

THE

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Walk in Awe of God!

Dear Brethren and Friends,

I am sure that God is honored when we ministers try to give all of you *detailed instructions* on marriage and family, how to keep the Holy Days, how to understand end-time events and other important issues. These things certainly are very important. They are *vital* to help all of us develop the fullness of Christ's character.

But now, I would like to get back to a truly *foundational* understanding of true Christian character which we must *never forget*. We should often review the most basic issues and build *all* of our other understandings and practices upon them. The topic I want to help you focus on now is the "greatest" commandment of all. So, obviously, **nothing** is more important than getting this one thing straight, and then *acting* on that precious knowledge! In Matthew 22:35–40, Jesus Christ Himself responded to what could have been a challenging question. Jesus was asked, "Teacher, which is the **great commandment** in the law?" (v. 36). Then the very Son of God answered, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment" (vv. 37–38).

How should we truly love God with all of our heart, strength and mind? How should we actually *fulfill* this greatest and most important commandment of all?

Although there may be a number of approaches to this topic, one "key" is the *example* of King David of Israel. Notice how the author of the book of Acts describes God's view of

David. "And when He had removed him [King Saul], He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will'" (Acts 13:22).

None of us is perfect. So the example of David is *especially helpful* when you consider the faults David had—and yet realize how important David's *entire attitude* was to God. This attitude was so exemplary that God looked beyond the human mistakes David made and loved him, forgave him, honored him and has already committed in His inspired word to make David—under Christ—king over all the nations of Israel in Tomorrow's World. Notice Jeremiah 30:8–10, "For it shall come to pass



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in that day,' says the LORD of hosts, 'that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,' says the LORD, 'nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid.'"

How did David exemplify the *attitude* that God loved so much? The answer is that David made God the very *center of his being!* He walked with God, talked with God, constantly thought on God's word and God's law and had a constant relationship of love, worship, honor and **obedience** to his

Volume 15, No. 6



Inside This Issue...

Our Church Family...page 3 • To Whom Do You Listen?...page 6 • Stay Focused!...page 8 • Adventure Camp 2013...page 12 • Love and Government...page 16 • Woman to Woman: Women and Stress...page 18 • Local Church News.....page 22 • Commentary..... page 24

Creator. If you read the story of King David's life in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles and of his thoughts throughout the book of Psalms, you quickly realize there have been *very few* human beings in all history who so continually *sought God* and deeply wanted to honor Him, obey Him and **worship** Him in the way that David did. David continually "sought" for a closer relationship with his Creator. He "meditated" on God's law and statutes continually—even during the night seasons. Notice: "With my whole heart I have **sought** You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!" (Psalm 119:10). Again: "I remember Your name in the night, O LORD, and I keep Your law" (v. 55). And again: "At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments. I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts. The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy; teach me Your statutes" (vv. 62–64).

Obviously, off and on through the entire day and even in the "night seasons," *David sought God*. He "delighted" in thinking on and meditating about God's greatness and power—His beauty, His majesty, His glory and His righteous ways as exemplified in His laws. David stated, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation" (Psalm 119:97–99).

Over decades of "walking with God" David **proved** to himself—as *I have done*—that God's "way" and His inspired laws bring understanding and **blessings**. For God's laws show us the *right way* to live and they always "work" for good—to the extent they are followed. Each one of us needs to realize that, and **worship** the great God who gave us such a magnificent law and way of life. David *delighted* in God's goodness. Again, he stated, "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:103–104).

One of the wonderful ways God reveals Himself to us is through His magnificent creation. David constantly delighted in the intricacy and beauty of the creation around him. He could "see" God's marvelous and thoughtful hand in all of this—and so he *honored* and *worshiped* his Creator by meditating on these things. David stated of God that, "He appointed the moon for seasons; the sun knows its going down. You make darkness, and it is night, in which all the beasts of the forest creep about. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God. When the sun rises, they gather together and lie down in their dens. Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening. O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions..." (Psalm 104:19–24).

We should *all* remember David's inspiring words in Psalm 8:3–5, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little [while] lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor." King David meditated on the magnificence and power of God's creation, which moved him to sing and worship continually: "I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart. Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end" (Psalm 119:31–33).

So King David "loved God *with all his heart*" by meditating on and appreciating His wonderful law, by meditating on and exulting in God's magnificent creation and all the beauty around him. By "seeing" that God's law and way really *works well* for those who truly "seek" God and **obey Him**, David *worshiped* God. This, then, is the next basic "key" to loving God with **all** your heart—and not "kidding yourself" about "loving" God in a merely sentimental way. For, remember, God found David, "a man after My own heart, who will **do all My will**" (Acts 13:22).

Continued on page 21



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Our Church Family

As most of us know, God is now building a “family.” He is our Father, and we are all “brothers and sisters.” Under the direct supervision of the Father and of Christ—our loving Head—the true Church is like our “Jerusalem”—the “mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26). For the Church helps us understand and put into action many aspects of Christian living. It corrects us, guides us and encourages us in many ways.



Through our loving cooperation in the true Church of God, the very *Work of God* is carried out. Through the Church, we have the opportunity to experience and to picture the kind of interaction, service and loving fellowship which will be finally perfected when we are “born of God” at the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4). Together—if we are truly overcomers—we will become those kings and priests who will assist Christ in *ruling* this entire world within the next few decades (Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

When Jesus was informed that “Your mother and Your brothers” were outside seeking Him, He replied, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother’” (Mark 3:33–35). In this and many other statements, Jesus Christ clearly indicated that His true disciples were to have a “family-type” relationship with Him and *with each other*. So, we should develop the *loving relationship* and the genuine *trust* that close members of a good family should have. Jesus 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” (Matthew 18:15).

Brethren, we in God’s Church today need to build *that kind* of loving concern and trust. We

all need to *meditate* on the fact that we will spend *all eternity* with our brothers and sisters in God’s Church. So, it is absolutely *vital* that we now—in *this life*—learn to lovingly and patiently interact with one another in preparation for *eternal life together* in God’s Kingdom. It will be helpful if each one of us learns to “picture” ourselves—so to speak—helping, serving and interacting with **all** our Church brethren throughout the next *ten trillion years!*

After telling His disciples to “go to your brother” in the passage I just cited in Matthew 18:15, it is interesting that the next thing Christ guided Matthew to write was the following: “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 said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’” (vv. 21–22).

Jesus was clearly showing in this passage that the family relationship and willingness to *correct each other* described in the previous verses would



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involve real **forgiveness** on the part of each one of us. For we simply **must** learn to genuinely forgive one another—over and over—or we will just *not make it* into the loving Kingdom of God that will soon be set up on this earth! Right after revealing what we call the “model prayer,” Jesus declared: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14–15). Of course, the *genuine forgiveness* that we must learn to give each other is all based upon each one of us developing the **sincere love** that comes from God alone. This love will enable us to develop forgiving attitudes, and it will help us all to truly *appreciate* and *enjoy* the loving relationship we can have with others in the begotten Family of God even today. It is all based upon our willingness to let Christ *fully*

live His life within us (Galatians 2:20). It is based upon our full and continuing realization that *every one of us*—black and white, male and female, old and young—is made fully in the “image of God” and deeply deserves profound love and respect as a potential son of God!

If we deeply believe this, *practice this attitude*, and pray about it on a continual basis, we will learn to exude the kind of warmth and love that God’s begotten Family should demonstrate. Then, we will definitely *experience* a profound loving relationship—throughout all eternity—that will far surpass anything we have been able to experience in this physical life. For, at that time, we will have totally *overcome* our human nature and be “filled with all the fullness” of God Himself through the rest of eternity (Ephesians 3:19).

BUILD A “FAMILY” SPIRIT

Jesus Christ promised His disciples: “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29–30).

During my 64 years in the Church of God, I can honestly say that I have personally *experienced* the love and concern of **hundreds** of fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters that Jesus spoke of. For I can deeply remember—and fondly recall—the *many dozens* of brethren and fellow ministers who have helped me in so many ways over the decades. One of my earliest American Thanksgiving celebrations after I was baptized occurred when Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Armstrong themselves asked me (and a few other students) over to their home for the traditional Thanksgiving meal. I had already been pretty well acquainted with them through my friendship with Richard David Armstrong, their older son. But I had not yet had an actual meal in their home until that time. So it was a wonderful experience to feel the relaxed love and warmth and concern of Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong over several hours in their own home.

The Armstrongs’ kindness made the feeling of “loneliness” that I might otherwise have felt go away. For, back home in Missouri, we had *always* experienced a wonderful Thanksgiving meal with my father and mother and family and Uncle Paul and Aunt Ethel—Dr. and Mrs. C. Paul Meredith—and others. But now, I was with Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong, Dick Armstrong and a number of other students. Slowly but surely, the “spirit of family” was being experienced as I drew closer and closer to my fellow students and to many of the older brethren in God’s Church at Pasadena in those early days.

After my first year in Ambassador College, two students and I drove up to Oregon to “work in the woods,” as

lumberjacks. *Before* we were able to get this job, one of the oldest couples in the Church—Mr. and Mrs. David Henion—had us *live with them* in their home. In a sense, *it was amazing!* For Mrs. Henion immediately “adopted” us as though we were her sons—cooked for us, washed our clothes, let us have the run of the house and treated us as sons in almost every possible way. Mr. Henion was also very solicitous of our welfare, and gave us advice and encouragement like a father. *Dozens* of times since then, I have experienced that kind of relationship with brethren in God’s Church—my many *hundreds* of brothers and sisters!

This is not “big news,” I know, to many of you. Some of you have *also* experienced this kind of relationship. But it is good that we think about it, learn to practice it even more deeply today, and realize what this means and the lessons we should be learning through the genuine giving and helping,



serving and loving relationships we should be experiencing in the begotten “Family” of God!

As I have relayed to you in sermons, one of the early deaconesses, Mrs. Chloe Schnippert, constantly helped me like a mother when I was first learning to be a minister up in Portland, Oregon in the winter of 1952–53. She was actually a few years older than my real mother. But she wrote me notes of encouragement. She treated me like a son in every way she could. She and her husband had me to their home for dinner occasionally.

Mrs. Schnippert realized that, as a bachelor, I was probably not too good at housekeeping, so on a couple of occasions she even offered to come over and clean up my apartment. I dissuaded her by telling her that while I appreciated her offer, there was “no need.” Yet she knew I did not really know what I was talking about—though I did not realize it, my apartment did need to be cleaned! Not long after I turned down her kind offer for a second or third time, she simply came over one day with another lady in the Church. Brooms, dustpans, mop and bucket in hand! The two ladies invited themselves in, and began to clean my

apartment in a way it had never been cleaned in the months that I had been there!

After these dear ladies left, I realized that it really did look somewhat “different.” I simply had not bothered to



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notice the little lines of dust and other things that had accumulated during the months that I was there. So, indeed, Chloe Schnippert was a “mother” to me in many ways—even writing me notes of encouragement almost every week for the “wonderful” sermon I had given on the previous Sabbath. Although I was perceptive enough to realize that my sermon was probably not all that great, this dear lady was trying to “mother” me and encourage me. And I appreciated it very much, nevertheless!

MANY “MOTHERS,” BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Over the years, another one of the earliest Christian ladies to support Mr. Armstrong’s ministry—Mrs. Roy Hammer, whom many of you older brethren will remember—was *constantly* helping brethren in the Church. Along with her husband—and *even more than* her husband, since he had his regular job—she was at the “command post” on her telephone helping literally *scores* of brethren organize themselves and know what to do and where to stay when they came to the Feast of Tabernacles at Big Sandy when it was first being set up. She would help arrange a place to stay, tell them where they ought to shop and *help personally* with many situations. Also, when Mr. Raymond McNair and I (and later his younger brother Burk) came through there—she would *always* invite us to stay at their home and *insist* on washing our clothes. “You boys don’t know how to wash your own clothes properly, do you?” she would say, mothering us in every way she could. Looking back, I *deeply appreciate* the service of Mr. and Mrs. Hammer over the decades, and how she “mothered us” in a number of ways—just like a genuine mother would have done, and sometimes *even more so!*

In the early days of the Church in Pasadena, *scores* of the older brethren would invite people over for dinner or a visit

and try to serve them and encourage them in every way they could. There was, indeed, a genuine “family spirit” in the Church in many of those years. As the Church grew bigger, more formal and more structured, some of that “family” spirit began to fade. Mr. Armstrong was off around the world on trips to visit world leaders, and some of the newer and younger ministers came along without the sense of kindness that had been shown in earlier years. Yet, even then, the Church of God experienced a “family spirit” much more than most churches in the world ever do!

Some of our men in the Church—back then *and now*—regularly go out to help older people “fix up” their homes, mow their lawns and help them with many situations just as though they were part of the “family.” Many of our people give of themselves in helping those in need, in helping newer people get adjusted, find a job, have a place to stay, and so on. This is all part of what Christ wants us to do as part of the genuine “family” of God.

Jesus said: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). Brethren, can newcomers or “outsiders” come to “see” that we in the Living Church of God are *practicing* this kind of love for one another? We must examine ourselves, individually, then try to do better. We must get down on our knees and *beseech God*, through Christ, to give us this kind of outflowing love and concern so that all will *know* that we are, indeed, the disciples of Christ! The Apostle Paul was inspired to tell the Corinthian brethren, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:27). For he had just stated earlier, “But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:24–26).

Each one of us, therefore, needs to have the feeling that we want to “honor” those who are blessed—and *rejoice with them*. Each one of us needs to experience the *suffering* of others in the Church—as though they are members of our own body! For *they are!*

May God help all of us to “drink in” of this attitude and try to express it in many ways as we genuinely learn to love one another, *serve* one another and “give” to one another in a hundred different ways as we come to fully experience the “family” spirit which ought to shine forth in the Church of God. For *our Church family* is something that will give us friends and relatives far beyond what we have ever had before. When we fully practice this family spirit and it *begins to radiate throughout God’s Church*, this will profoundly help prepare all of us to be part of *God’s Family* for all eternity. ■

To Whom Do You Listen?

Today, literally hundreds of groups each claim to be the true successor to the Worldwide Church of God under Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. Jesus Christ said that He would build His Church, and that it would never die out (Matthew 16:18). So, since God's word cannot be broken, we **know** that He is still leading His Church. Somewhere, He is directing His servants to continue in doing His Work of proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world, as a witness, and feeding those sheep whom He calls.

IS CHRIST DIVIDED?

The Apostle Paul pointedly asked the Corinthian brethren, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). Already in Paul's day, the Church was being pulled apart by factionalism and personality worship or dislike. People were more interested in following their favorite minister, rather than maintaining a spirit of godly unity.

As the years went by, self-appointed leaders began to stray further and further from the foundation, as laid down by Christ and the apostles. Paul warned the ministers of his day to be careful of outsiders who would worm their way in to pervert the truth. The ministers were also to guard against deceiving themselves into thinking that they should be the focus of attention, rather than humble servants of God's people. "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:28-30).

Those words that Paul wrote more than 1,900 years ago could just as easily have been written to describe what happened in God's Church after the death of Mr. Armstrong. Indeed, the problem of false ministers has been around since almost the very beginning. Even ancient Israel had false teachers who tried to deceive the people of God. The Creator sent true servants to prophesy against the religious perversions being taught, and to point the sons of Jacob toward the true worship of their God. "And when they say to you, 'Seek those who

are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:19-20).

How could so many become deceived, turning their backs on the truths they once knew and obeyed? Jesus Christ Himself gives us the answer, explaining what has happened to those who can no longer discern where Christ is working today: "And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may

have life. I do not receive honor from men. But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you" (John 5:37-42).

Those who act on God's word are able to understand it and retain the truth in their own lives. Those who think they "know better" or that "it doesn't apply" to them will lose the knowledge they once had. We grow in knowledge by practicing what we know. And we grow in love by practicing love for others, by being part of the Work that is proclaiming God's message to a world in desperate need of the coming Kingdom of God.

GODLY LOVE

God's love toward all of humanity is the same outgoing concern that truly Spirit-filled Christians will display for their fellow human beings. Notice that Paul himself—the "apostle to the Gentiles"—knew and practiced the principle of godly love toward men and women of all nations. "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13) Paul's love for those who were not of Israel is the same love Christ taught we should show first to our Father in heaven and then to anyone made in His image: "'And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your



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neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30–31).

Those who love God will support His plan—first to warn and ultimately to save their neighbors. If we love ourselves enough to want eternal life, we must be willing to do our part to help everyone else gain eternal life. Today, whether by overt word or simply by deed, many who call themselves Christians—even in the Church of God—put their own “selfish salvation” first, and in doing so they “lose the plot” of God’s plan, forgetting the big picture of what God is doing for all of mankind.

And what is the ultimate fruit of that selfish approach? God will spew such self-interested Christians out of His mouth! “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:15–17). God has given Christians the Holy Spirit not just for our own salvation, but also to give us the power to do our part in supporting His very Work. Today, there are wolves circling who want us to take our eyes off that purpose, and instead to focus on some grievance or personal ambition as if it is more important than our mission. Yet to do so is a “one-way ticket” to outer darkness (Matthew 25:14–30)!

DETAILS MATTER!

We put ourselves in danger if we think that, because we “know” what God has said, we can ignore what seem to be small details. Notice the example of Moses. God instructed Moses to speak to a rock, to bring forth water for the children of Israel. However, Moses lost his temper and neglected how he was supposed to carry out God’s instruction: “And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them’” (Numbers 20:10–12).

Today, there are men who call themselves “prophets” and “apostles” and claim leadership in the Church of God, yet by their words and deeds we can see they have forgotten Who

it is that can cause water to flow from solid rock. Instead of humbly yielding to God’s word and to those whom God has placed in authority, they presumptuously modify God’s instructions and seek to draw a following.

Another Old Testament example of letting a personal agenda get in the way of God’s instructions is found in the time of Jeroboam. God had sent a man to admonish Jeroboam for leading the northern ten tribes of Israel away from the true worship of the Creator. This man carried out his instructions to the letter until he started home. Then, that man of God was pursued by a prophet who carried a false message to test him. “Then he said to him, ‘Are you the man of God who came from Judah?’ And he said, ‘I am.’ Then he said to him, ‘Come home with me and eat bread.’ And he said, ‘I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. For I have been told by the word of the LORD, “You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came.”’ He said to him, ‘I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, “Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.”’ (He was lying to him.) So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water. Now it happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back; and he cried out to

the man of God who came from Judah, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD, and have not kept the commandment which the LORD your God commanded you, but you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the LORD said to you, ‘Eat no bread and drink no water,’ your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.’” So it was, after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for him, the prophet whom he had brought back. When he was gone, a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood by it. The lion also stood by the corpse’” (1 Kings 13:14–24).

EVIL MEN AND IMPOSTORS

What is the lesson? It is that we must be wary of anyone who, claiming to be a messenger or minister of God, brings instructions that differ from those we have received from those we know to be God’s ministers. We know that, as the end of this present age approaches, we will more and more see this coming to pass. “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been

Those who act on God’s word are able to understand it and retain the truth in their own lives. Those who think they “know better” or that “it doesn’t apply” to them will lose the knowledge they once had. We grow in knowledge by practicing what we know.

STAY FOCUSED!

By Douglas S. Winnail

One of the most sobering aspects of human existence is that important lessons of history go unheeded or are soon forgotten. As a result, mistakes of the past are repeated again and again by individuals who fail to learn from history. The story of God's Church is no exception. In this article we will examine an important warning the Eternal God inspired and recorded in His word that has clear application for us today.

REMARKABLE PARALLELS

The history of the Church of God is outlined (in prophetic form) in the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation. As we approach the end of this age the people of God have grown more concerned about the messages recorded for the Philadelphian and Laodicean eras of the Church—and rightly so! However, it is instructive to notice a number of remarkable similarities between conditions in the Church at the end of the age and the circumstances that existed in the Church during the first century—the Ephesian era.

The Ephesian era represents the Church started by Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Jesus' ministry began in the second decade of the first century (the late 20s). The New Testament Church actually began in the 30s (see Acts 2). The Book of Acts covers events in the 30s, 40s and 50s. Paul's epistles were written in the mid-50s and early 60s. These were times of rapid growth in the early Church. The books of 1, 2, 3 John and Revelation were probably written in the 90s. These books indicate that within 60 years of its founding by Jesus Christ and the Apostles, serious problems and divisions had arisen in the Church. The Bible explains why these problems developed, and records lessons that are for our admonition today. "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

The modern era of the Church of God appears to have begun in the late 1920s when God called Mr. and Mrs. Herbert W. Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong started the Radio Church of God in the 1930s. The 50s, 60s and early 70s were periods of rapid growth for the Church of God. However, beginning in the 1970s, problems and divisions were becoming apparent. By the 1990s,

after the death of Mr. Armstrong, serious splits and factions developed. Within 60 years of the founding of the modern era, devastating divisions engulfed the Church—just as in the first century! The question is—what can we learn from the lessons of history that God has recorded in His word? What can we glean from the admonitions given to the Ephesian Church? How can we avoid the mistakes of the past?

THE WARNING TO EPHEBUS

In Revelation 2, we see the Apostle John revealing Christ's praise for the Ephesian Christians' works, patience, labor and perseverance for the truth of God. They are also commended for being able to discern true apostles from deceiving impostors (Revelation 2:2–3; see also how Peter handled the encounter with a teacher named Simon in Samaria in Acts 8:9–23). The Scriptures, however, record a sobering admonition to the brethren of the Ephesian era! God plainly states, "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen:



repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (Revelation 2:4–5).

The lesson of the Ephesian era is that the Ephesian brethren lost their original focus! As time went on, they drifted away from their founding mission and purpose. They apparently forgot why they had been called out of the world and into the Church. As a result they began to splinter into factions and to follow different leaders with different ideas (1 Corinthians 1:10–17). In order for us to be able to learn important lessons from the experience of the first century Church, we must clearly understand what they lost sight of. We must keep a clear focus on the mission and purpose that Jesus Christ outlined for the Church—from which the Ephesians had drifted away!

THE BASIC COMMISSION

Today, many people have different ideas of why the Church was founded and what it is supposed to

be doing. However, Jesus Christ gave specific instructions to His first disciples. The night before He was crucified, Jesus told them, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Love of God is equated with following His instructions. After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus told His disciples to go to all nations “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). But just what commands did Jesus give to the disciples He used to raise up the New Testament Church? What was their focus to be? What were they commissioned to do?

Notice the beginning of Christ’s ministry. Jesus told His disciples, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). He urged them to think bigger than just themselves, and He set an example for them to follow. Jesus was busy preaching the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God and attending to the needs of people. “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23). When He sent the twelve out on their initial training mission, He commissioned them to preach this same gospel of the

24:36–44; 25:13; Mark 13:32–37). For people to remain alert and watchful, someone needs to function as a watchman. This is the message of chapters 3 and 33 of Ezekiel. This, too, has been an important function of the Philadelphia era for more than 70 years! It has been a mission that has held us together. However, there are some Christians today who feel this is not their job—and even that it is no longer necessary. This is another aspect of the “first love” that has been forgotten—a focus that has been lost!

Jesus gave another vital commission to His disciples. He told them to “feed my sheep” (John 21:15–19). That feeding involves teaching those who are called out of this world about the mission of the Church and how to live by every word of God. Christians must learn to live according to the rules that will govern every aspect of life in the coming Kingdom of God. The Church is to be busy preparing individuals to function as the leaders—kings and priests—in God’s coming Kingdom. Those whom God has called must come to understand the real causes and solutions to the problems facing mankind—not just participate in Church social occasions. They must develop the capability to function as part of an

The Church is to be busy preparing individuals to function as the leaders—kings and priests—in God’s coming Kingdom. Those whom God has called must come to understand the real causes and solutions to the problems facing mankind—not just participate in Church social occasions. They must develop the capability to function as part of an effective world-ruling government under Jesus Christ—instead of resisting and resenting godly authority.

Kingdom and to heal the sick (Matthew 10:7–8). Jesus also indicated that His disciples would not complete this mission before He returned (Matthew 10:23). Bible prophecy states that this gospel of the Kingdom of God would be preached to all the world at the end of the age as a witness (Matthew 24:14). This has been the focus of Philadelphian Christians for the last 70 years and more. We have been united in that focus for about three-quarters of a century!

However, some today feel this job—of preaching the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to the world—has been accomplished. Their focus has turned inward. All they want to do is “prepare themselves” for Christ’s return—they neglect the importance of sharing the hope of Christ’s return with the billions who desperately need that return in order to see their world change for the better! For others, the gospel has become merely a gospel of “good works”—which Jesus Himself said was a misunderstanding of His original instructions (Matthew 7:21–23). Yet a vital purpose given to the Church by Jesus Christ was to warn this world of the sobering and climactic events that will precede His second coming. Entire chapters of three gospels are devoted to this theme—Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21.

Paul, Peter and John emphasize the same warning (2 Thessalonians 2, 2 Timothy 3, 2 Peter 3, and the entire book of Revelation). Jesus repeatedly urged disciples who would be alive at the end of the age to watch world events (Matthew

effective world-ruling government under Jesus Christ—instead of resisting and resenting godly authority. They must be of the same mind, able to work together as a smoothly functioning team—instead of being preoccupied with “doing their own thing.”

Sadly, some today seem to feel that having their own minister, their own song books, their own church building or preaching their own ideas is evidence that the flock is being fed. Jesus Christ, however, was moved by His compassion for the plight of mankind. Scripture records His lament, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37). He urged His true disciples to be willing to sacrifice their personal wishes, ideas and comforts in order to finish the job—of conveying the hope of the gospel to a dying world (Luke 9:58–62). For most of us, learning the Truth of God was not just to feed ourselves. We learned that “to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48). We felt deeply that our responsibility was to be part of a Work that involved sharing the good news we had come to understand and to warn this world of the coming judgment of God. This has been our historical focus!

For decades, through the 30s, 40s and 50s, Mr. Armstrong was the only minister many people ever knew

or heard—over radio or television—yet many people were fed, and many grew spiritually. Today, we have ministers, tapes and videos, magazines and newsletters for feeding the flock as well as preaching the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God and for warning the world. To accomplish the fundamental missions of the Church and follow the instructions of Jesus Christ, decisions must be made about the allocation of resources. Not everyone would make those decisions the same way. That is where leaders and respect for leadership come in. It is the job of those in leadership positions to keep the Church focused on the basic commission Jesus gave to the Church—preaching the gospel of the Kingdom to the nations, warning the world of coming cataclysmic events, and feeding the flock. All three aspects are important.

We cannot pick and choose from among the three. Divisions will arise among those who lose sight of the “big picture” and focus instead on just one aspect or another of our overall Christian mission. This is a fundamental lesson from both the Bible and history.

EARLY ZEAL

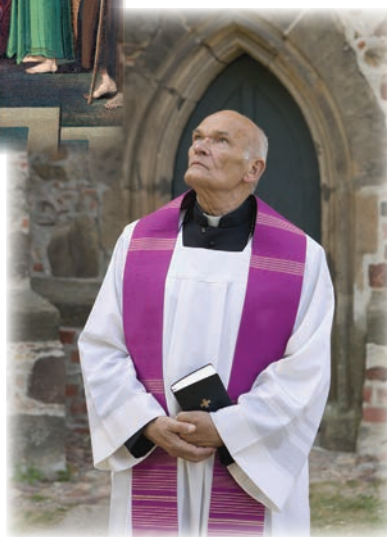
Jesus Christ, as the founder of the Church, set the initial example. He was focused on doing the work He was given to do. He stated to His disciples “my food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish the work” (John 4:34–36). He told His disciples there was plenty of work to do, and that it needed to be done while there was opportunity to do it (John 9:4)! The early disciples followed the example of their Master. The Church began with a sense of unity and common purpose (Acts 2:1, 40–46). They asked God for boldness and guidance as the Church began to grow (Acts 4:29–31). Even in the face of persecution that scattered the Church they “went everywhere preaching the word” that Jesus had given to them (Acts 8:1–4). In the early chapters we find Philip preaching “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). In the last chapter of the same book we find the Apostle Paul preaching the same gospel of the Kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus Christ (Acts 28:23, 31). They continued preaching what they had been commanded by their Master in spite of persecution and threats of physical harm. The initial picture of the first century Church is one of a highly motivated, sharply focused and unified group of believers. They were excited about their calling and their commission. They enthusiastically embraced their “first love.”

PROBLEMS ARISE

This ideal situation, however, did not last long. On his last visit to Ephesus (in 56 or 57AD) the Apostle Paul warned the assembled elders that “after my departure savage wolves [false teachers] will come in among you, not sparing the flock” and that “from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse [misleading] things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29–31). Paul had to deal with divisive factions that developed around personalities (1 Corinthians 1:10–13), with different views about what constituted the gospel (Galatians 1:6–9), with different ideas about Jesus Christ and even different spirits that were influencing congregations (2 Corinthians 11:1–4). Paul clearly labeled those who promoted such divisive ideas as agents of Satan—in spite of the fact they claimed to be ministers of Jesus Christ. “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13–15).

Nearly every one of the epistles deals with issues that erupted to trouble and divide the early New Testament Church. False teachers and misleading doctrinal ideas seemed to pop up everywhere. Paul warns Timothy that “the time will come when they [people in the Church] will not endure sound doctrine” but having itching ears would flock to false teachers and would “turn their ears away from the truth” to believe fables instead (2 Timothy 4:3–4). Paul reminds Titus that a true elder must be found “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught” (Titus 1:7–9). Peter warned that false teachers would “secretly bring in destructive heresies” and would use “deceptive words” to exploit people and lead them astray (2 Peter 2:1–3). He describes these false teachers as presumptuous, self-willed and despisers of those in authority (2 Peter 2:10).

Near the end of the first century, John wrote that “many deceivers have gone out into the world” (2 John 7) and he describes one situation where “Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence” was actually putting true believers out of



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the congregation over which he presided (3 John 9–10). Jude admonishes his audience to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” because certain individuals had subtly and deliberately twisted and perverted the instructions and truth that Jesus gave to the original Apostles (Jude 3). The gospel Jesus proclaimed, about the coming Kingdom of God, was narrowed to become a gospel about nothing more than Jesus’ person, love and good works. Instead of looking forward to reigning with Christ on earth, converts were told about the glories of going to heaven. In place of the hope of becoming part of God’s family, God was increasingly described as a closed Trinity. Instead of focusing on preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, the Church was divided by arguments over the nature of God.

At the close of the first century, the picture of the Ephesian era of the Church—the Church founded by Christ and the Apostles—is of a Church increasingly divided and struggling, with a growing list of false or twisted doctrines promoted by misguided teachers. It is a Church that has lost its unity, its

first love—as they began following individuals who pointed congregations in different directions. Such individuals must be clearly labeled as false teachers who cause divisions—in spite of their “good intentions.”

For years we have emphasized the importance of “proving” all things and “holding fast” to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21, *KJV*). In order to avoid getting caught up in reasonable-sounding yet misleading ideas, we must know what the Bible clearly teaches. This requires regular personal study of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:14–16). Christians in the early Church had to do this (Acts 17:11; Revelation 2:2). We must do the same today to avoid being led off in reasonable-sounding but wrong directions. We must remember Paul’s admonition to Titus to hold onto what we have been taught (Titus 1:9) in spite of the fact that well-meaning critics may assert that we are stuck in the past and are unwilling to change. Here, again, it is an issue of staying focused!

We must also learn to think about bigger issues than just our own personal needs and desires. Jesus Christ is coming

We must also learn to think about bigger issues than just our own personal needs and desires. Jesus Christ is coming back to this earth to save mankind, to establish a world-ruling government that will address and solve global problems. He needs individuals who have learned to think about more than local Church issues and individual concerns.

sense of mission and its original focus. This is the context in which John is given the admonition regarding the Ephesian era of the Church (Revelation 2:1–7). God reveals that the problems of the early first century Church were due to the fact they had lost their focus! They had drifted off course. They had ceased to follow Christ’s clear example and His specific instructions. This is a sobering indictment, but it is the lesson that God chose to record in Scripture about the first century Church. The lesson is preserved in the Bible for those who “have ears to hear”!

MODERN APPLICATIONS

So what can we learn as we compare our present situation to the conditions that developed in the Ephesian era of the Church of God? How can we avoid making the same mistakes? The most important lesson is that we must maintain the same focus that Jesus Christ emphasized through His example and His instructions to the disciples. Our goal, as it has been for more than 70 years, must be to preach the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to this world and to function as a watchman to warn this world of the dramatic events that will mark the imminent return of the Savior of mankind. This commission requires a coordinated team effort. It cannot be done effectively by uncoordinated, piecemeal attempts of isolated individuals and groups. That is why Jesus Christ founded a Church. The churches of the Ephesian era fell into trouble when they lost this fundamental focus—leaving their

back to this earth to save mankind, to establish a world-ruling government that will address and solve global problems. He needs individuals who have learned to think about more than local Church issues and individual concerns. We have been called to prepare to rule the world with Jesus Christ—that should be our focus—not to just play Church! Future members of the family and government of God must be able to respect those God has put in positions of authority and work smoothly together to accomplish our mission (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13). Personal preferences and agendas cannot be allowed to disrupt and derail the commission Jesus gave to His Church. We must stay focused on the mission that Christ commanded His disciples to accomplish.

Finally, we cannot afford to become lukewarm regarding the commission we have been given. Christ’s commandments matter! His instructions are not issues for debate and discussion. To entertain such an approach only fosters discord and division. The focus then becomes fuzzy and blurred. People begin drifting away. The sense of mission dissipates and the mission falters. That is what happened to the Church in the first century. That is the clear lesson of both Scripture and history. Brethren, we cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the early Church. We must remain focused. We must follow the clear example and the plain instructions of Jesus Christ. That is how we can avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. That is how we will gain the crown and the reward that God promises to His faithful servants in these last days (Revelation 3:10–12). That is the importance of staying focused! ■



ADVENTURE CAMP 2013

By Jim Meredith

One of the highlights of the year for some of our Church youth is the Adventure Camp we hold each summer. This unique and challenging camp offers our teens the opportunity to do something that they would probably never be able to otherwise. The youth in the Church are very important to us, and we want to do all we can to help them to develop—both physically and spiritually.

Preparation for this camp begins months in advance, as all who participate must physically prepare themselves for this challenging adventure. By the time they arrive for camp, all must be in top physical condition to be able to complete the challenges they will face. This year, after weeks and months of preparation, nearly 40 enthusiastic campers and staff arrived in Oakhurst, California on July 9, excited and ready to go!



Each day, adult staff started things off for the youth with both physical and spiritual food. After breakfast the first morning, Mr. Sheldon Monson gave a Bible Study on the important and timely topic of “Preparation.” We then loaded the vehicles and hit the road. As we entered the spectacular Yosemite Valley, many of the youth could be heard “ohhh-ing” and “ahhh-ing” at the majestic views of Half Dome, El Capitan and Yosemite Falls. This is a valley unlike any other place in the world, and can only be truly appreciated in its fullness by being there. We then hiked about two miles up the “Mist Trail” to the top of Vernal Falls. This hike was a good warm-up for what we were to begin the next day. After the hike, we stopped for lunch and then drove for about three hours, going out of the

east entrance of the Park over Tioga Pass (elevation 9,945 feet), then south to the town of Mammoth, California.

Mammoth Mountain is a popular ski resort, and was where we would begin our backpacking trip the next day. After checking into the hotel, we held an orientation meeting with everyone, and went over what we would be doing on the backpacking trip. Needed equipment (such as cooking stoves, water filters, dishes and tents) was handed out to each group and packed into backpacks. We then weighed the backpacks to make sure all were carrying their fair share. The weights varied from 25–40 pounds for the women, and from 40–60 pounds for the men. Some of the strong young men like to prove their strength by carrying more, which is perfectly fine with us “old guys” on the staff. We all then enjoyed our last “real food” for a few days, having pizza and salad.



That night would be our last night of good sleep in a real bed for several days. The next morning, we again started the day off right with breakfast, followed by my Bible Study on the timely topic of “Perseverance”—something all of us would need over the next five days. Now it was time to begin the adventure! We all loaded onto a bus at the main lodge at the Mammoth ski area and were driven up to the trailhead. The bus stopped along the way and let us walk up to see the “Devil’s Postpile National Monument.” We then put our backpacks on, and began our hike into the wilderness.

Park regulations required that we split into three groups for hiking and camping, so each group headed out on its

designated route in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. We would be on the famous John Muir Trail and Pacific Coast Trail much of the time, hiking at elevations from 8,500 feet to more than 11,000 feet. After more than six hours of grueling hiking, my group made it to our campsite—the beautiful Thousand Island Lake, at an elevation of 9,833 feet—shortly before sunset. We had just enough time to set up our tents before the sun dropped over the mountains, along with the temperatures.

To run an efficient camp, everyone in the group must work together to do all of the necessary chores. While some of the guys pumped water through the purifiers (all drinking water must be purified, even in the wilderness), some of the girls quickly prepared dinner. We then cleaned the dishes and packed the food into the bear barrels that are required by the Park Service when hiking in the Sierra Mountains (and many other state parks). By the time we had everything done, it was quite dark, which afforded us an amazing view of the night sky. On a clear night at that elevation, the view of the stars and planets is spectacular! Shooting stars could be seen streaking across the night sky many times—God’s vast universe seemed a little clearer than usual. After the long day, and due to the cold temperatures, everyone went to bed fairly early.



temperatures had probably dropped into the 20s. But the sun warmed things up quickly, and we had our morning breakfast of coffee or hot chocolate and oatmeal with nuts and dried fruit. After a Bible Study, we took down the tents, packed everything

up and headed up the trail. That day, our route would take us over Island Pass to Waugh Lake. After spending Thursday night at different lakes, all three groups would stay together at Waugh Lake over the Sabbath day. The hike for my group was shorter that day, and—due to starting the hike earlier in the day than Thursday—we were able to make it to our campsite by mid-afternoon. After setting up tents and the campsite, the hearty hikers had time to wash some of the trail dust off and take a swim in the refreshing (and very cold) lake. The warmth of the sun felt good after getting out of the very cold water, and it was wonderful to be clean once again. We were then able to enjoy a relaxed Friday dinner, and to get all of the clean-up done before sunset.



Once again, we had an incredible view of a star-filled sky before heading into our tents for the night.

Everyone appreciated being able to sleep in on Saturday morning. After two hard days of hiking, all appreciated even more that the Sabbath is a day of rest. Sabbath brunch consisted of cheesy eggs, sausage, Mexican rice and beans and pancakes with syrup. Everyone enjoyed the brunch, and no one left hungry. After a leisurely morning, we walked a mile or so and met up with the other two groups that were camped farther down the lake. Sabbath services were held sitting in the woods on logs and rocks in God’s awesome creation. We all sang hymns, followed by a sermonette by Mr. John Robinson on “The New Normal,” special music by Molly Forrestier and a sermon on wisdom from Mr. Darrell Lovelady. Not forsaking the assembly of ourselves applies in the remotest of places, and the fellowship was abundant as campers compared stories





of their experiences. After the closing hymn, Mr. Monson made a surprise announcement—everyone was invited to walk down to the lake and witness a baptism. One of the



older campers had been counseling for baptism with Mr. Monson and requested that he be baptized at the adventure camp. So, we all went down to the lake and watched as this young man was baptized and had hands laid on him by the ministry present. Congratulations, Jake Hunter! Jake was the first person to be baptized

on one of these camps, and it was an inspiration to all. The remainder of the afternoon was spent enjoying the scenery, swimming in the lake and resting for the next day.

On Sunday morning, we got up early in order to start on the trail before the temperature grew too hot. That day's hike would be the hardest day of the trip, in that we needed to go over the 11,056-foot Donahue Pass. After our normal breakfast of oatmeal, and our Bible Study, we broke camp, packed up and hit the trail. God gave us another gorgeous sunny day, and everyone was feeling strong after having the Sabbath off to recuperate. High altitude can be a real challenge to hike in if you are not used to it, and a few of the campers did have some trouble going over the pass, but they persevered in spite of how they felt. Everyone made it over in good shape. The view from the top in all directions was spectacular, and some of the girls were even doing a dance of joy for having made it up there. As we came down the other side, we could see the length of Lyell Canyon, where we were going to spend the night. After more than seven hours of hiking, we found a great campsite across the river from the trail and pitched our tents. Because we had left our previous campsite early,

we were able to get the new camp set up by 4:00 p.m., which gave us extra time to clean up in the river and relax.

At previous lakeside campsites, we had tried to do some fishing, but to no avail. That Sunday was different, as some of the guys were able to catch some fish in the river, which we all enjoyed eating as a supplement to our dinner. Another difference that night was that, since we were now in the Yosemite National Park, we were able to have a campfire—something everyone really appreciated. After dinner and dishes were done, we sat around the fire, and we talked until much later in the evening than we had in the “cold camps” the previous nights. It had been a long hard day of hiking, but everyone was happy to have made it over the mountain in good shape.

On Monday morning, we had our usual oatmeal for breakfast, followed by a Bible Study on “Adversity”—a topic everyone could relate to. We then packed up the tents and backpacks, waded across the river and headed down



the trail. Monday's hike was a relatively easy 8–9 miles along the river, and was fairly flat. We finished the hike at Tuolumne Meadows in the early afternoon, loaded our gear in the vehicles and drove to a campground in Groveland, California. Everyone enjoyed swimming in the campground pool, playing volleyball and taking a warm shower before eating dinner—hotdogs never tasted so good!

After a sumptuous breakfast of scrambled eggs, pancakes and turkey bacon on Tuesday morning, Mr. Lovelady gave a Bible Study on “Kindness.” We then packed our tents, loaded our gear and headed just down the road to the rafting company, where we boarded buses that took us down to the

Tuolumne River where our next adventure began. After being outfitted with life jackets and helmets, we climbed in the rafts and began our 17-mile journey down the river. Seven hours and many rapids later—one class five, thirteen class four and countless class three—we completed the journey. We were wet, sunburned and tired, but excited and full of memories.



This rafting trip was probably the best rafting trip we have done at any of the Adventure Camps and everyone thoroughly enjoyed it. We then drove back to Oakhurst, where we had begun this trip. After dinner we showered and had a good night's rest. What a treat it was to sleep in a bed after five nights on the ground!

On Wednesday morning, we once again needed to get an early start, but we still had time for both physical and spiritual food with Mr. Monson giving the final Bible Study of the camp on "Achievement." The day was spent driving to Sequoia National Park where we saw the giant Sequoia trees. Standing at the foot of the General Sherman tree makes one feel quite small. It is the largest (by volume) living tree known of on the earth today, and it is thought to be more than 2,000 years old! Perhaps they should have named it Methuselah? After seeing these trees, we made the long drive back to Oakhurst, where there was still work to do. All of our camping gear had to be taken out, cleaned, organized and packed back in the tubs in which they

were brought, then loaded back into Mr. Monson's trailer. Everyone pitched in and got it done with enough daylight left for a few volleyball games. We all enjoyed a final dinner of spaghetti, after which we packed up to head home the next morning.

This year's trip was yet another epic success, and everyone who was able to participate in it loved it. This year we had to turn down more than half of the people who applied to come—we are clearly seeing the popularity of these trips grow. The Church wants to help our youth to grow spiritually and physically, and this camp is a perfect opportunity for both.

If you are interested in attending the Adventure Camp next year, you need to be preparing for it now. Since we can only take a portion of those who apply, we will be looking at the applications and ministerial recommendations carefully. Being chosen to attend this camp is a privilege and a reward for those who are dedicated. If you are setting a good example and serving in your local congregation, attending Sabbath service with the Living Church of God every week, participating in the regular teen camp and serving at preteen camps, your name will be at the top of the list.



We look forward to another great Adventure Camp trip next year, and are beginning to plan it now. These camps do require a lot of planning and expense for the Church. The camp tuition does not begin to cover the actual cost of the camps, so if you would like to help and contribute to this and any other camp, we would appreciate it very much.

In addition to the photos on these *Living Church News* pages, there are many more incredible pictures and videos of Adventure Camp posted on the LCG Living Youth Facebook page as well as on the *LivingYouth.org* Web site. ■



Love and Government

By Wyatt Ciesielka

John's gospel reveals a key attribute by which Christians can be recognized. Jesus told His disciples, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Love—outflowing concern for others—is at the core of our Christian commitment.

So, why do so many wonder about Church government? Is Church government something that sincere Christians even need to bother understanding in the first place? The answer is, *yes*. Government is *integral* to the Gospel message. And, properly understood, it is integral to our understanding of God's love.

Scripture records that Jesus came "preaching the gospel of the *kingdom* of God" (Mark 1:14–15). The word "kingdom" (from the Greek word *basileia*) means *government*. The gospel message Jesus brought was about the coming *government* of God to be established over this earth at His Second Coming. At that time, the "kingdoms" (*basileia*) of this world will become Christ's, and He will reign or *govern* (*basileuō*) over them forever (cf. Revelation 11:15). Furthermore, those who now do the will of the Father will not only enter into that coming kingdom (*basileia*), but they will also rule, reign and *govern* (*basileuō*) in that coming kingdom (Revelation 5:10; 20:6; 22:5). However, Jesus warned that not everyone who calls Him "Lord" will enter into His coming *basileia*; but rather those who do the will of the Father will enter into that kingdom (Matthew 7:21).

GOD'S GOVERNMENT IS BASED ON LOVE

Jesus Christ revealed that the *entire law* is founded on two principles; love toward God and love toward neighbor (cf. Matthew 22:36–40). Indeed, as many are familiar with, God's very nature is expressed as *love* (1 John 4:8, 16), and love is *kind* (1 Corinthians 13:4). However, as will be further explored, God's nature is also expressed as *tsēdaqah*, which means *governmental righteousness*, as in Isaiah 9:7 and elsewhere. Logically, godly government is then an expression of *service* and of *love*, which is the clear model provided in Scripture.

While God does require faith, repentance and obedience (Matthew 9:13; James 2:18–20) there is nothing oppressive or tyrannical about godly government. All of God's instructions are for our good and for "instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16) and are based on His laws of love. As Dr. Roderick C. Meredith has written, "God loves us so much that

He let Jesus Christ come to this earth to die for those who were still sinners. He is not trying to 'crush' people and make them 'cower' for His pleasure. He sincerely desires that all should be saved. Those who are rebelling against God should certainly fear His vengeance. But those who are seeking to obey Him should be awestruck by His love, and should be moved to deep reverence" (*Tomorrow's World*, September-October 2012).

It is important to note, as Jesus Christ instructed in Mark 10:44, that whoever desires to be "first"—whoever desires to be a leader, or to have authority—must be the servant of everyone else. A true godly leader is a *servant*, and according to Jesus Christ, an attitude of righteous service is a prerequisite and a requirement for those who would be in authority.

All governments (even those governments which are in rebellion to God) are in reality existing subordinate to God's dominion. This does not mean that God approves of unrighteous governance. Far from it! Unrighteous governance is completely contrary to God's very nature—His *tsēdaqah*. But, any human governance is nonetheless ultimately allowed by, and subservient to, God's sovereignty as Scripture makes plain, "For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1). This is a lesson that humanity continues to struggle to learn.

This was in part what the English grappled with in 1215, leading to the famous confrontation with King John and resulting in the Magna Carta. This was the same truth that, nearly 2,000 years earlier, the Almighty God had taught Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Had either king truly understood what Nebuchadnezzar came to learn, "that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses" (Daniel 5:21), perhaps they both would have avoided their respective humiliations. Yet neither man—just like most people today—fully accepted the lesson that it is ultimately God who rules and who governs (cf. Isaiah 22:22, Revelation 11:15). It is God who gives the laws which we are obliged to follow. It is God who even provides the model for the proper form of governance.

WHY GODLY GOVERNMENT

It is helpful to be reminded of the *perfect model* against which we should measure governmental efforts. God has always given humanity freedom of choice to choose between the right and the wrong (Deuteronomy 30:19). Unfortunately, history is full of wrong choices and wrong government.

What does the Bible reveal about God's government and governance? In addition to being based on love, God and His

God expects those who serve as leaders to serve and to lead in love. This type of leadership is often called "Servant Leadership," and is based on Jesus' example and instruction (Matthew 20:25–28). This pattern of loving servant leadership and ecclesiastical appointment—not oppression or corruption or politicking—is to be upheld by God's Church; it is not to be changed (Matthew 28:20).

government is also *good* (Mark 10:18), *perfect* (Psalm 18:30) and *just* (Isaiah 9:7). God's justice stems from His righteous character, and His righteous character is reflected by His "perfect law" or His *teleios nomos* (James 1:25). God's "perfect law" is *without defect* in any way. It is also, as James 2:8 reveals, a "royal" law (a *basilikos nomos*) which connotes that it is a law established by, and supported by one in authority. God's "royal law" is appropriate for governing, and again, is always founded on *love* (Romans 13:1).

This royal and perfect law emanating from God is called His *tsēdaqah*, or "governmental righteousness" (cf. Isaiah 9:7, 56:1; Psalm 119:142). Perfect and righteous governance is integral to God's very purpose, as Job 37:23 reveals by describing that God is *excellent* in power and in judgment and in governance (*tsēdaqah*). He executes *righteous* governance (*tsēdaqah*) for all who are oppressed (cf. Psalm 103:6). It is Jesus Christ who is the branch of *tsēdaqah* from the household of David (Jeremiah 33:15). It is Christ who will return to establish the Kingdom of God as described in Revelation 17:14 and elsewhere.

Christians today are to be imitating Christ and following His example in all ways (1 John 2:6). While no human can act perfectly as God acts, notice that Abraham is counted as practicing *tsēdaqah* righteousness (cf. Genesis 15:6). Likewise, King David also demonstrated *tsēdaqah* in his life (cf. 1 Chronicles 18:14). It is no wonder that Abraham and David will receive very high positions in the coming Kingdom of God! What then is the purpose of this royal and perfect law? The purpose is to reflect His righteousness (*tsēdaqah*), which leads to salvation (Isaiah 56:1). If we reflect His righteousness, then we will also reflect His love, and His example of service. We will then be on the path for qualifying to rule within the theocratic monarchy that will be established under Christ in the coming Kingdom of God (Revelation 1:6, 5:10).

Why should this matter to us today? Consider these words from our Presiding Evangelist in the *Living Church News*: "The type of hierarchical government Christ directed His servants to employ throughout both the Old and New Testaments is the exact form of government we will soon be teaching and practicing in Tomorrow's World" ("Growth Through Servant Leadership," January-February 2011, p. 2). Yet we are also reminded, "And we should all—from the greatest to the least—learn to administer *our part* in God's government with love and humility, and with the approach of *Servant Leadership*" (*ibid.*). As Dr. Meredith wrote in *The World Ahead: What Will It Be Like?* God's coming government will create "an entire new society based on love, joy and peace" (p. 2). God's government is one of peace, fairness and *righteousness*.

In the Kingdom of God, there will be peace, righteousness, and true happiness. As Isaiah 11:9 tells us, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." God is love (1 John 4:8; 16). He governs with love. Godly government and godly governance are expressions, or manifestations of love. And God expects those who serve as leaders to serve and to lead in love. This type of leadership

is often called "Servant Leadership," and is based on Jesus' example and instruction (Matthew 20:25–28). This pattern of loving servant leadership and ecclesiastical appointment—not oppression or corruption or politicking—is to be upheld by God's Church; it is not to be changed (Matthew 28:20).

BEYOND TODAY'S CONFUSION

God is not the "author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33). Sadly, today in the Church of God there is much "confusion" about Church government. This confusion is not only illustrated by the myriad differing *forms* of Church governance that exist, but it is also often exhibited in the *manner* of governance, as governance often becomes highly politically charged. There is also too often a lack of "peace" within organizations that have become highly politicized.

This is true throughout the professing Christian world as well. Consider the "Vatileaks" scandal that shook the Roman Catholic world in 2012. Why those secret Vatican documents were released at all is a source of speculation ranging from having "something to do with power struggles between senior Italian Church officials intent on putting their favorite candidates in good positions for the next papal election" to "a conspiracy" against the number two Vatican official. Regardless of the motivation for the leaks, these papers "show that, just like elsewhere, there are lies, intrigues and bitter feuds between rival parties" (*Der Spiegel*, June 4, 2012). "Vatileaks" may have made for sensational news headlines, but this scandal is sadly just an example of what can happen when power and politics are blended—and these problems are by no means limited to the Roman church.

The simplest answer to "why" there is such governmental confusion in Christianity today is that Adam and Eve partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From that time on, mankind has too often neglected God's clear instruction, rejecting "blessing" and instead choosing "cursing" (cf. Deuteronomy 30:19). As 2 Peter 2:10 specifically warns, there is a dangerous human tendency to "despise government" (KJV). In this passage, the Greek word *kyriotēs* is used, which typically refers to a governing reign, a government or a dominion—not simply "authority," but the official capacity and rule of a government. This word (*kyriotēs*) is the same word that is used elsewhere to refer to *God's governing position and governing authority, both in this age and in the age to come* (cf. Ephesians 1:21, Colossians 1:16).

God's governing intent is to establish righteousness and peace (cf. Isaiah 9:6–7; Romans 14:17), and as has already been shown, all of God's law, and all that God does, is founded on love (cf. Matthew 22:36–40; 1 John 4:8, 16). His *tsēdaqah*, or *governmental righteousness*, is also a manifestation of His perfect love, despite the persistent human tendency to "despise" God's instructions and His laws regarding righteous, biblical government. Let us be careful to embrace and obey, not to despise and reject, those instructions. ■

Worrior to Woman

By Shirley Young

Women and Stress

Stress is not something unknown to godly women. In chapter 1 of 1 Samuel, we read of righteous Hannah who was childless while her husband's other wife, Peninnah, gave him many children. As a result, Peninnah mocked Hannah's barrenness. She used her sharp tongue to cut and wound Hannah. Peninnah's actions were probably motivated by jealousy because their husband, Elkanah, loved Hannah and gave her a specially honourable portion when they went up to Shiloh, to worship God and offer sacrifices.

Peninnah did not understand that the *Lord* had closed Hannah's womb and that it was not some form of punishment. However, her repeated spitefulness, using her tongue like a sword, so greatly stressed Hannah that she did not eat. Then, when Hannah was at the Tabernacle crying out to God, she was mistaken by Eli, the High Priest, for being a drunken woman, whereas Hannah was actually praying from the heart, not just the mouth.

Yet God understood Hannah's pain and sincerity. Consequently He blessed her with Samuel, a very special son, who later became a judge in Israel. Then after Samuel was weaned and given to God for His service, the Lord again blessed Hannah with other children (1 Samuel 2:5).

As a result, God allowed Hannah's prayer to become part of the Scriptures: "Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by His actions are weighed" (1 Samuel 2:3). Hannah understood that she did not have to "get even" with Peninnah. She left it to God.

WEARING AWAY STONE

Perhaps a number of us might sympathize with Hannah if we have ever suffered under the lash of the tongue. Nagging, belittling or continual digging at a person's known sensitive spot is like the dripping of water that eventually wears away stone: it can wear away our nerves, confidence and patience. But like Hannah, and with God's strength, we *can resist* the temptation to fly back with that carefully thought out retaliatory retort, which would be equally cruel and hurtful.

If in prayer we place the whole situation into God's capable hands, and leave it there, He *will* take care of it. After

all, "He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see?" (Psalm 94:9).

Stress can come in a variety of other ways—sometimes suddenly, from the unexpected death of a loved one, or sometimes in ways that wear one down over time.



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A SOLDIER'S STORY

Not so very long ago, in the United States, a young veteran soldier was driving his mother along a road when a nearby train sounded its horn. He was so shocked by the noise that he immediately flung open the car door and leapt out, leaving it to crash into the curb.

This young man, who had so eagerly joined the armed services, had come under attack many times while on tours of duty. One particularly serious incident had incurred a blow to the head that caused traumatic brain injury. His body was so peppered with shrapnel that whenever he walked through an airport security screen he set off the alarm.

Not much later, at the age of 23, this poor young man committed suicide and became part of a gruesome statistic. In 2012, 177 U.S. soldiers took their own lives—a death toll exceeding the 176 who were killed while in the combat zone.

In an interview given later after her son's death, his mother said that the nights were the worst for him. He had dreadful nightmares, and actually slashed his own face with a knife on one occasion.

She continued that she did not think her son had ever read Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but she was moved to notice that, after he returned from his final tour of duty in Afghanistan, he kept rubbing his hands over and over and then rinsing them under the tap. "Mom," he said "It won't come off." When she asked what he was talking about, he replied: "The blood! It won't come off!"

This young man who committed suicide was overcome by extreme stress because of his involvement in continual and extreme violence. Thankfully in God's soon coming Kingdom, our children will not "learn war anymore" (Micah 4:3).

Stress is by no means confined to soldiers, or to men. Recent studies have in fact found that women tend to suffer from stress more than men, and react to stress in different ways. Women are far more likely to dwell on a problem, become emotional and feel extremely anxious.

In fact, so found one study, women who work in a predominately male-dominated environment often feel

inadequate or experience a sense of failure. As they make great efforts to equal or surpass their male counterparts, they work twice as hard to prove themselves and experience tremendous stress as a result.

It was also found that married women are far more likely to suffer stress than single women. This is easy enough to understand when we realize that today's woman often has significant responsibilities outside the home, yet may shoulder most or all of the household responsibilities as well, especially when a husband does not or cannot share the load as appropriate.

Such stresses inevitably take their toll. For women, more than men, stress is far more likely to manifest itself in eating disorders—either not eating at all or binge eating. Too much alcohol can also be a temptation. Insomnia may be a problem. Some women of childbearing age may even find their periods becoming irregular.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

How, then, to deal with stressors? Experienced counsellors advise that one should try to become a “problem solver.” The first step they suggest is to make a list of problems. Think about each one calmly, and meditate on possible solutions. Tackle the easier ones first and, as they are resolved, confidence will build to tackle the larger issues.

Sometimes small matters are not worth the stress of arguing over, so try to meet the other person halfway or concede.

Taking care of the body is also important. Get sufficient sleep and eat properly. Research has shown that physical activity can relax tense muscles and greatly aid the relief of depression—even a short walk can help.

Women, it was discovered, found much more help and consolation in confiding their difficulties to another family member or friend. As the old adage says: “A problem shared is a problem halved.” The Apostle Paul also counselled us to “Bear one another's burdens” (Galatians 6:2). So perhaps we can all help in this by just being willing to listen to another lady member's problems, and even if we do not have an immediate “magic” answer we can give encouragement and continually pray about the issue, remembering to keep it confidential if necessary.

Insufficient finances can also become a stressor, especially if we get behind on bill payments.

There is much good advice on the Internet and elsewhere about budgeting. Debt counsellors are also available. However, if the case is joblessness then we should pray about the situation and then do all we can to find work. One might also want to read Dr. Meredith's booklet entitled: *God's People Tithe!*

However, there are sometimes emergency situations when we need God's intervention immediately. So, I would like to tell you a *true story*.

Many years ago a long-time Church couple with young children went through a period of poverty to the extent that they did not even have money for basic groceries. So after

praying in faith, the husband told his wife to take her shopping bag and go to the local store and get the necessities needed, and that God would provide. Faithfully and without question, his wife started off to the store. On the way she found a £1 note lying on the pavement. She picked it up but then returned home. Fearing that this was perhaps a temptation from Satan to steal a nearby neighbour's money, the couple handed it in to the local constable. The constable meticulously took down the details in his book, but then as the couple stood up to leave, he pushed the £1 note into the husband's pocket saying: “No one ever comes in here to claim lost money.” So because of their absolute trust in God, *He did provide!*

Stress can also come from moving house, exams and many other sources, but perhaps one of the worst stresses of all is illness—either looking after someone with a long-term debilitating sickness or personally experiencing chronic or terminal illness.

If caring for a loved one with a chronic illness goes on day and night, year after year, it can be extremely wearing and will often affect the caregiver's own health. Watching that loved one deteriorate and dwindle away on a daily basis is a truly heart-wrenching situation, and in the end death descends like a peaceful blessing. Therefore, if it is viable, volunteering to sit with the sick person occasionally can be a great help, and may enable the caregiver to have some respite.

A WAY OF ESCAPE

Speaking from personal experience, and not in a cold, clinical way, I understand only too well the stress of living with terminal illness, especially if one lives alone. However, throughout my own ten and a half years' trial with cancer, though God has not *yet* healed me, He has rescued me again and again. There have been many occasions when I felt I could not continue, but each time, after fervent prayer, He has always intervened in some way and provided “a way of escape” (1 Corinthians 10:13) so that I have been able to continue with a basic routine.

God is faithful and He will never renege on His promises. He will also not try or test us more than we can stand and He always only does, or allows, what is best for us. He loves us so much that He wants us to have His character and be fully trained as first fruits in His glorious coming Kingdom. *No suffering is ever in vain!*

Sometimes, we may even be overwhelmed by the stress of realizing that we will die. Yet how many of us have faced such a moment, only to continue on? We can take comfort in the words of Job 5:19 and 26: “He shall deliver you” from many troubles, and “You shall come to the grave at a full age,” according to *His* time and purpose!

As Christian women, we can also take comfort in knowing that a time will eventually come when “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain” (Revelation 21:4). The stresses of today will seem as nothing compared to the reward we are to receive at the resurrection. God speed that day! ■

To Whom Do You Listen?

Continued from page 7

assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them” (2 Timothy 3:13–14).

Yet, we are to learn and grow. The Apostle Peter wrote: “Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:17–18, NIV).

Some few have been upset by the Living Church of God gaining greater understanding of several key passages of Scripture. Yet—unlike some leaders who claim “new revelation” that must be accepted on their own authority—Dr. Meredith consistently admonishes us, “Don’t believe me; believe what you find in the pages of your own Bible!” If we study the word of God daily, and know it “inside and out,” we will be able to tell the difference between true scriptural understanding and the misrepresentations of self-interested false leaders. We need to follow the example of the Bereans. “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

In this “Internet age,” it is easy to find dozens and hundreds of teachers proclaiming their own messages, claiming to follow Mr. Armstrong but in fact straying wildly from the truths Mr. Armstrong taught from the Bible. Some would have you believe that the Work is finished. Yet Christ made it plain that He expects His followers to be doing what He did—preaching the true gospel of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:46). Others have corrupted the gospel by teaching a message “about” Mr. Armstrong, while distorting Mr. Armstrong’s actual message—thus mimicking the same error that took first-century Christianity off the track!

Paul told the Galatians, “As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Galatians 1:9–10). Some ministers come to God’s people as flatterers, assuring them that if they believe some strange new doctrines they are the “very elect.” Others want God’s people to flatter them, insisting that they be recognized as apostles or prophets despite their utter lack of fruit.

As we go forward, we must always be mindful of Christ’s last command to those who would carry on His Work; “But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of

the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:13–14) Since the end has not yet come, Christ expects His true servants to carry on, as He has instructed them. We can stop only when He tells us to and not before. As long as we have life and breath, we must push ahead, as God makes it possible. “When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes” (Matthew 10:23).

LISTEN TO THE SHEPHERD!

How can we be sure we are not misled? First and foremost, we must listen to our Shepherd! We must read our Bible every day, studying and meditating on its teachings. God alone can save us! As we keep our minds saturated with the word of God, and our hearts in supporting His Work, we can go forward in confidence, knowing that we can discern between the truth of God and the falsehoods offered by so many who would seek to draw us away from that truth. If we absorb ourselves in the truth, we will not have the “itching ears” of which Paul warned Timothy. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:3–5).

Paul told Timothy that his mission was to do the work he had been given—to fulfill his ministry. Each of us, in our own ways—whether as a homemaker, a parent, an employee, an employer, a husband or a wife—has been given responsibilities by God. Satan wants to distract and ultimately to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). He can do that if we take our eyes off our responsibilities and listen to those who do not have our eternal interest at heart.

We live in a world where self-appointed teachers are free to say and publish what they want, contrary to God’s word. But we have a job to do. What should our approach be? Solomon said it well: “And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:12–14). Let us keep our eyes on the goal as we carry out our responsibilities, listening obediently to the true Shepherd, Jesus Christ!

—LCG Editorial Staff

HOW CAN WE BE SURE WE ARE NOT MISLED? FIRST AND FOREMOST, WE MUCH LISTEN TO OUR SHEPHERD! WE MUST READ OUR BIBLE EVERY DAY, STUDYING AND MEDITATING ON ITS TEACHINGS. GOD ALONE CAN SAVE US!

Walk in Awe of God!

Continued from page 2

Millions of sincere Protestants, Catholics and others say they “love the Lord.” To an extent, they may *realize* the magnificence of His creation and the fact that it is all based upon continuing laws and principles that are *unchanging*. They may even realize that the principles in the Ten Commandments are good. Yet they have various arguments and “excuses” whereby they somehow get around the need to obey what God says. They seem blinded to the fact that when the young man came to Jesus asking the way to eternal life, Jesus answered, “But if you want to enter into life, **keep the commandments**” (Matthew 19:17). But we—who ought to be truly “conquered” by God and *willing to do His will*—should realize that all *real* “love” is, in fact, based upon **obeying** the commandments of God. As Jesus Christ tells us in the book of Revelation: “Here is the patience of the saints; *here are those who keep the commandments of God* and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

And please *never forget* the *direct definition* of “love” given near the **end** of the Bible—*after* the point where the Protestants say everything was “nailed to the cross.” The inspired Apostle John tells us near the end of his life: “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). So God’s “love” is expressed by a human being actually **keeping** God’s way of life and His commandments—which commandments express the very *nature* and *character* of God Himself. Again, as the Apostle John was inspired to tell us, “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:4–6).

Please *think carefully* about these verses. They indicate that—although someone may “know about” God—he cannot really “know” God except by actually **keeping** God’s commandments—therefore **experiencing** the love of God through Jesus Christ **living** within him. By that experience of *exercising* the very character of God and “walking with God” in this way, we will come to “know” God in a personal and profound way that is not possible in *any other manner*!

In verse 5, God tells us that we must “keep His word” to have the love of God perfected in us. For Jesus Christ said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4). And in verse 6, John tells us that if we are to “abide” in Christ we ought to walk or to **live** as Jesus Christ

walked and lived—not some inferior or “different” way. For it is clear and understandable to virtually **all** scholars of all denominations that Jesus Himself did, in fact, keep God’s Ten Commandments. Jesus directly stated in John 15:10: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”

Therefore, dear brethren, we really **do** need to **love** God “with all our heart, mind, strength and soul.” But we must do it by constantly realizing the magnificent beauty and awesome intricacies of God’s creation and **worship**

We should love and worship our Heavenly Father for all of this and so much more. Then we should love and appreciate the fact that He has given us a wonderful law, an enormously helpful and loving way of life that brings blessings to the extent that it is obeyed.

Him and His magnificence as revealed through everything we see around us in the world and in the entire universe. Every beautiful little child, every loving young couple in a God-ordained marriage, every wonderful piece of music, every majestic mountain scene, every beautiful sunset or sunrise, every good and perfect gift comes from God.

We should *love* and *worship our Heavenly Father* for all of this and *so much more*. Then we should love and appreciate the fact that He has given us a **wonderful law**, an enormously helpful and loving *way of life* that brings **blessings** to the extent that it is

obeyed. And then, as God spoke about David—“a man after my own heart *who will do all My will*”—we must not ever “kid” ourselves about it but *seek with all our hearts* to fully **obey** the Ten Commandments. We should seek *daily* and *hourly* for Jesus Christ to *live His life* within us through the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul was inspired to write: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but *Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God*, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, KJV). Then, it will actually be *Jesus Christ living* within us through the Holy Spirit, and we will constantly walk with God, talk with God, worship God and genuinely **love** our Creator and our Father in heaven in all the ways described above.

We will then “*know* and **know that we know**” that God is truly with us and that He will **never** leave us or forsake us because we truly **love** Him (Hebrews 13:5). We will know this because we truly have learned to actually **love** our Father and our Creator with all our heart, strength and mind. This is the first and **great** commandment. Let us “seek God” with all our hearts and learn to *obey* this magnificent instruction which **will lead** to eternal life in the very Family of God!

With Christian love,



LOCAL

CHURCH NEWS

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Tony Leman was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Pastors Rob Tyler and Michael Gill. Mr. Leman serves in the Adelaide, South Australia, congregation.

Mrs. Jan Paxon was ordained a deaconess on Pentecost by Pastors Rob Tyler and Michael Gill. Mrs. Paxon serves in the Adelaide, South Australia, congregation.

Mr. Tim Markopoulos was ordained a deacon on Pentecost by Pastor Phil West and elder Reiner Luken. Mr.

Markopoulos serves brethren in the Chicago, Illinois, congregation.

Mrs. Marie-Anne Hardy was ordained a deaconess by Regional Pastor Mario Hernandez and Area Pastor Vincent Lardé on Sabbath, June 29. Mrs. Hardy and her husband, deacon Roger Hardy, serve the Paris, France congregation.

Mr. Leonard Bower was ordained a deacon on Sabbath, July 13 by Pastor Martin Fannin. Mr. Bower serves in the Knoxville, Tennessee, congregation.

Anniversaries

Mr. and Mrs. Dayrell (Jeanette) Tanner of the Brisbane, Australia, congregation celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on May 11, which was also the Sabbath. After services, the congregation honored them with a special anniversary cake and gifts. Elder Dan Love gave a moving tribute and thanked them for all their hard work, tireless service and fine examples of commitment and servant leadership—an inspiration to many. Mr. Tanner pastors the Brisbane congregation and is Regional Pastor for the Philippines.

Mr. and Mrs. James (Sussie) McCrimmon celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on August 9. The McCrimmons are from Savannah, Georgia and regularly attend the congregation in Walterboro, South Carolina. The brethren honored them on August 10 with a gift, a card and a cake to recognize this significant milestone. Their daughter Sharon was able to attend also. They have three children and three grandchildren.

Weddings

Job and Pam dela Cruz are delighted to announce that they were united in marriage on Sunday, May 5, at a beautiful garden in Alpadi Estate, Antipolo City, Philippines. Pastor Basilio Osillos conducted the ceremony. The groom is the son of Mr. Tito dela Cruz and the late Fely dela Cruz. The bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jesus Puzon. A dinner reception was enjoyed by 100 guests after the ceremony. Many of the brethren helped with the wedding preparations and the joyous celebration lasted through the evening, with

lots of fun and tears of joy. The newlyweds are extremely grateful to all the people who became part of their very special day and of course, more importantly to the great God for all the blessings He has poured upon them.

On June 30, *Veronica Mahasoh and Nii Acquaye* were united in marriage by Pastor Adam West. Both are members of the London congregation in the United Kingdom. More than 150 family members joined them to celebrate the happy occasion.

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).

In Loving Memory

Mr. Paul Meyersick, age 28, of Lakewood, Colorado died tragically on May 25. Funeral services were conducted by Mr. Ben Whitfield on May 31. Paul was baptized in 2010. He was a successful electrical contractor. He is survived by his parents and one brother and will be remembered by his many friends for his energy, smile, laugh, and kind heart.

Mr. James Culbert, of County Galway, Ireland, died on June 12, a few days before the age of 88 years. He had fought a particularly brave battle against ill health for over a year. He and his wife, Edith, have been members of God's Church for over 40 years. Besides his wife, he is survived by eight children, 22 grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and eight siblings. Almost all of them, from home and abroad, attended his funeral. Mr. Henry Cooper conducted the funeral service and Mr. Culbert was laid to rest with four earlier generations of his forefathers.

Mr. Kenneth Carroll Ford of Alvin, Texas, died June 20 after several years of health trials. He was 76 years old. Mr. Ford was baptized in 2009 and attended the Houston, Texas, congregation. He will be greatly missed. Mr. Ford is survived by his daughter and two grandchildren. Mr. Ron McGowen conducted the memorial service.

Mr. Owen Totts, age 85, of Jacksonville, Florida, died June 28. Mr. Totts was a long-time member, baptized in 1965, who remained faithful to the end. Several years ago he became paralyzed on the left side as a result of a stroke. He is survived by his wife, Shirley. He will be greatly missed by family, brethren and friends.

Mrs. Phyllis Api, age 78, died July 2 in Saratoga, Wyoming, at the home of her daughter and son-in-law, Sarah and Alan Williams, with her family at her bedside. Mrs. Api was born in Detroit to a military family, so during her childhood she traveled the world. She attended college in Vermont and taught English in Mexico. In 1962 she and her husband, Eugene Api were married at the United States Naval Air Station in Morocco, North Africa, and they lived in several foreign countries as well as in various places in the U.S.A. before settling in Pasadena, California. They were both baptized in 1964. For a number of years they spent part of their time in Saratoga, Wyoming, and moved there three years ago. Mrs. Api was a devoted wife, mother, grandmother and homemaker. Besides her husband, she is survived by four children, 13 grandchildren and one brother. Mr. Ben Whitfield conducted the graveside funeral service on Friday, July 5.

Houston Congregation Celebrates 20th Anniversary!

The Houston, Texas congregation of the Living Church of God celebrated its 20th anniversary on August 3. From a humble beginning of six members, meeting in the living room of Mr. Wes Metzler, Houston has grown to the present-day average weekly attendance of over a hundred, giving cause for a well-deserved celebration. Our celebration began with Sabbath services, with 150 enthusiastic members in attendance from Houston and surrounding church areas. The congregation was treated to a lively sermonette, given by local pastor Mr. Rick Stafford, followed by an informative sermon by guest speaker from the Joplin, Missouri congregation, Mr. Karl Beyersdorfer.

After a group dinner, brethren returned around 8:00 p.m. and several of the pioneer members presented a brief history and their experiences during the first few years of the Living Church of God here in Houston. The highlight of these reminiscences was a very encouraging filmed message sent by the first full-time pastor of the Houston congregation, Mr. Richard Ames.

Lively dance numbers then filled the air as brethren danced the night away to music provided by the band of J. R. Wells from the Baton Rouge congregation.

The band played a variety of favorites, from the slow and soothing sound of Glen Miller, to the nimble and vigorous energy of Chubby Checker's "The Twist." And who could stay seated, as it seemed the whole congregation joined in on the "bunny hop"?

As the band took a break everyone enjoyed finger foods and refreshments, followed by the cutting of the beautiful anniversary cake and reflecting on the events of the evening.

—James Quinters



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COMMENTARY

THANKSGIVING AND OUR MISSION

Thanksgiving Day—celebrated in the United States on the fourth Thursday of November, and on other days in other nations—can be a good time to reflect on our blessings, our purpose and our future. How thankful are we? Have we used the blessings God has given us to fulfill our national purpose and mission? Or do we even know our mission?

In 1863, the year when Thanksgiving became a national holiday in the U.S., President Abraham Lincoln stated that “it is the duty of nations, as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God... and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the holy scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.”

Today, while most Americans profess to be religious, many are living very secular lives. We have forgotten our heritage! We have neglected the foundation of truth and divine instruction, the Bible. As long as we were a Bible-reading society, we reflected to some degree the morality of God. Consider this statement from *Green's Short History of the English People*: “No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England in the latter part of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. England became the people of a book and that book was the Bible. It was read by every class of people. And the effect was amazing. The whole moral tone of the nation was changed” (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 817).

The word of God should influence our behavior and

our character. Whatever course our nations may take, we individually must get back to reading the Bible. We need to be living by the Bible. As Jesus said in Luke 4:4: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.’” Are we indeed living that way of life?

If we are truly thankful people, the Creator God expects that we will fulfill the mission He has given us. Jesus instructed the Apostles to have the attitude of giving: “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Jesus told the Apostles to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). He told them to “preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 10:7). ‘The Living Church of God continues to fulfill the mission Christ gave. We in this Work are striving to give the good news of the coming Kingdom of God to the world. As Christ opens the doors, we walk through them in faith.

The world desperately needs the truth of God. It needs the gospel Jesus of Nazareth preached, the gospel of the Kingdom of God. You can pray that the gospel will go out in greater power around the world. As Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). Individually and nationally, we need to fulfill our God-given mission. As truly thankful people, we all need to be involved in the Work Jesus Christ is doing!

—Richard F. Ames