadfast spirit" (v. 10). Our God is a Creator God, creating the universe from nothing *and creating in us a clean heart and a renewed spirit if we are repentant!*

### RESTORATION

Verse 10, the middle of Psalm 51, marks an important transition point. With *forgiveness*, David begins to be *restored*. It is very instructive to note that the name "God" only appears *once* from verses 1–9, while David is acknowledging, confessing and seeking forgiveness for his sins. In the first half of Psalm 51, David was spiritually *far away* from God. Likewise, when *we* sin, we remove ourselves *away* from God. The Lord is our Helper, and *He* will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:4–5), but if we are on the path of sin and transgression and do not truly repent, *we* can leave and forsake Him (Hebrews 6:4–6). The end of this unrepentant path is *death*, as Ezekiel 18:4 and 20 make clear: "The soul who sins shall die." And, as the Apostle John warns, "anyone not found written in the Book of Life was [will be] cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). So, when he was guilty of sin, before his deep personal *repentance* and receiving *forgiveness* from God, not only was David in jeopardy of losing the Holy Spirit (cf. Psalm 51:11), but—like anyone who sins and *does not* repent—he was *removing himself* from an intimate relationship with his Creator, and risking the eternal consequences of that decision!

Beginning in verse 10, the Psalm transitions. It is *encouraging* to note that upon receiving forgiveness, David becomes quickly and intimately close to God once again. With this transition, the name "God" then appears *five times* in the last half of the Psalm. With this transition, David becomes *cleansed* (v. 10), *not cast away* (v. 11) and is finally *restored*

to God's *presence* (v. 12). In the second half of the Psalm, David expresses his *restored relationship* with God. Because of David's deep, sincere repentance—and because of God's mercy, grace and lovingkindness—the compassionate Creator God has *forgiven* the numerous sins and transgressions that David had committed. Can we be as trusting of God's grace and mercy?

David begins his Psalm by pleading *in faith*: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness [*hesed*]; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies" (Psalm 51:1). Do we fully understand and fully appreciate that God is a *merciful* God? Much of professing Christianity has painted Jesus as being the "nice" Son, and the Father as being the "harsh" God. But this is an evil lie! Scripture reveals that *God is love* (1 John 4:8)—and, as David understood, God is also *merciful* (Psalm 51:1). Jesus Christ and the Father are *one* in nature, thought and approach (cf. John 10:30)—*both* loving and merciful. The Apostle Paul clearly revealed *the Father's* nature when he wrote: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). The Apostle Peter wrote, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

The above three steps, as found in Psalm 51, illustrate that God is loving and forgiving toward those who acknowledge their sins, are truly repentant, confess to God their sins with godly sorrow, and faithfully seek forgiveness. These three steps lead to the fourth vital step toward restoration, as outlined in Psalm 51.

**COMMITMENT AND ACTION:** David makes the commitment that, upon being restored, he will live the life of a bondservant to God. He will seek God's will and teach God's laws (v. 13). David praises God with a "broken spirit" and a "broken and contrite heart" because, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (v. 17). Finally, David acknowledges God as the Good King, under whom he will strive to rule as a good king—as God's bondservant (vv. 18–19).

After deep repentance, David looks forward to a life of service and of obedience to God. He would not live a perfect life every day until his death—no one does. Yet we see that David bitterly and deeply repented of his sins, he changed his course, he turned back to God in obedience—and he committed himself to God, just as *we* can be restored to God's presence when we "fall short."

Like David, true Christians must renew their commitment to be "bondservants of Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:1, James 1:1, Jude 1:1). David would crucify his carnal desires and live a new life, with God's Spirit in him (1 Peter 1:11; Galatians 2:20). We as Christians must also

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# Understanding the “Night To Be Much Observed”

By John H. Ogwyn (1949–2005)

What is the real significance of the occasion observed by the Church of God at the beginning of the first Holy Day of the Days of Unleavened Bread? Traditionally, brethren have gathered in small groups for a festive occasion of food and fellowship that evening. Why? We do not begin any of the other Holy Days, such as Pentecost or Trumpets, in this same way.

Do you clearly understand why this particular night is set aside for such special note—why it is a night to be *much observed*? And do you understand how we should actually observe it? What does the Bible say about this important topic?

We begin the Days of Unleavened Bread with a special night on the basis of instructions given in Exodus: “And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night of solemn observance [“night to be much observed,” KJV] to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations” (Exodus 12:41–42).

Some have claimed that the night spoken of here is actually the night of the first Passover. Is this really the case? God’s Church observes the Passover on the evening that *begins* Abib 14. Twenty-four hours later, while we are gathered for the Night To Be Much Observed, today’s Jews are gathering for a festive meal with family and close friends in observance of what they call “the Passover.” This has caused some to conclude wrongly that the Church today keeps the Passover a day earlier than what God established in the book of Exodus.

What was Christ’s example? Was the last supper of Jesus and His disciples actually the Passover, or simply a new observance done a day earlier? In order to properly understand what the Night To Be Much Observed is all about, it is necessary that we grasp its relationship with the Passover.

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF PASSOVER AND UNLEAVENED BREAD

The distinction between Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is clearly stated in Leviticus: “On the

WAS THE LAST SUPPER OF JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES ACTUALLY THE PASSOVER, OR SIMPLY A NEW OBSERVANCE DONE A DAY EARLIER? IN ORDER TO PROPERLY UNDERSTAND WHAT THE NIGHT TO BE MUCH OBSERVED IS ALL ABOUT, IT IS NECESSARY THAT WE GRASP ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PASSOVER.

fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD’s Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread” (Leviticus 23:5–6). Before we examine the timing differences in detail, notice first the difference in symbolism.

The Passover represents God’s redemption of His people. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and the Creator God had sent Moses to Pharaoh with a message to let them go that they might serve Him. Pharaoh refused to heed God’s demand and, over a period of time, plague after plague was poured out on this rebellious king and his people. The final plague that God intended to bring upon the Egyptians was the death of the firstborn. God instructed the Israelites

to make special preparations that would allow them to escape this terrible plague. Each family was to select a lamb on the tenth day of the first month, and save it until the fourteenth. During the period of twilight on the fourteenth they were to kill and roast the lamb, first having drained the blood into a container. The blood of the slaughtered lamb was to be used to mark the doorposts and lintels of their homes. That night they were to remain inside their homes until the morning (Exodus 12:22) and eat the roast lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Moses told the Israelites that, at midnight, God would send “the destroyer” (v. 23) through the land to strike dead the firstborn in every house that did not have the blood of the lamb on the doorpost.

This represents the first part of God’s great redemptive plan. The Passover reminds us that God commends His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Jesus Christ came as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). The Apostle Paul explained: “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

However, we must remember that the Passover is the *starting point*—not the conclusion—of the plan. On the night of the Passover, ancient Israel received an exemption from the death penalty, setting the stage for one of history’s greatest and most dramatic events: the Exodus from Egypt. Their deliverance typifies the way in which Christians are justified and made innocent before God. First, we require God’s grace, given through God the Father’s gift of His only begotten Son, who died in our stead and paid sin’s penalty on our behalf (John 3:16; Romans 3:24–25). Second, we must *respond* to God’s grace with faith and repentance (Romans 5:1–2;



Acts 3:19). Repentance—a turning away from sin and a turning toward God—flows from faith. The Israelites of old did not receive an exemption from death so that they could remain as slaves in Egypt, any more than we receive God's grace extended to us in His Son's sacrifice so that we might remain slaves to sin.

The original seven days of unleavened bread were the week of the Exodus, beginning when Israel started out of Egypt “with boldness” (Numbers 33:3) or “with a high hand” (KJV) and concluding when they crossed the Red Sea, leaving Egyptian slavery behind. **When we celebrate the Days of Unleavened Bread, we are celebrating God's deliverance of His people from slavery.** Passover represents our redemption from death through the sacrifice of Christ, and Unleavened Bread reminds us that God will completely deliver us from the bondage of sin if we will respond to His grace by following where He leads. This must be our response to the grace that God freely extends. Even though Israel was spared the wrath of the Eternal on the night of the Passover, any who had refused to follow God's lead would have remained behind in Egypt as Pharaoh's slaves.

Those who confuse the Passover and Unleavened Bread festivals lose sight of the fact that two distinct events are to be noted by God's people. The first is our redemption from death, and the second is our deliverance from the bondage of sin. They are inexorably linked, yet also distinct and separate.

### THE TIMING EXAMINED

Over the years, some have wondered if the first Passover was also the night that the Exodus began. If that were true, that Passover would have had to be observed on the evening that was the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth. Simply put, does the phrase “at even” (KJV) or “twilight” (NKJV) refer to the end of the day or the beginning of the day? The Bible makes the answer quite clear. Note that Exodus 12:6 states: “And ye shall keep it [the lamb] until the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole

assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at dusk” (JPS version). The Hebrew phrase translated “at dusk” in the JPS and “at even” in the KJV would be literally translated “between the two evenings.” This phrase is used several times in the Old Testament and these various usages show what it properly means.

Dusk, or the period between sunset and total darkness, is the proper meaning of “between the two evenings,” later Jewish tradition notwithstanding. Defining this as the afternoon period between noon and sunset was simply an attempt by the Pharisees to justify their tradition of a mid-afternoon Passover sacrifice and to read it back into the text. As Christ pointed out on various occasions, they gave their tradition more weight than the plain text of Scripture.

The Hebrew word normally translated “evening” is *ereb*, and refers to the period that begins with sunset. This is made clear in verses such as Leviticus 22:6–7 and Joshua 8:29 where evening [*ereb*] is equated with sunset and clearly marks the end of the old day and the beginning point for the new. The term used in Exodus 12:6, *beyn ha'arbayim*, is only used a few places in the Old Testament. In addition to describing the time when the Passover was to be killed, it is also used to describe the time when the Israelites could slaughter and prepare the quail in Exodus 16:12 and the time when the priests were to light the lamps in the tabernacle in Exodus 30:8. It clearly makes sense that the lamps would be lit at dusk (after sunset, but before it became really dark). This account regarding the quail, examined closely, explains much.

Exodus 16 explains that on the fifteenth day of the second month the Israelites began to complain about food and declared that they were going to starve. This was clearly a Sabbath, because God promised them manna the next morning and gave it to them on six consecutive days. On the seventh day, God's Sabbath, they received none.

Now notice the giving of the quail. This was sent the evening before the first manna came. They received the quail at dusk (v. 12, JPS). Do you understand

the significance of this statement? This clearly shows that dusk represented the **beginning** of the first day of the week, *not* the last portion of the Sabbath. God did not want the Israelites gathering and preparing their food on the Sabbath (cf. vv. 22–23). This miracle of the quail represented the beginning of God's miraculous demonstration of which day is the Sabbath.

Now consider the implications of this for the timing of Passover. Exodus 16 shows that the period of dusk was the beginning of the first day of the week, therefore the dusk mentioned in Exodus 12 also means **the beginning** of the fourteenth day of the first month, *not its end*.

Days begin and end at sunset, *not* at total darkness which comes an hour or so later. *Ereb*, referring to sunset, means the end of the old day and *beyn ha'arbayim* (“dusk” or literally “between the two evenings”) always means the beginning of the new day, as Exodus 16 shows.

Notice also that several other points help to prove the timing of the Passover. First, consider the origin of the name of the festival itself. Exodus 12:27 shows that the name came because God “passed over” the houses of the children of Israel. The slaughter of the lamb, placing the blood on the door post, roasting and eating the lamb, and the “destroyer” passing over (v. 23), all came within about a six-hour period and must have all occurred on Abib 14, the only day ever identified in Scripture as the LORD's Passover (Leviticus 23:5).

In Numbers 28 and 29 we find a detailed list of sacrifices offered in the tabernacle, covering the morning and evening sacrifices and the sacrifices for the weekly Sabbath, for the first day of the month (the new moon) and for each festival day. One very interesting point is that the fourteenth day of the first month is clearly identified as the Passover, and differentiated from the fifteenth—which is designated as the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Numbers 28:16–17). However, unlike *all the other* days mentioned in these two chapters, there is *no* special temple sacrifice designated for the Passover. Of all the festive occasions,

the Passover alone was a household-centered ceremony rather than a temple ceremony. Notice also that the temple sacrifices offered on Abib 15 were repeated throughout the entire seven-day period, clearly delineating Abib 15 and the six following days as the same festival, distinct from the festival on Abib 14.

In the New Testament, the gospel accounts repeatedly call Jesus' final meal with His disciples "the Passover." The disciples asked, "Where shall we eat the Passover?" and we are clearly told that the disciples then "prepared the Passover" (Matthew 26:17–19). There is no indication that they were surprised at the timing of the meal, or that it differed from the Passover to which they were accustomed.

Further, Christ was our Passover, sacrificed for us. The symbolism only fits when we understand that Christ's introduction of the new symbols as a memorial, His arrest and scourging, as well as His crucifixion and death all occurred on the fourteenth day of the first month, the day called in various Old Testament scriptures "the LORD'S Passover." By the sunset that began Abib 15, Jesus was dead and buried, and all of the Passover symbolism had been concluded. There was clearly no part of the New Testament fulfillment of the Passover that happened after sunset on Abib 14. Thus, the period of dusk that began Abib 15 saw Jesus asleep in the grave, and saw completed all the fulfillment of the Passover symbolism.

### RESOLVING A DIFFICULTY

Some have wrongly thought that Deuteronomy 16:1–8 shows the night of the Passover and the first night of Unleavened Bread as one and the same. Upon careful examination, however, we will see that these verses explain something very different.

First, we should remember that the Torah was occasionally edited, to make its terminology "up to date," all the way down to the days of Ezra. A classic example is found in Genesis 14:14, which says that Abram pursued "as far as Dan" the kings that had looted Sodom

and taken Lot and his family captive. While the location of Abram's pursuit was known in later Israelite history as "Dan," it was not known by that name in Moses' lifetime—and certainly not in the days of Abraham! Dan was Abraham's great-grandson. Judges 18:29 makes clear that this city, known earlier as Laish, had its name changed to Dan in the days of the judges, long after the deaths of Moses and Joshua. Some later editor, possibly Ezra, substituted "Dan" for the earlier place name, so that readers in his current generation would understand where the ancient battle took place.

In later usage, the Israelites had come to use the term "Passover" to refer to the entire eight-day period of Passover and Unleavened Bread, just as we in the Church of God commonly say "the Feast" when describing the eight-day period of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Ezekiel 45:21 and Luke 2:41–43 are two examples of this "inclusive" use of the term "Passover." Deuteronomy 16 is using "the Passover" in this inclusive sense when describing the Festival of Unleavened Bread. In fact, the whole theme of Deuteronomy 16 is of the three "pilgrim festivals." Further, note that Deuteronomy 16:1 emphasizes God's deliverance, and the night He brought Israel out of Egypt—not the "destroyer" passing over homes marked by the blood of the lamb.

The *Jewish Publication Society (JPS)* translation helps clarify the proper sense of the second verse: "And thou shalt sacrifice the passover-offering unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd in the place which the LORD shall choose to cause His name to dwell there" (v. 2). What were these Passover offerings "of flock *and* herd"? Exodus 12:5 makes plain that the Passover meal celebrated at the beginning of Abib 14 must be a yearling lamb, taken "from the sheep or from the goats." It was not permissible to use a cow or an ox taken from the "herd." Neither was it permissible to cook it any way except dry roasting (Exodus 12:8–9). Yet Deuteronomy 16:2 plainly refers to an offering "of flock *and* herd." The Hebrew word for "herd" is *bakar*, and is

used frequently in the Old Testament, but only to refer to cattle or oxen. It can only refer to beef—not to lamb. As such, Deuteronomy 16:2 cannot refer simply to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb.

How was that Passover lamb to be prepared? It was to be roasted. Notice in 2 Chronicles 35 an account similar to Deuteronomy 16. While giving "Passover offerings" in the number of 30,000 lambs and young goats, Josiah also gave 3,000 cattle (2 Chronicles 35:7). What was done with these offerings? They "roasted the Passover offerings with fire *according to the ordinance* [Exodus 12]; but the other holy offerings they boiled in pots, in caldrons, and in pans" (v. 13).

Clearly, Deuteronomy 16:2 must be using the term "Passover offering" to describe offerings made at the temple to begin the Days of Unleavened Bread—the "Passover season" in the broadest sense. Thus can the instructions of Deuteronomy 16 be reconciled with those of Exodus 12.

### A "NIGHT TO BE MUCH OBSERVED"

In Exodus 12:42, we are instructed to keep a "night of solemn observance" to the Eternal. In the KJV, that phrase is translated as "night to be much observed." This verse is the only place in the entire Old Testament where the Hebrew word *shamarim* is used. *Shamarim* is the plural form of *shamar*, a word frequently used in the Old Testament and generally translated as "observe" or "keep." The plural form of a word is often used in Hebrew to denote the superlative (i.e., "Holy of Holies" or "Song of Songs"). This is a night of *special* keeping or observation. It represented the beginning of one of the most dramatic events in God's redemptive plan—the Exodus.

On the night when the "destroyer" passed through the land, the Israelites had been instructed to remain in their homes **until the morning** (Exodus 12:22). Pharaoh arose in the night, after the midnight slaying of the firstborn, and

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# Memory, Faith and Belief

By Gerald Weston

The ability to remember is a wonderful gift for both man and beast. Some animals are very difficult to trap if they have experienced a close call in the past, and human memory is essential to any kind of success in life. You are reading and understanding these words because God gave you the ability to remember.

But memorization has a downside. Many North American Sunday afternoon “couch potatoes” can tell you that John 3:16 is the verse citation displayed in the stands behind the end zone whenever a field goal is attempted, behind home plate during the World Series, or behind the goal of a televised basketball game. That fellow with the sign seems to be everywhere—but most cannot tell you what the verse says!

Some, however, go beyond remembering the sign. They can actually quote this “golden verse” verbatim, because they have heard it repeated enough times that it has somehow lodged in their brains. But can they explain in detail the meaning of John 3:16? Do they understand it in the context of the rest of the Bible?

The problem with memorization is that, once we learn something, our brains stash it away and concentrate on something new. We can pull up that piece of information and recite it, but our “thinking cap” has generally moved on to the next challenge. Such is the case with John 3:16.

In case your memory fails you, here is what it says: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” If you hear it often enough it will stick, but what does it mean, especially the part that says, “whoever believes in Him”?

Sadly, many people sincerely believe that all one has to do is “believe on Jesus” to be saved. Many professing Christians have the mistaken idea that “believing on Jesus” requires no other action on their part—that He has “done it all” for us, and that all we must do is profess Him. But notice Jesus’ own words in His unmistakably clear statement: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21–23).

Similarly, how can we account for these words of Jesus Christ: “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46)? After making that statement, Jesus gave the parable contrasting one person who “hears My

sayings and does them” with another who “heard and did nothing.” The first is like a man who builds his house by digging down to bedrock to lay the foundation. The latter is like a man who builds his house on the earth without a foundation (Luke 6:47–49). You probably already know what happens to the two houses when the heavy rains come. Only one is left standing—and it is not the one lacking a foundation!

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BELIEF



Jesus Himself tells us that we must not only hear His sayings—we must do them (v. 47)! He expects a personal response on our part to His sacrifice. Is that response accomplished by simply believing in Him? The answer is “yes, or no”—depending on how you understand belief. For sure, belief is an absolutely essential foundation if we hope to be given eternal life. “I am the resurrection and the life. He who

believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25–26).

Belief in His name is required to become a child of God. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). And: “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

The Apostle Paul always seemed to be in some kind of trouble—and it was no different at Philippi. There, Paul and his companion Silas found themselves in jail, but God miraculously freed them. The distraught jailer, fearing his fate for having them escape, was ready to take his life when Paul stopped him. We do not know all that occurred that night, or what had occurred previously in the jailer’s life, but the fearful man asked this most important question in Acts 16:30: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The reply was simple and direct: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

So, it is evident that belief is central to salvation. But what kind of belief is being described in these and other similar passages? Is it the simple confession, “I believe”? Is it a matter of saying a pre-written prayer, perhaps what is known as the “sinner’s prayer”?

Acts 13:38–39 tells us that, “through this Man [Jesus Christ] is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” But is belief simply an act of the intellect or the will? Paul seems to say otherwise when



he writes, “for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified” (Romans 2:13).

Are these verses in Acts and Romans at odds with each other? Jesus tells us that the scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35), and these two verses are no exception. Notice that Paul does not say that we are justified by being doers of the law, but that “the doers of the law will be justified.” The law does not justify us. It teaches us the reason we need justification. It teaches us what sin is (1 John 3:4). Once we have sinned by breaking that law, it is through faith in the sacrifice of Christ that justification—forgiveness of past sins—takes place. The law defines sin. Faith in Christ’s sacrifice brings about justification.

This is summarized in Galatians 2:15–18: “We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”

### WHAT KIND OF BELIEF?

When Paul says in this passage, “even we have believed in Christ Jesus,” what kind of belief is he describing? Scripture tells us that many believed in Jesus, but they were far from saved. “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, **many believed in His name** when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (John 2:23–25).

The Apostle John informs us that some believed in Him one moment, but wanted to kill Him the next: “As He spoke these words, **many believed in Him**” (John 8:30). But as He began to explain to them that they were in bondage to sin, they became offended. “Then Jesus said to those Jews **who believed Him**, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, “You will be made free?”’ Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin’” (vv. 31–34).

Notice! People who only moments earlier were described as believing in Jesus Christ began to accuse Him of being illegitimate (v. 41), of being possessed by a demon (v. 48) and, finally, “Then they took up stones to throw at Him” (v. 59). Obviously, though they believed, something was missing. Was this an exception, or does the Bible tell us of other believers who came up short? Yes it does!

“Nevertheless even among the rulers **many believed in Him**, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved

the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42–43). Then there is the famous passage where James says, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. **Even the demons believe—and tremble!**” (James 2:19).

Many today seek to disconnect belief from obedience, and faith from works. Continuing with James’ statement above, we read: “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (v. 20). Then, using the example of Abraham offering up his son Isaac, he says: “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” (v. 22).

The book of Hebrews makes an airtight case that belief is connected to obedience and how we respond to various trials. Where faith is lacking, obedience is also lacking—and the results are disastrous. Paul even describes unbelief as coming from an evil heart. “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). He then explains that we are to, “exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (v. 13).

Yes, sin is deceitful. As we are told, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Paul warns us not to make the same mistake ancient Israel made: “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: ‘**Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.**’ For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, **but to those who did not obey?**” (Hebrews 3:14–18). Then Paul sums up this passage by saying: “**So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief**” (v. 19).

### BELIEF AND OBEDIENCE CONNECTED

The Bible is adamant that belief and obedience are both necessary, and in fact are two sides of the same coin. True belief manifests itself in obedience.

Paul makes another powerful statement on this subject later in the letter to the Hebrews. Belief and faith are synonyms—they essentially convey the same meaning. When we believe something, we do so because faith says it is true; and we have faith because we believe something to be true. Hebrews 11 is known as the “faith chapter” because it records example after example of men and women who exercised faith in the face of trials and stress. It reminds us of Noah, of Abraham and Sarah, of Moses and of Rahab—all of whom overcame personal trials because their faith was rooted in the belief that God would bring to pass what He promised. As it says of Sarah, “she judged Him [God] faithful who had promised” (v. 11). And

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# Living Youth Camp 2013:

## Prepare To Have the Best Summer of Your Life!

By Sheldon Monson

In 2013 the Living Church of God will be conducting a number of Living Youth Camps in the United States and in other countries around the world. These camps provide excellent opportunities to get to know other people, to spend time with friends, to participate in a variety of fun and challenging activities, and to learn God's way of life.

The LYC Teen Camp will be held, for the third year in a row, at Camp Lazarus in Ohio. Campers will arrive

plans are underway for two pre-teen camps in the United States, in West Virginia and Missouri, and possibly a third in Texas—go to the LCG Youth Web site [LivingYouth.org](http://LivingYouth.org). Camps are also being arranged in Europe and South Africa.

If you have been to camp before, you know how much fun it

you attain success in all areas of life. And you will be amazed to see so many people sharing and working together harmoniously—ordinary people, producing extraordinary results.

What kind of friends can you expect to make at camp? At camp, you will find campers and staff members that will make you a better person when you are around them. And that is the kind of friend you also want to be, a friend that brings out the best in others.

At camp, even if you are uncomfortable in the surroundings, be assured that others will go out of their way to help you feel at ease. You will find people that are inclusive when it comes to friends;



on Monday, July 29 and depart on Sunday, August 11. The dates for the LYC Adventure Camp—tentatively set to hike the John Muir trail in California's Sierra Nevada mountains—are Tuesday, July 9 through Thursday, July 18. Set those dates aside now if you plan on coming!

For up-to-the-minute information about these camps, as well as others—

is, and how much you personally benefited from the camp experience. If you have never been to summer camp, we encourage you to consider signing up to attend this year. Camp is a foretaste of tomorrow's world! You will find people who care. You will find a staff dedicated to helping

people that will open up their heart and let you in. This is a value we stress at all of our summer camps, and one that we strive to uphold.





the camp menu looks like. You are, after all, a young person, and as such, typically

which comprise a wholesome diet. We understand that you will burn plenty of calories and that you will need to refuel throughout the day. We have got it covered! We will also have plenty of water and other liquids (lemonade, Gatorade, juices) to replenish depleted stores, and keep you hydrated. We aim to keep you energized and refreshed!

All of our camps begin the day with Christian Living classes. We start the day focusing on God and His way of life. We will be



What kind of activities can you expect? You can expect to find challenging activities taught by qualified teachers and staff. You will find a wide range of activities offered at our camps around the world. Check each camp registration site for specifics. Be prepared to be challenged and to have your skills tested! We believe in playing hard and doing things with all of our might. However, even if you are not an athlete, we would love to have you at camp, and we will work to improve your skills and abilities too. Additionally, each camp includes opportunities for those with musical talent to perform. Be sure to bring your instrument, and practice throughout the year so that you are ready to play before an audience.

What kind of food can you expect to eat while at camp? Of course we know that you are wondering what

have the ability to metabolize food at an amazing rate! Every camp has a different meal plan. However, we can tell you that we strive to have a healthy and balanced approach to the foods we prepare and serve at all of our camps around the planet. We will be preparing nutritious and delicious meals in our camp kitchen. Our kitchen staff plans to serve plenty of fruits and vegetables, protein-rich foods (lean meats, poultry and eggs), grains and pasta and dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt)—all of

covering a number of topics of particular interest to young people like you. Godly values and principles are important, and we seek to promote both. Much thought and prayer is put into each Christian Living Class, well in advance, as we appreciate their merit. We trust that you will enjoy these classes.

If Living Youth Camp sounds like something you would like to take part in, be sure to register soon. If you commit to coming to camp, know that we are dedicated to making it an adventure that you will reminisce about for years to come. Make this the best summer of your life!



# 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION IN CHARLOTTE: A DECEMBER TO REMEMBER!

December 2012 marked the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the Global/Living Church of God. Brethren from all across the United States—from as far away as California and Alaska—as well as brethren from Canada and the United Kingdom, gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina for a 20th Anniversary Celebration weekend of events from December 21–24.

The beautiful Renaissance Charlotte Suites Hotel was the venue for many of the weekend activities—and home, for a few days, to many of the attendees.

The weekend began with tours of the Headquarters offices for those who were able to arrive early enough on Friday afternoon, December 21. One of the highlights of the tours is seeing the television studio and standing behind the *Tomorrow's World* lectern.

There was a buzz of excitement in the air as brethren met one another and renewed friendships during dinner at the hotel and prior to the Bible Study Friday evening.



Almost 300 people attended Mr. Richard Ames' very helpful Bible Study on Friday night entitled "Know Your Bible." Brethren were given stacks of scripture cards and challenged to really study their Bibles. Much fellowship continued

long after the Bible Study. Many commented on the Feast-like atmosphere, and remarked how much they appreciated the hotel so many stayed at being the venue for many of the events.

There was a hymn sing at the hotel on Sabbath morning, December 22, followed by a PowerPoint Bible Study entitled "The Chosen People" by Dr. Douglas Winnail. Approximately 250 attended Dr. Winnail's very interesting presentation.



Many of the brethren were then able to have lunch at the hotel before afternoon services.

Sabbath services began with rousing opening hymns sung by more than 550 enthusiastic brethren, after which Mr. Sheldon Monson gave a sermonette entitled "To Show Himself Strong." Evangelist Richard Ames gave the announcements, mentioning that just two days earlier—on December 20—had been the 60th anniversary of Dr. Roderick C. Meredith's December

1952 ordination as an Evangelist by Mr. Herbert Armstrong.

After the uplifting special music performed by the local choir, a special video presentation was played recapping Dr.



Meredith's life. At the end of the video, Mr. Ames presented Dr. Meredith with a beautiful Baccarat crystal eagle accompanied by a curved glass inscription piece inscribed "...on behalf of the Living Church of God."



Mr. Meredith then gave a very inspiring sermon entitled "Who We Are and Where We Are Headed." After reminding us of our spiritual roots, he encouraged us to

never give up, and to fulfill our calling as spiritual warriors. He exhorted us to be prepared for the persecution that will come on us, and reminded us of the glorious future we have ahead if we will hold fast to the truth. He concluded his message exhorting us to always keep moving forward, and to be on fire to do the Philadelphia work.

Nearly 400 spiritually fed brethren stayed for an elegant catered dinner held at the hotel on Saturday night. Following







together—not to mention the beautiful background piano music he played throughout the dinner.

The evening was capped by a semi-formal dance featuring a variety of music for young and old. Dr. and Mrs. Meredith got the dance started by dancing to the tune of Nat King Cole's "Unforgettable." Soon the dance floor was full, and it stayed that way the rest of the evening with young and old alike displaying their best dancing skills.

On Sunday, December 23, a family sports day was held at Carolina Courts, Charlotte's premier indoor basketball and volleyball training facility. Activities included organized basketball and volleyball tournaments. In the basketball finals, Josh Lyons' team—the "Office Job Bodies"—got bombed by Eric Varner's "Bama Bombers." In the volleyball finals, Jim Meredith's "The Good, the Bad and the Old Guys" showed Jake Monson's "A-Team" what it is like when a plan comes together.

There were also basketball and volleyball clinics for the younger children, and plenty of free court basketball and volleyball play. One highlight was the food that was served throughout the day. Freshly grilled hamburger, and hotdogs with chili and all of the fixings, were enjoyed by all who were there. After

the delicious meal served by the hotel staff, several pieces of musical entertainment were presented. Many remarked at what an excellent job Mr. Marcus McCullough did in putting this

with lots of fun for all, but what really stood out was that the players competed hard while displaying good sportsmanship.

That evening, approximately 200 wearied souls participated in a family game night back at the hotel. Most played cards or board games, and once again that Feast-like atmosphere of fellowship was there continually.



On Monday morning, December 24, approximately 235 people attended three sets of seminars conducted simultaneously at the meeting hotel, geared toward teens, singles and married couples. Mr. Ames and Mr. Rod McNair gave married couples seminars, Evangelist Gerald Weston and Mr. Wallace Smith gave the singles seminars and Mr. Monson gave the teen seminars. Many brethren commented on the helpfulness of the seminars. Afterward, a number of participants ventured to Headquarters for an office tour.

On Monday afternoon, a group of nearly 100 participated in an indoor climbing activity at Inner Peaks Climbing Center, the largest full-service indoor climbing gym in the Charlotte area. Many commented on how much they enjoyed the challenge of climbing the man-made rock walls. There were walls available to climb for all different ability and age levels—and it was apparent that some of the young children were quite the climbers! Perhaps not having to drag as much weight up the wall makes it easier?

On Monday evening, the weekend of activities was brought to a happy conclusion when about 150 energetic fellowshippers showed up for an ice cream social back at the Renaissance Suites Hotel.

Our thanks go out to all of the brethren who traveled from near and far to make the 20th Anniversary Celebration truly a "December to Remember." Plans are underway to hold a similar event next year; we hope that many of you who attended the 2012 gathering will return, and will bring with you any friends who could not make it to this year's celebration.

—Jim Meredith



the tournament finals, the young children showed us what competition is all about as they participated in a variety of challenging games, with medals given to the winners. It was a great day

**HOW AND WHY WE DELEAVEN**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

with a spiritually unleavened attitude of righteousness, sincerity, and truth as *the unleavened children of God*. The Days of Unleavened Bread focus us on this aspect of our Christian walk.

**BEWARE OF THIS LEAVENING**

Finally, Jesus Christ warned the disciples to avoid a specific leavening agent, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6–12). The disciples, whose hearts were focused on physical things, concluded that Jesus was speaking of their failure to take bread on their trip across the Sea of Galilee (v. 7). However, Jesus was referring to the *leavening* of evil influence—the teachings and practices of the Pharisees and Sadducees (v. 12). Speaking of them, Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah: “This people

honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:6–7).

The Pharisees and Sadducees viewed religion solely within the context of form and tradition. Jesus continued: “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do... All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (vv. 8–9). Jesus adamantly instructed His disciples, “do not do according to their works,” which served only to clean the outside of a person and did not focus on the spiritual intent of the heart (Matthew 23:1–4, 25–28).

The Pharisees had the form, but denied the very Son of God. Shocking as it may sound, some of them denied the power of God’s Spirit working through Jesus Christ. Is it possible that we could wash feet, take the Passover symbols, remove leavening

from our homes, yet still be *leavened* inside our hearts and minds? Yes, it is!

Therefore, brethren, let us prepare now to keep God’s Feast by **emphasizing the spiritual intent and purpose** of these days. As a Christian, *you* are called to be a type of “unleavened bread,” picturing the keeping of these days in sincerity and truth, hungering and thirsting after God’s righteousness. It is well understood by God’s Church that the number seven is symbolic of perfection and completeness. Will not God complete and perfect what is lacking in us? Absolutely! Are there not two Holy Days of Unleavened Bread—the first and seventh days—just as Christ is both the “*author and finisher* of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2)? Most certainly! Throughout our lives in God’s Church, we are promised His help—“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will *complete* it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). ■

**PSALM 51: FROM SIN TO FORGIVENESS**

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daily renew our commitment to be “bondservants” of Jesus Christ, “doing the will of God from the heart” for the rest of our lives (Ephesians 6:6).

**THANKFUL FOR GOD’S MERCY**

Repentant, forgiven and *restored* Christians are joyful and thankful—not downcast, depressed or downtrodden. Forgiven Christians live lives of action, *confident and “steadfast”* in spirit (Psalm 51:10), *joyful* in the knowledge that they have been restored to God’s salvation (v. 12), and *teaching* transgressors God’s ways through their words and example (v. 13). The person who is forgiven by God is *joyful* and is “blessed” (Psalm 32:2). That person goes on to live a life of “rejoicing,” being “*glad in the LORD*” (v. 11).

If we sincerely repent of our sins and confess our sins to God, He will be faithful to forgive. Scripture reminds us, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9).

We should be *profoundly thankful* for Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, and for the Father’s and the Son’s unsearchable love and mercy. We should also be deeply thankful for *baptism*—

which cleanses us of our past sins (Acts 2:38). But baptism is not the *end* of our repentance—it is the *beginning*. Just as Paul still had sin in him even *after* conversion (cf. Romans 7:20), and just as David sinned terribly *after* receiving the Holy Spirit, there is both sin *and a path from sin to restoration* available even after conversion, as the Apostle John plainly stated.

Thank God for the examples of the great men and women of faith, a great “cloud of witnesses” recorded in Scripture for our instruction and for our edification. And even more, thank Christ as the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes [we] were healed. For [we] were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls” (1 Peter 2:24–25).

Finally, and most importantly, thank God the Father and Jesus Christ for their *hesed* lovingkindness! Thank God that He is the Creator who can *restore* to His presence those who are truly repentant, who can create in the repentant a *clean heart* (Psalm 51:10) and who in His loving mercy “has *not* dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:10–13). ■



**THE NIGHT TO BE MUCH OBSERVED**

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dispatched soldiers to send for Moses. After Moses and Aaron journeyed several miles to Pharaoh's palace and had their meeting, they returned and sent word out to the hundreds of thousands of Israelite families to begin assembling quickly. In the process, they were to spoil the Egyptians by taking the gifts of gold, silver and jewels that their Egyptian neighbors thrust on them. As they were preparing for the beginning of their journey, they saw the Egyptians burying their dead from the night before (Numbers 33:2–4). Even though the people moved with haste, it took a number of hours to assemble well over a million people, along with their herds and flocks, to march in an orderly fashion (Exodus 13:18). They began their journey around

sunset on Abib 14, coming out of Egypt by night (Deuteronomy 16:1).

Notice further how God, in Exodus 12, distinguished the meanings of these two evenings: the Passover and the Night To Be Much Observed. Scripture explains what the Israelites were to teach their children regarding the Passover service: "It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households" (Exodus 12:27). Later, we read of another night with a *different* meaning. That night is Abib 15. Scripture says of it: "It is a **night to be much observed** unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt" (v. 42, KJV).

Passover commemorates the offering of the "Lamb of God," and our deliverance from death by God's grace. The Night To Be Much Observed celebrates the beginning of our own spiritual "Exodus"

from sin! We gather at dusk, at the beginning of the fourteenth day of the first month, to commemorate the sacrifice of our Savior by partaking of the symbols that He set apart at His final Passover with His disciples. On the following evening, we gather for a festive meal to celebrate the beginning of our journey. We were not "passed over" to continue dwelling in spiritual Egypt, but rather so that we would be free to follow our Savior all of the way out of Egypt, and on to the Promised Land—the glorious liberty and freedom of the Kingdom of God. This evening that begins the Days of Unleavened Bread should be a festive and joyous occasion. Rejoicing and giving thanks to God should be the centerpiece of this occasion. We are celebrating the beginning of our journey to spiritual freedom: "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). ■

**MEMORY, FAITH AND BELIEF**

Continued from page 17

we are told of Moses, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (v. 27).

Not everyone is spared in this life, and this can pose challenges to our believing faith. "Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy" (vv. 36–38). These men and women stared fear in the face and stood firm. Is it any wonder that faith is essential? "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (v. 6).

Other examples of believing faith are found in the book of Daniel. Who is not inspired by the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego standing up to Nebuchadnezzar? They faced immediate death by burning, but their belief in the supremacy and faithfulness of God gave them courage to act and to answer the king with these words: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16–18).

How often must we choose between obeying God or trusting in ourselves and the sight of our eyes (2 Corinthians

5:7)? When God tells us, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," do we immediately obey Him, or do we rationalize around His command? Do we look at the fiery furnace of losing a job, of offending family and friends? Or, do we believe God and trust, in faith, that whatever He tells us to do will work out best in the end?

Do we really believe Jesus' words, "But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). And do we believe Him when He said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [love to a lesser degree, by comparison] his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26)? Belief must be followed by action!

John 3:16 is truly the "golden verse" of the Bible. It is rich in meaning. It is a verse worth memorizing. But it is so much more than a mere "memory verse." Millions who repeat its words superficially, without properly comprehending its full meaning, can be lulled into a false sense of security. Yes, the correct response to Christ's sacrifice is to believe in Him as the true Savior and Messiah. But what does that belief entail? Do we want to be like the demons who believe but are lost through disobedience? Or, will we act on our belief, demonstrating by our actions that Christ is living within us? As James affirms, "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20). Do we have the faith to move mountains (Matthew 17:20)? Such faith is remarkable, but moving a mere mountain is nothing compared to the real reward of active believing faith—eternal life in the Kingdom of God, as a born member of the Family of God. Let us all strive to deepen our faith, and act on our belief! ■

## OUR COUNCIL OF ELDERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

ministry goes back more than 60 years—as I was ordained an evangelist by Mr. Armstrong on December 20, 1952.

Therefore, though I am extremely human, I pray—for *your sake*—that all of you can have confidence that Christ will continue to guide me and use me unless I *obviously* turn aside from Him in some major way. For I try to remain faithful to His Truth and to His Work with all my heart—*driving myself* even when I am tired or sick—over many decades. Also, the other men that I have noted have also had, collectively, scores of years of service in God's Work. That wisdom can certainly strengthen our understanding and wisdom in the Council of Elders in all the major decisions it will make.

God's word also tells us, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17). Certainly, this inspired warning should give pause to any of those who are tempted to become "self-appointed critics" and constantly look for the "loose brick" as they eagerly seek to find *any, any* fault they can criticize. We must not let ourselves become confused or distracted by those who try to position themselves as "superior" to the ones Christ is actually using to do His Work.

God's word tells us very clearly: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:2–3).

Again, brethren, we are *all* being "trained"—through the jobs and the experiences God gives us—to actually *rule* this entire world under Jesus Christ in a *few short years*! So we certainly should trust that Christ will guide us in this—and in the decisions that we make even now in God's Work. As Paul indicated, as we are even to "judge angels," then "how *much more*, things that pertain to this life" (v. 3)? So, we can be confident that Christ will certainly be "in charge" of *all* the major decisions in His Church, as He is training us for *far greater* responsibilities in the future!

God's inspired word tells us how Jehoshaphat—a *righteous* king of Judah—was led by God to "set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city" (2 Chronicles 19:5). Then he told the judges, "Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment" (v. 6). Again, *how much more* would Christ be in charge of the spiritual judgments in His *New Testament Church* than those in ancient Israel under carnal—though dedicated—kings and leaders?

So, again, it all comes back to our genuine *faith* in the fact that Christ really is "Head" over the Church of God and over our lives. Brethren, this aspect of *faith* really does need to sink into our minds so we can understand the importance

of following the *right form of Church government*—and how *any other form* is certainly deficient and, in fact, *contrary* to the direct teachings and examples of Church government found in God's inspired word!

In our most recent Living Church of God Council meeting, I started out with introductory comments about the Work of God and, interestingly, even this aspect of *faith* in Christ and His leadership. Then, we had reports on the significant issues and developments in the Church all around the world. We then had major discussions on factors relating to *healing*, on *demon possession*, on *preaching the Gospel* more effectively and the role of Jesus Christ.

Later, we went into a review of the scriptural support for the fact that God's true saints, after they are resurrected, will briefly appear in heaven for their marriage to Jesus Christ. We had another follow-through discussion about the **Great Rebellion** described in 2 Thessalonians, and considered some interesting technical issues involving the 70-weeks prophecy of Daniel, the seven seals of Revelation and on "what is a calling?"

We also received a detailed report, with feedback and discussion, about what the Living University is now accomplishing, and we reviewed our goals for, and strategies for enhancing effectiveness of, the university. We discussed renaming our "Tomorrow's World Special Presentation" campaigns with the simpler title, "Tomorrow's World Presents." We reviewed manpower needs for the Work, and discussed potential new Feast sites for 2013 and beyond.

In closing, I gave a final inspirational talk to our assembled leaders on how we must have *faith* and *courage* in the traumatic times just ahead. I discussed how these times might be. And I certainly tried to inspire our ministers to encourage all of you to "get ready" and build the spiritual strength and faith to go through these times.

Brethren, through the advice and input of the Council of Elders, I have seen for myself the truth of the proverb, "Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established" (Proverbs 15:22). The men on the Council have shown themselves to be faithful servants of Jesus Christ, with their hearts deeply in the Work. I appreciate their personal loyalty and even more their loyalty to Jesus Christ.

This, then, brethren, is a brief overview of the activity and importance of our Council of Elders. I hope and pray that *all of you* will continue to *pray for us*, pray for one another, and build increasing *faith* that Christ is indeed using us to carry on the Work of the *original Church of God* and do His Work in these last times. Thank you for your love, loyalty and support!

With Christian love,



# LOCAL

## CHURCH NEWS

### BIRTHS

Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon (Desirae) Zaste of the Bismarck, North Dakota congregation are happy to announce the birth of their first child, daughter **Eden Marie Zaste**, born June 12, 2012. Eden weighed 5 pounds 7 ounces and was 18½ inches long. Grandparents Randy and Rachelle Lien are thrilled, and the Bismarck brethren are elated for the growth in their congregation. All are happy, healthy and doing well.

Mr. and Mrs. Reynaldo (Jennifer) Colón, of the Charlotte, North Carolina congregation are thrilled to announce the birth of their second daughter, **Vivian Elise Colón**, born July 10, 2012. She weighed 8 pounds, and was 20½ inches long. The grandparents, South-Central Regional Pastor Dan (Nancy) Hall of Texas, as well as Area Pastor Raul (Annie) Colón of Puerto Rico, are overjoyed to welcome their newest grandchild to the family!

Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan (Sonja) Davis of Katy, Texas, are pleased to announce the birth of their second child, **Hannah Marie Davis**, on August 11, 2012, She weighed 9 pounds and was

20 ½ inches long. Grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Bob (Barbara) Grief of Wynne, Arkansas, Mr. and Mrs. Dale (Kathy) Ramsey of Athens, Alabama and Mr. and Mrs. Clifford (Georgene) Haak of Kamden, Arkansas.

Mr. and Mrs. Philippe (Danielle) Pierre of the Asheboro, North Carolina congregation are pleased to announce the birth of their firstborn son, **David Isaac Pierre**, born August 14, 2012. David weighed 7 pounds, 3.9 ounces and measured 20¼ inches long. He is the second grandson of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Stewart (Maxine), deacon and deaconess of the Atlanta congregation. All family members are elated at his arrival!

Mr. and Mrs. Lance (Amanda) Reece of Angleton, Texas, are pleased to announce the birth of their second child, **Landon Andrew Reece**, born on September 12, 2012. He weighed 7 pounds and was 20 inches long. Grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Larry (Debbie) Reece of Richland, Texas, and Mr. and Mrs. J. L. (Carla) Davis of Brazoria, Texas.

### *Atlanta Spokesman Club Hosts Ladies' Night*



club members and announced the new officers: Mr. Geoff Cox, President; Mr. Jonas Burnett, Secretary; and Mr. Richard Hall, Sergeant-at-Arms. We look forward to continued growth in the coming year.

The Atlanta Spokesman Club hosted a ladies' night on November 3, 2012. The atmosphere was filled with anticipation as club members and guests dined in a private room of a local Italian restaurant. The topics session generated a lot of discussion, with even the younger guests participating. The speakers and evaluators were all in top form. Mr. Jack Lowe, the Spokesman Club Director, presented certificates to the 2012 graduates: Mr. Jonas Burnett, Mr. Geoff Cox, Mr. Gerald Curry, Mr. Hugh Stewart, and Mr. Lawrence Taylor. Mr. Lawrence Taylor, outgoing president, expressed his heartfelt thanks to the club for their support throughout the year. Mr. Jack Lowe expressed his gratitude for the growth in

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



## ORDINATIONS

*M. Jean-Louis Stein*, of Vimy, France, was ordained an elder on Sabbath, September 24, 2011 by Area Pastor Rees Ellis. Mr. Stein serves the brethren in Belgium and northern France.

On the First Day of Unleavened Bread 2012, six ordinations were performed by Area Pastor Joe Brown during a combined Holy Day service in Lake City, Florida. Ordained to the office of elder were *Mr. Wallace Hay* of the Thomasville, Georgia congregation and *Mr. Jack Lucas* of the Jacksonville, Florida congregation. *Mr. Alan McCarty* of the Thomasville congregation and *Mr. Mark Finney* of the Lake City, Florida congregation were ordained as deacons and *Mrs. Connie Carpenter* of the Thomasville congregation and *Mrs. Cheryl Finney* of the Lake City congregation were ordained as deaconesses.

*Mr. Kevin Lee* was ordained a deacon on the Last Holy Day of Unleavened Bread, April 13, 2012 by Area Pastor

Daniel Friz. Mr. Lee serves in the Lansing, Michigan congregation.

*Mr. Reiner Luken* was ordained an elder on Pentecost 2012 by Area Pastor Phillip West. Mr. Luken serves the Chicago, Illinois congregation.

*Mr. David Jones* was ordained a deacon on the Feast of Trumpets 2012 by Area Pastor James Sweat and elder Tex Malone. Mr. Jones serves the brethren in the Chattanooga, Tennessee congregation.

*Mr. Aaron Vorel* was ordained a deacon and *Mrs. Barbara Cheek* was ordained a deaconess on the Feast of Trumpets 2012 by Area Pastor Ron Poole and elders David Wakefield, Harry Wilson and Manuel Burdette. Mr. Vorel and Mrs. Cheek serve in the Anderson, South Carolina congregation.

*Mr. Issacar Tenorio* was ordained a deacon by Regional Director Mario Hernandez on September 26, 2012, in Mexico City. Mr. Tenorio serves the congregation in Mexico City.

*Mr. Hernal Fuller* was ordained a deacon and *Ms. Marie Chin* was ordained a deaconess on October 5, 2012 by Director of Church Administration Douglas Winnail, Regional Director Scott Winnail, and Area Pastor Lascelles Fraser. Mr. Fuller and Ms. Chin serve the congregation in Kingston, Jamaica.

*Mr. Etienne Duval* was ordained an elder by Area Pastor Wilner Pierre on October 6, 2012. Mr. Duval serves in the Fort-de-France, Martinique congregation.

*Mr. Kumar de Silva* of Colombo, Sri Lanka, was ordained an elder by Regional Director Bruce Tyler and Area Pastor Zig Svalbe on November 24, 2012. Mr. de Silva serves the brethren in Sri Lanka.

*Dr. Oladele Akin-Ogundeji* was ordained an elder on Sunday, December 9, 2012 by Regional Director Rod King and Area Pastor Rees Ellis. Dr. Akin-Ogundeji has been serving faithfully in Nigeria for a number of years.

## Anniversaries

*Mr. and Mrs. Felipe (Trinidad) Casing* of the Davao City, Philippines congregation celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary on September 7, 2012. Mr. and Mrs. Casing have been attending God's Church since 1960, were married in 1962 and have served in the ministry since 1982. Mr. Casing pastors the Southeastern Mindanao congregation. Their children, grandchildren, relatives and brethren honored them with a reception, Bible songs and inspirational words on the happy occasion of their 50th anniversary.

*Mr. and Mrs. Charles (Nadine) Knowlton* of the Columbus, Ohio congregation celebrated their 60th anniversary on October 17. The congregation presented Mr. and Mrs. Knowlton with a card and shared a cake in their honor. Mr. Knowlton taught in the Ohio public school system and has served in the ministry for over 30 years. He graduated from Ambassador College, Pasadena in 1980. The Knowltons have five children and have set a wonderful example to all for many years.

*Mr. and Mrs. Donald (Jennie) Engle* observed their 70th wedding anniversary on November 1, 2012. The Washington, DC congregation honored them after services on Sabbath, November 3 with an anniversary cake, champagne punch, flowers, and a congregational meal. Mrs. Engle was given an anniversary quilt fashioned by Miss Ruth Ann Kesner. Mr. Engle, who is known for giving out chocolates at services, was surprised with a gift bag of gourmet chocolates. There were many visitors from the other congregations pastored by Mr. Sheldon Monson, which brought the total attendance to 71. Mr. Engle commented that although they had wanted a large family but have only one son and two grandsons, they are very blessed to have such a large spiritual family. Mr. and Mrs. Engle had been married seven years when they first heard Mr. Herbert Armstrong on the radio in 1949. They were baptized in 1971 and have been fine examples ever since.

On the Sabbath of November 17, the Minneapolis, Minnesota congregation honored the wedding anniversaries of *Mr. and Mrs. Edwin (Opal) Mauch*, married for 69 years; and *Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth (Mae) Christenson*, married for 65 years. Mr. and Mrs. Mauch have been attending God's Church for more than 60 years and Mr. and Mrs. Christenson for more than 37 years. Special refreshments and a cake were enjoyed by all members.

# IN LOVING MEMORY

*Mrs. Jessie Ruth Watts*, a long-time faithful member of the Church of God, died shortly before the Feast of Tabernacles, after a relatively short battle with cancer. Mr. George Webb performed the memorial service. Mrs. Watts is survived by her son, Sammy Watts, and her daughter Ramona. She is missed by all who knew her, and those who knew her are comforted by her steadfast faith in the Truth.

*Mr. Steven Duane Zirul*, age 69, of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, died suddenly on October 6, 2012. Mr. Zirul has been a pillar in the Minneapolis, Minnesota congregation for over forty years and will be greatly missed by all. He was a positive, humble and gentle person who enjoyed serving the brethren in many ways, always with a smile on his face. Mr. Zirul was a Special Education teacher for 32 years, and after retirement, enjoyed going fishing, golfing and spending time with his family, Church family, students, friends and neighbors. He gave sermonettes, led songs and participated in choirs and all Spokesman Clubs and Graduate Clubs. He will be dearly missed by Patricia, his wife of 44 years, and his brother, Dennis Zirul. Mr. Adam West officiated at the memorial service and interment on October 18.

*Mrs. Rebecca Ann Vuncannon*, a longtime member who attended the Asheboro, North Carolina congregation lost her battle with cancer on October 19, 2012. She had been unable to attend services for about a year. Mrs. Vuncannon is survived by her husband Keith; two sons, Keith, Jr. and Steve; and one daughter, Patricia. She was preceded in death by one son, Michael. Mrs. Vuncannon will be missed by many in all the areas where she and her husband attended God's Church through the years. Mr. Gaylyn Bonjour conducted her funeral.

*Miss Merle Chua*, age 58, of the Quezon City, Manila, congregation died on November 4, 2012, after several months battling cancer. She died peacefully, knowing that her brethren and family cared deeply for her, and is now at rest, awaiting the Resurrection. Merle was a faithful member, baptized in 1978. She was very proficient in English and had office and accounting skills, so she was employed in the Philippine Church office for many years, a position she held until her death. She was a real lady, well-liked, and she will be greatly missed by all. She is survived by one sister and other relatives.

*Julia Danto Almeam*, age 39, a faithful member of God's Church in Papua New Guinea, died October 3, 2012, after a long battle with cancer. She is survived by two young daughters. Mr. Peter Devis, pastor of the Wewak congregation, conducted the funeral.

*Glenn Nicholas Wyant*, age 79, died on November 8, 2012 in Little Rock, Arkansas. He and his wife, June, had recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Besides his wife, he is survived by a daughter, a grandson, one brother and one sister. Mr. and Mrs. Wyant were baptized in 1980. They were ordained deacon and deaconess on July 27, 1987. Mr. Wyant was very active in the Church and served diligently in the local congregation until recently, when he was not physically able to carry on. He was known for his big smile, enthusiasm for the Work, and his serving attitude. A memorial service was conducted at the Russellville Church Hall on November 17, 2012 by Mr. Davy Crockett.

*Mr. Bernard Alan "Bernie" Blick*, a venerable and long-time member of God's Church in New Zealand, died November 11, 2012 after a short illness which ended a long, interesting and productive life. Mr. Blick died peacefully at the age of 81. For almost half his life, since his baptism in 1975, he had been a faithful and active member of God's Church and had served as a deacon since his ordination in 2008. His wife, Muriel, and their two sons, Gordon and Peter, are also stalwart members of the Church. It was Mr. Blick's delight that he was able to observe the Feast of Tabernacles 2012 with all his family present, including four grandchildren who now live in Australia.

*Deborah Ruth Derrick*, age 61, a member of the Russellville, Arkansas congregation, died on November 17, 2012 after a lengthy illness. Mrs. Derrick is survived by her husband, Jackson; two daughters, BriAnne Clover (Christopher) and Dusti Yarber (Shawn); six grandchildren; her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Damron; and a brother, David (Debi). She was preceded in death by a brother, Dustin R. Damron. Mrs. Derrick was baptized April 1, 1974 and served as pianist in the local congregation until her health failed. She worked with the hearing-impaired in public schools and would often sign for Sabbath services. Mr. Davy Crockett conducted her funeral on November 20, 2012, in Atkins, Arkansas.

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# COMMENTARY

## SEVENTY-TWO HOURS

For most people, 72 hours is a nice three-day weekend, or maybe a short vacation. It is enjoyable, but often quickly forgotten. After all, it is only three days and nights. What could be the importance of such a short time in the larger scheme of things?

Consider the book of Jonah. God instructed Jonah to warn the people of the great city of Nineveh that if they did not repent of their cruelty and atrocities, their city would be destroyed. But Jonah, a Hebrew, had seen his people become victims of great Assyrian cruelty, and he fled the scene, trying to escape his responsibility.

However, the ship on which Jonah had booked passage was caught up in a terrible storm at sea. Jonah ended up being thrown overboard in an effort to save the ship, and God had prepared a great fish to swallow him, which prevented him from drowning. The Bible says that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights—72 hours.

Think of what that must have been like. Jonah surely expected to die in the ordeal. And yet, God made the great fish vomit Jonah out onto the seashore! As Jonah recovered from this incredible deliverance, wondering “What next?,” God told him to warn Nineveh. Now, Jonah obeyed.

Jesus Christ used Jonah’s 72-hour ordeal as a powerful sign to answer the skeptical scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees who demanded that He give a sign proving that He was the Messiah.

Scripture records the event. “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see

a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’” (Matthew 12:38–40).

Think of it! The only direct sign Jesus Christ gave of His Messiahship was that He would spend 72 hours in the grave—just as did Jonah, who was as good as dead in the belly of the great fish, were it not for God’s deliverance! The religious leaders who questioned Christ knew the story of Jonah very well, but it seems they never understood its true significance.

Today, most who profess Christianity follow a Good Friday/Easter Sunday tradition that makes a mockery of Jesus Christ’s own words of promise! There is no way to fit Jesus’ 72-hour promise within the mistaken idea of a Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection. The Easter story itself is a product of pre-Christian pagan traditions, and is nowhere found or countenanced in your Bible!

So, how do true Bible-believing Christians acknowledge and observe the memorial of the death of the Savior of mankind? The Church of God observes the Passover with the New Testament symbols of the bread and wine, as Jesus Christ taught His disciples to do!

—J. Davy Crockett, III