

THE

LIVING

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A Godly Fear Is Necessary!

Dear Brethren and Friends,

One of the key attributes God is looking for in His future sons is: *do these people have the genuine “fear” of God?* The final dramatic “test” for Abraham to qualify as “father of the faithful” was that he had to demonstrate to God that he *really was willing* to sacrifice his son, Isaac—the very son through whom the magnificent promises were to come.

At the very moment when he had the knife in his hand and was ready to slay his son, the voice of the One who became Jesus Christ rang out, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you **fear** God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Genesis 22:12). Abraham’s *total surrender* to be willing to do **whatever** God commanded him brought this response: “For now I **know** that you *fear* God”!

Brethren, the profound *awe* and the tremendous and active respect and worship for God are all part of the “fear” of God, which our Creator absolutely **requires** of you and me! Notice what God tells us: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever” (Psalm 111:10). And God inspired this statement in Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Again, Solomon was inspired to conclude the book of Ecclesiastes in this manner: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all [or, his *whole duty*]” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). So the “whole duty” of man is to **fear** God and keep His commandments!

When we fully grasp that the Ten Commandments reveal the full **character** of God and the *only* way to genuinely obey them is *through Christ in us* (Galatians 2:20), it then shows us the real meaning Solomon had in mind here.



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As we see at the end of another book, Isaiah, Almighty God tells us essentially the same thing: “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, *and who trembles at My word*” (Isaiah 66:2). Do you and I have the same sense of *awe* as we carefully read and *study* the Bible? Do we sincerely try to focus on the fact that this marvelous book *really* is the inspired word of God—the Instruction Book from our very Creator? “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Some of our brethren in God’s Church do **not** have the genuine “fear” of God. Yes, they claim to be “Christian”—to be followers of Christ. But they seem not to really *understand* Christ’s warning to “would be” Christians or “part-time” Christians. To these very people, Jesus Christ challenged: “But *why* do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ *and not do the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46).

These kind of “part-time” Christians are those who often “skip out” on attending Sabbath services or other Church activities on a regular basis. They often have some wonderful “excuses” as to why they are often *not there* when a sermon is given which *they may need* in a special way! Some of these people come to church to “get,” to show off, to argue or to just develop a social fellowship. They are **not** primarily coming to “seek God” and humbly

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worship their Creator on His commanded Sabbath day. They are not there through a desire to *love*, to *serve* and to help their fellow Christians by their presence, their encouragement, etc. These are the peoples whose “hearts” are not truly given to God *in His Work*. They are not going “all out” to help proclaim His message going to the *entire world* and honestly do *all they can* to support the Gospel in every possible way. As Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong put it over and over, “The depth of one’s conversion is often best measured by the *degree* to which a person’s **whole heart** is in helping and supporting the very **Work** of the living God”!

Jesus Christ said: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to *finish His work*. Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together’ (John 4:34–36). Do you, *personally*, go “all out” for God’s Work in *fervent prayers*—encouraging and inspiring others to become fully involved in the Work and in happily returning to God His **tithe** plus *generous offerings* to support the Work which Jesus Christ is right now performing through His end-time Church?

Do you?

Remember how God’s word tells us: “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; *for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Corinthians 9:6–7). A deeply converted person will have a sense of *fulfillment* and *joy* in giving to his God! And he will sincerely want to dedicate his talents, his time and his energy to do everything he can as part of the very Work in which we are all involved!

Those who have the genuine “fear” of God will **not** regularly sit around and evaluate the ministry and their fellow Christians. True Christians will be *very careful not* to wrongly or unduly criticize God’s own people. For they will be zealously feeding on God’s word, and therefore will constantly be reading such

instructions as Jesus gave in Matthew 7:1–3: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?”

Truly zealous Christians, those who genuinely “fear” God, will go *all out* to avoid or to break wrong habits such as drinking too much alcohol, allowing bitterness and resentments to come into the mind, or allowing a spirit of “competition” to take over their thoughts. They will be *filling their minds* with the thoughts of God: “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which

you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth” (Colossians 3:5–8).

Dear brethren, because we do not want to be practicing a “fear religion” we may sometimes fail to consider the *many examples* of Jesus Christ Himself powerfully **warning** His followers to be very careful to **avoid** the Lake of Fire! Remember, *Jesus Himself* warned

about what will happen at the end of the age: “So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and *cast them into the furnace of fire*. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:49–50). Again, notice Jesus’ statement to some who took their salvation for granted: “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be **weeping** and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:11–12).

If you or I *allow ourselves* to get into **any** ungodly **habit** that tends to cut us off from God, we must truly **cry out** to God with

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EDITORIAL

By Roderick C. Meredith

WE MUST INCREASE OUR FAITH!

As world events continue to build toward their prophesied end-time climax, we who await the Second Coming of Jesus Christ may sometimes find our patience tried and tested. Daily, we cry out, “Thy Kingdom come!” in anticipation of our Savior’s much-needed return, when He will rule this world with a “rod of iron” and also with the true love and compassion that will heal the present sin-sick society.

We are certainly drawing close to the very end of this age. Yet we do seem to be in a sort of “transition period” before things speed up to the grand-smash climax of world events. At this point Satan will sometimes try to intervene and test the faith and stability of many of us. He will even try to get us doubting and questioning God, His laws, His promises and many of the basic premises we have understood.

So, how do we know that we can have absolute faith in God? There are many factors involved here. God’s way of life “works”—as thousands of you know. God does intervene and heal His people supernaturally—again, as thousands of you know. But one of the obvious ways we can and should know is that the “big picture” events of prophecy have been, or are now being, fulfilled even as I write!

PROPHECIES FULFILLED!

The nations of the modern ten-tribed “house of Israel”—especially Ephraim and Manasseh, the “house of Joseph”—are definitely going down as God prophesied. The British Empire is no more! The power and prestige of the United States is quickly diminishing. The vitally important sea-gates which God gave Britain and America have mainly been taken away already—and a few others will probably be taken away soon! Suez is gone. The Simonstown base controlling the tip of South Africa is gone from British control. The Bab-el-Mandeb—the southern entrance to the Red Sea—is also gone from British control. Singapore and the Malacca Straits are gone from British control. America’s greatest sea-gate—the Panama Canal—is gone from American control. Two of the other major sea-gates on earth—still critical to world trade and wartime supplies and troop shipments—Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands, are even now subjects of controversy and agitation to remove them from British control. How long until they, too, are gone?

As Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was virtually alone in predicting, the nations of Eastern Europe broke away from Soviet control. This dramatic upheaval back in 1988–89 was sudden and totally unexpected by the so-called “experts”! Yet God made it clear to Mr. Armstrong that this had to happen to lay the groundwork for the complete ten-nation European Union that would follow. Remember, no one else taught this as he did!

Now, as Mr. Armstrong had long understood would happen, a German-dominated European Empire is definitely taking shape! Also, as very few if any others have understood, Britain will **not** be part of this final union of European nations! Why? Because Britain is “Ephraim” and is prophesied to be the target of devastation by this very union in years to come! The so-called “Bible scholars” of this world simply do **not** understand this vital key to Bible prophecy. We do.

Although we cannot be sure that we are at the very end, at least the beginning stages of the horrifying droughts, fires, floods and eventual famines and disease epidemics do seem to be slowly getting under way around vast portions of the earth. As I write this, much of the western United States is now experiencing terrible drought—in some cases, the worst in more than 100 years. When rains come, they are causing terrible floods and mudslides on the formerly parched land. And the fire season is just beginning. We are going to have a lot of “worsts” over the next several years in fires, drought alternating with floods, earthquakes and other “natural” catastrophes. Get ready! We in God’s Church are virtually alone in understanding the details of these **major** world events!

Why?

God Himself gives the answer in Psalm 111:10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.” Although we certainly need to draw even closer to God and be more diligent in our commandment-keeping—through Christ living within us—we nevertheless have been given wonderful understanding of world events and of the very purpose of human existence.

WE NEED MORE FAITH!

But, brethren, as we see the Great God whom we serve intervening in world events, it should inspire us more than



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ever to trust Him to back up His inspired Word in every area of life. If we want to have greater **power** in the Work, we need more **faith!** If we wish to have more healings and miracles in the Church, we need more **faith!**

In Hebrews 11:6, God tells us, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must **believe** that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Certainly the attitude of absolutely trusting and believing in God, in His word, in His way and in His promises—is the basic **foundation** for real Christianity—the kind of Christianity preparing us to live for eternity in the Kingdom of God. As I have said so many times, we must “walk with God” in this attitude of faith and certainty. And to build this kind of faith, we must “feed” on God’s word as Jesus indicates in John 6:56–57: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who **feeds** on Me will live because of Me.”

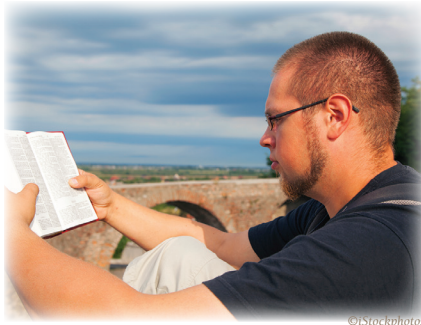
Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7–8). As these verses clearly indicate, we have to keep coming to God in **faith** in order to get the answers to our prayers. We do not merely just “ask” one time. We cry **out** to God and keep coming back over and over again as the importunate widow did as described by Jesus Christ in Luke 18:1–5. And in verses 6–8, notice what Jesus tells us: “Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who **cry out** day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” In Mark 11:21–24, we read of Peter’s surprise when a fig tree that Jesus had cursed had withered away very quickly. Jesus answers, “Have **faith** in God!” Then He instructs the disciples (and us today), “For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, **believe** that you receive them, and you will have them.”

EXERCISE REAL FAITH!

Through constant study, fervent prayer and consciously directing our minds to **trust** in God, we must, as Jesus said, “believe” that we have received what we ask for, and then we shall receive it! It is true that you cannot just “work up” faith. But it is equally true, my dear brethren, that by doing your part as I have just described—fervently studying for faith, praying for faith and then doing your best—with God’s Spirit—to **exercise** faith in all types of daily situations both

great and small, greater faith will be manifested in your life! That is what I mean by telling you from time to time, “We must build an atmosphere of faith within the Living Church of God!” Yet, as the Apostle Paul explained, “It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure!” (Philippians 2:13).

Jesus again emphasized the vital key of “drinking in” of the Word of God in regard to faith when He instructed us, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7). For Jesus’ words to “abide in us” we certainly do have to study them over and over, drink in of them, meditate on them and put them to work in our lives. Then we will literally think like Jesus thinks. We will, more and more, have the mind of Jesus Christ and the mind of God. Then, as Jesus said, “You will ask what you desire and it **shall** be done for you.” And then Jesus continued to say, “By this My Father is glorified that you bear much fruit, so you will be My disciples” (v. 8). So the faith we receive and the answers to our prayers should all have a part in accomplishing the very **Work** of Christ which He is doing through us as His human instruments today!



One major obstacle to faith is the attitude of “guilt.” A very helpful biblical passage regarding what we might call this “guilt syndrome” is found in 1 John 3:18–22: “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we **keep His commandments** and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

NEVER LET DOWN!

Through the help of Christ living within us, each of us must “**grow** in grace and knowledge” (2 Peter 3:18). We must, year by year, overcome and begin to reflect Jesus Christ more and more in obedience to God’s law, in the attitude of love and outflowing concern to God and to neighbor, and in literal **service** to God and to others in the things we do. Lacking this, of course we will realize that we have “let down” and this will hurt our feeling of closeness to God. We must understand, however, that God does **not** require us to achieve perfection in this life, but simply to be “growing” to the best of our ability. Therefore, we read in the above passage in 1 John 3, “God is greater than our heart and knows all things.” But we should be growing toward the state described in verse 22 wherein we

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FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

By Dexter B. Wakefield

With a certain air of superiority, the Pentecostal believer asked, “Well, does your church have *signs of the Spirit*?” He was referring to the phenomena that he often saw demonstrated at his worship services, which he attributed to the presence of the Holy Spirit of God acting on a particular individual. That might include (according to Pentecostal ministers) glossolalia (speaking unintelligibly), being “slain by the spirit” (falling down unconscious, sometimes for hours), growling or barking, hopping, quaking, shaking, rolling, spinning, laughing, crying, appearing to give birth or appearing drunk. And that is a partial list. Are these activities evidence of God’s Spirit dwelling in a person? Even Pentecostal ministers admit that such phenomena can be caused by demonic possession, but they believe that they can distinguish the unclean spirits from the Holy Spirit.

God’s word teaches us that those in His Church are to demonstrate *fruits of the Spirit*. These fruits are evidence in our lives that God’s Holy Spirit produces as it transforms us inwardly, and such fruits are an important sign that Christians have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. Someone may demonstrate the strange phenomena listed above without *ever* showing the *fruits* that God wants to build in His begotten children. As we enter the Pentecost season, it is a good time to think about the *fruits of God’s Holy Spirit* in our lives.

IT HAPPENED ON PENTECOST

On the biblical Holy Day of Pentecost in 31AD, God founded His Church and gave extraordinary evidence of what He was doing. “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1–4). They were filled with the power of God, not with a person. The Holy Spirit—the power of God—had come upon them.



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It was clear to those who witnessed these events that the people upon whom the Holy Spirit of God came in such a dramatic manner were speaking *in other languages that could be understood* by those who were native to those languages. Christ had commanded His disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20). It was necessary for the disciples to have this spiritual gift of languages—“tongues”—to allow the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to be spread around the world.

The disciples upon whom the Holy Spirit came were not speaking gibberish that no one could understand. No one fell down unconscious or made animal sounds. Rather, they spoke of God’s wonderful works. “And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.’ So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’” (Acts 2:5–12).

What it meant was that God had founded His Church. Those firstfruits that were begotten by the Holy Spirit of God on that Feast of Firstfruits—as the Holy Day of Pentecost is also called—would begin the “little flock” that would be despised and persecuted by the world.

MIND AND POWER OF THE FATHER

How can we describe this Spirit? There is much that can be said, and the Bible gives us a good descrip-

tion. The Holy Spirit of God is described in His word as the **power** of the Most High God, who is the Father. “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the **power** of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:31–35).

The Father is the Highest, and Christ is subordinate to Him. Jesus said, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28) and “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all” (John 10:29).

Joseph, who was to become Mary’s husband, was told that Jesus would be conceived *by the Holy Spirit*. “But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for *that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*’” (Matthew 1:20).

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. *If the Holy Spirit were a person, Jesus would be the Son of the Holy Spirit, not the Father.* Jesus is the Son of the Father. The Holy Spirit is the **power** by which the Father conceived Jesus, and one of the things we say about the Holy Spirit is that it is the **power** of God.

God’s word also describes the Holy Spirit as **the mind of God**. “Let this **mind** be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). A good general statement is that the Holy Spirit is **the mind and power of God**.

The Holy Spirit *proceeds from the Father*. “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, **the Spirit of truth who [which] proceeds from the Father**, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26). That power has been given to Jesus Christ. “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth’” (Matthew 28:18, KJV).

The Holy Spirit is in the Son, and Christ uses its power. “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and **upholding all things by the word of His power...**” (Hebrews 1:1–3).

The Spirit *proceeds* from the Father, and it is *in* the Son—who directs its power to uphold all things. And God gives it to His begotten children. It begets us, identifies us, constitutes a promise (a down payment) and it *works in us*.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IDENTIFIES GOD’S CHILDREN

“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His... For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God... The Spirit... bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:9, 14, 16–17). *God’s Spirit leads us to have fruits of the Spirit.*

God’s Holy Spirit is also a kind of down payment—an earnest deposit—for our transformation to come. “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Corinthians 1:21–22). Indeed, our future birth into the God Family “seals” us for that great destiny. And that Work of preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and

begetting children of God by the Holy Spirit has not stopped in our day; rather, Christ continues His work through His body, the Church of God. Christ revealed in the book of Revelation, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees *till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads*” (Revelation 7:3). Here is a direct statement that the Work goes on into the final days of this age. Never let anyone tell you that the Work is finished!

A TRANSFORMING SPIRIT!

The Holy Spirit of God—His mind and His power—is *a transforming Spirit!* The Apostle Paul told the Church in Philippi, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). This is so important, because when this Spirit dwells in us, it can transform our thinking and wills to be like God’s—if we will submit ourselves to Him. Paul instructed the Church in Rome, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect *will of God*” (Romans 12:1–2).

A person’s will is the power to choose. And each of us—prior to conversion—chose in accordance with our carnal natures and the ways of the world that we live in. But, at some point, God grants us repentance, and we must choose to obey God. Obedience to God means subordinating our human wills to God’s perfect righteous will.



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For instance, when a little girl is told to clean up her room—and she does not want to—it is necessary for her to subordinate her will to her mother’s instruction in order to obey. She wants to do something else, but she does what her mother wants instead. But when she becomes an adult, she likely keeps her home just as neat as her mother did—because she *chooses* to have a neat, clean place in which to live. It is now *her will* to keep a clean home, because her will in the matter has changed.

Similarly, when people first become convinced that they should be keeping all ten of God’s commandments—including the one about the Sabbath—it may be a difficult choice at first to repent, obey God and keep the Sabbath holy. As a person comes to Christ, there may be a lot of contrary pressure from family, friends or employers. However, after baptism, receiving God’s Holy Spirit and for some time keeping the Sabbath holy, the attitude of the Church member changes: “*This has been a long week. I can’t wait for the Sabbath to begin!*” We now look forward to, and delight in, the holiness and sanctity of God’s Sabbath, and we see it as a great blessing. It is very much in our wills to keep it holy.

Similarly, God’s Spirit leads us through our trials and choices. Initially, we are just being obedient to God in keeping His commandments. But by constantly leading us to choose as He does, God’s Spirit transforms our wills to become like His. That process is called *conversion*. We want to choose as God does—or at least we do to the extent that we are converted and transformed inwardly. And we are to yield to God’s will, as His Spirit leads us to obey, to love God and to want to be like Him. *Our righteous choices reveal themselves as fruits in our lives—fruits of God’s Holy Spirit that is working in us.*

SOME OF THE FRUITS

“But the **fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patient endurance], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23). A whole sermon could be given about each of these spiritual attributes that the Apostle Paul mentions to the churches in Galatia. God is love, and His mind is joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, desirous to do good things and always faithful. Do we show these characteristics—these fruits—in our daily actions? Are we like our heavenly Father and Elder Brother in these things?

God’s Spirit **illuminates** the right path for us. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk

as children of light (for the **fruit of the Spirit** is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8–10). Doing God’s will—willingly and from the heart—is always acceptable to Him.

God’s Spirit is essential to our calling and conversion. Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would work *first with us* to open our minds to His truth—and *then in us* to change us. Prior to His disciples’ conversion at Pentecost, Jesus told them, “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—referring to the the Holy Spirit, which “*dwells with you and will be in you*” (John 14:15–17).

GOD GRANTS REPENTANCE

Repentance is something that God *grants* us; “...And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also *granted* to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:18). Sadly, not everyone chooses to accept what God grants. However, when they do, it is made clear by *fruits*. Early in our conversion, God’s Spirit works with us and leads us to true repentance—which brings changes in how we live. “Therefore bear *fruits worthy of repentance*” (Matthew 3:8).

True repentance changes what we are going to do in the future, but it cannot change the sins we have already committed. Only Christ’s sacrifice makes possible the removal of the guilt of our past sins, and Scripture explains what we

must do to have that guilt removed. The Apostle Peter was asked, “‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘*Repent*, and let every one of you *be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall *receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*’” (Acts 2:37–38). After repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, we receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you *through the laying on of my hands*” (2 Timothy 1:6).

After the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit *dwells in us*. “That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who [which] dwells in us” (2 Timothy 1:14). This Spirit and its fruits are the evidence that Christ lives in us and that we are living our lives in Him. “Now he who *keeps His commandments* abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit... He has given us” (1 John 3:24).

This *transformative Spirit* changes how we think and how we see the world around us. “The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of *wisdom and understanding*, the

True repentance changes what we are going to do in the future, but it cannot change the sins we have already committed. Only Christ’s sacrifice makes possible the removal of the guilt of our past sins, and Scripture explains what we must do to have that guilt removed.

Spirit of *counsel and might*, the Spirit of *knowledge and of the fear of the LORD*” (Isaiah 11:2). How often have those who are being called into God’s Church said, “I understand the Bible for the first time!” But they soon find that others do not seem to be able to understand it as they do. God’s Holy Spirit first works *with us* and then *in us*, and it works this miracle of spiritual understanding and knowledge in all those He calls and converts. This is a **miracle** in the lives of all of God’s people.

The fruit of God’s Spirit in a true Christian is not found in babbling, barking or falling down unconscious. Rather, it produces a *sound mind*. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a *sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:7). God’s Spirit instills a special kind of wisdom and thinking. “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the **fruit** of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:17–18). Even in trying, difficult times, stirring up God’s Spirit produces the **fruit** of a *peaceful mind*.

The Apostle Paul gave the Church great encouragement, for times of trial, through God’s Spirit. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...” (2 Corinthians 4:16–17).

SPECIAL GIFTS

To serve the needs of the Church, God—through His Spirit—gives different members different gifts. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12:4–11).

Notice that each of these gifts is a practical tool for serving the needs of God’s Church and His Work. The much-misunderstood gift of “tongues” is not a matter of one person babbling and barking, while another “interprets” the noise. Rather, as happened on the first Day of Pentecost after Christ’s

resurrection, the Spirit gave Christ’s followers the ability to speak and understand multiple languages they had not humanly learned. Similarly, the gift of “prophecy” is primarily the gift of inspired speech, and can be exercised in a strong sermon that covers no “new ground” but simply explains with clarity and power the meaning of Bible prophecy and end-time events. “Prophets” in the sense of Elijah are rare, and when we encounter a man who declares himself a prophet we had better be sure of his fruits before we listen to him. Most self-proclaimed “prophets” are deceived, or are cunning deceivers—or both—and those who have God’s Spirit have the ability, and the responsibility, to discern their fruits and their genuineness.

THE SPIRIT OF REVELATION AND OF PROPHECY

The Apostle Paul urged all of God’s people to use His Spirit for spiritual vision and the revealing of things that others cannot see. “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has *revealed* them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:9–11). The carnal man only understands the things of this world, but the Spirit reveals things that are otherwise invisible.

The Spirit that God gives is very different from that which is naturally in a man—and it produces very different fruits. “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit... from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For ‘who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?’ *But we have the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:12–16).

God’s Spirit dwells in Christ’s “little flock,” and transforms God’s begotten children inwardly. This transformation is evidenced by **fruits of the Spirit**. The Church is only a little flock, because God is not calling the rest of the world now—but He will in the future. A small harvest occurs in the spring before the great harvest in the fall. The Feast of Firstfruits—Pentecost—points us to the time when God will pour out “a pure river of water of life” for the whole world (Revelation. 22:1, 17). ■



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Covenants Old and New

What lessons should we learn from the biblical Holy Day of Pentecost? There are many. One of the most important, revealed by Jesus Christ, is that Christians today can have a foretaste of life under the New Covenant, the covenant that will be offered to all human beings—not just a few “firstfruits” as is the case today—when the Kingdom of God is established on planet Earth.

The “Old Covenant”—the agreement God made with ancient Israel—did not include the granting of the Holy Spirit to all the Israelites. It included no promise of eternal life. The rewards God promised for obedience to the Old Covenant included physical health, prosperity, national safety and victory in battle (Deuteronomy 28:1–14). Failure to comply with the provisions of the agreement would result in poverty, sickness, war, national slavery and death (vv. 15–68).

This original contract between the Creator and His chosen people was unique in all history. Though it would not grant the Israelites God’s Spirit, it was the most marvelous set of promises any carnal nation could receive at that point in God’s plan for humanity. The Apostle Paul, even while extolling the benefits of the New Covenant, reminds us of this about the old, that “the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away” (2 Corinthians 3:7).

Even what Paul called the “ministry of death”—which warned Israel of its sins—was glorious. Yet we in God’s Church have been promised a far better and more glorious covenant, introduced to us by Jesus Christ when He came as the only begotten Son of His Father. That covenant, the New Covenant, was not for a particular ethnic group or nation, but rather would be offered to all whom the Father would call to become members of His royal family. A sign of this covenant would be the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. “How will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels” (vv. 8–10).

For those individuals who are not striving to practice obedience to the law of God, the Old Covenant—which Paul called the “ministry of condemnation”—is still their lot.

Those who practice disobedience reap the consequence of that disobedience, receiving from God the penalty of that law. By contrast, Christ’s followers are commanded to put away sin, come out of the world and avoid fellowship with those whose corrupting lifestyle is contrary to the way Christ would have us live. “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:3–4).

Paul made plain what must be done (and not done) if we are to partake fully of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them [those living according to the flesh] and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:14–18).

God’s Love Expressed

Some mistakenly assume that the Old Covenant—given to ancient Israel through Moses—did not express God’s love. In truth, however, it reveals how we are to relate to our heavenly Father and one another, so we can live in peace with both our Creator and neighbor. Sadly, just as a little child will often continue to misbehave after being punished for his misdeeds, Israel again and again would stray from God’s protection, seeking God only after calamity struck the nation. “In spite of this they still sinned, and did not believe in His wondrous works. Therefore their days He consumed in futility, and their years in fear. When He slew them, then they sought Him; and they returned and sought earnestly for God” (Psalm 78:32–34).

Of course, just as with a little child who is sorry for being caught, rather than truly repentant, the Israelites



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would make a show of sincerity and give a surface impression of changing their ways, while still harboring rebellion in their hearts. “Then they remembered that God was their rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him with their tongue; for their heart was not steadfast with Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant” (vv. 35–37).

Despite their continual backsliding, God never gave up on His plan to save them—and, indeed, to save all who would accept His covenant. “Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, “Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!” Therefore prophesy and say to them, “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it,’ says the LORD”’ (Ezekiel 37:11–14).

God created human beings with free moral agency. We can—and must—decide for ourselves whether to do good or evil. Yet, while God wants us to do good, He is not some tyrant eager to “zap” us when we fall short. He is merciful. “But He, [God] being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again” (Psalm 78:38–39). Why does God treat us this way? He has a plan for us. He cannot by force give us His holy and righteous character. Rather, He created us in such a way that our human weakness could be overcome through the indwelling of His own power, the Holy Spirit. By using the Holy Spirit, Christians have the power to surmount the obstacles caused by self, society and by Satan.

A BETTER COVENANT

In this, the New Covenant surpasses the Old. Consider what Paul wrote about the two covenants. “For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with

unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord [living in us though His Spirit], are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:11–18).

The Logos—the Word of God—became flesh, and lived a perfect human life as Jesus Christ. He had the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34). His death and resurrection qualified Him to rule over the coming Kingdom of God, and opened the way for all of sinful mankind ultimately to have the opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit and practice obedience to God’s holy and righteous law. Yet it is up to each of us whether or not we will do so. Those who are reading this article, and who have been baptized, have entered into a covenant to receive the Spirit and through that Spirit to receive the blessings of the New Covenant—culminating with entrance into the very Family of God upon the resurrection when Jesus Christ returns.

So, we need to ask ourselves as Christians: Are we “between the two covenants”? Or are we living the fullness of both covenants, through our obedience to the New—which in fact is what makes possible true obedience to the Old?

Ultimately, in the most basic sense, there are just two ways in which anyone can live—one way that leads to death, and the other that leads to eternal life. “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Those who have in this age accepted baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit have accepted God’s calling to prepare to become His actual sons, but it is up to each of us whether we will accept His offer zealously, whether we will accept it in a lukewarm manner, or whether we will turn away and reject that marvelous opportunity.

BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS?

Why, then, does it seem that some are “straddling the fence” spiritually, resisting God’s command to obey Him? This is an age-old problem. “And Elijah came to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people answered him not a word” (1 Kings 18:21). Through the Living Church of God, this Elijah-like Work, God is asking us the same question today.

Unlike those who are blinded, we have no excuse. Those who are blinded—the majority of human beings alive today—exist without knowledge of God’s truth, unrepentant of breaking God’s law, and bereft of the Holy Spirit. Their way would lead to destruction and death, were it not for the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20).

We, however, have an opportunity even now to experience the blessings that have not yet been extended to most human beings. “This I say, therefore, and testify

in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Ephesians 4:17–19).

We are not like that, anymore. Now we know better, our minds having been opened; having been granted the understanding of God’s plan for us through His mercy and grace. “But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (vv. 20–24). True righteousness and holiness come from Christ living in us.

Until we become literal sons of God at the resurrection, even baptized Christians will continue to contend against the flesh. However, to the extent that we practice righteousness and yield to the Holy Spirit within us, we will find available the same power the Father gave to Jesus Christ. How can we gain that power? Christ told us plainly. “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper [to] abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, [that] the world cannot receive... [which] dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:15–18).

If we fully surrender to God, tremendous power is available to Christians. “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 10:7–8). We are even promised power to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons. “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Indeed, obedient Christians can do all things through Christ who strengthens them (Philippians 4:12–13).

WE NEED CHRIST

Certainly we must exert all our human strength and effort as we strive to obey God. But we who have the Holy Spirit must ask ourselves, are we vainly striving through nothing more than our pitiful human strength, like those under the Old Covenant? Or are we fighting the good fight with the essential help of the Spirit of God? We must not make the mistake of thinking that we can succeed on our own strength. We need Christ if we are to bear the fruit God seeks of us. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:5–8).

And what is the fruit of that obedience? Consider what Jesus said to the lawyer who came to Him asking what would be required of him. “Jesus said to him, ‘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. and the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37–40). Our Father in heaven never asks us to do the impossible. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

Why is this so? “For whatever is [begotten] of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (v. 4). As begotten sons of God, we have the Holy Spirit within us, through which we can have the very faith of Christ (Galatians 2:20). As we prepare to observe Pentecost, let us remember to stir up this amazing gift of God’s Spirit and be grateful for the New Covenant.

—LCG Editorial Staff



THE IMPORTANCE OF PENTECOST

By Douglas S. Winnail

In Acts 2, we read the account of the New Testament Church beginning on the Day of Pentecost 31AD. It began when 3,000 people made a baptismal commitment after witnessing the dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit and listening to the inspired preaching of Jesus' disciples. But did these 3,000 people merely decide on the spot to "give their hearts to the Lord"? Or was there something more going on—something unique and profound? Do we really understand what God was doing on that Day of Pentecost when the New Testament Church began? Were those events related to God's previous actions in history? And how do the events on Pentecost relate to you and the Church of God today?

YOUR SPECIAL CALLING

It is instructive to notice that when Jesus began His ministry, He did not stand on street corners and invite just anyone to become His disciple. Jesus called

(John 6:65). At that point, those who did not grasp what Jesus was talking about ceased to follow Him—and Jesus did not pursue them. On the night before Jesus was crucified, He told God in a prayer, "I have manifested [revealed] Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world" (John 17:6). Some years later, the Apostle Paul wrote to Church members in Corinth, "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:26–27). James identified those who are called into the Church as the "firstfruits" in the plan of God (James 1:18).

From these verses, we learn that people do not decide on their own to become Christians, and that God is not now calling everyone into His Church. He is calling a few individuals to become "firstfruits" who will reign with Christ when He returns to set up the Kingdom of God on this earth (see Revelation 5:10; 14:4; 20:4–6).

What is the purpose of keeping the Holy Days? What truths are they intended to convey? What lessons can we learn—especially about Pentecost—that are relevant to Christians today?

specific individuals to become His original disciples (Matthew 4:18–22). Later, as He trained His disciples, He explained to them: "It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [those in the world and those who followed Jesus out of curiosity] it has not been given" (Matthew 13:10–11). Jesus explained that only a few would be called initially to follow Him, and that those not called would be blinded to an understanding of the true Gospel. Jesus then told His disciples: "Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly... many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it" (Matthew 13:16–17). In other words, Jesus' disciples were called and given a special understanding of the plan of God, which others were not yet given.

On another occasion, Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). Jesus then launched into a spiritual discussion about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, which many in His audience did not understand. Jesus then repeated His earlier statement that "no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father"

Jesus said that a calling to be His disciple was a unique opportunity and a very special privilege that would only be offered to a few in this age. This means that what happened on the Day of Pentecost in 31AD was according to a plan and that something very profound was going on. The people who made a baptismal commitment on that day did not just decide on the spot to "give their hearts to the Lord." The individuals who were baptized had been called by God and given a special opportunity to be part of His Church. They were given the ability to understand the meaning and significance of what they had seen and the message they heard from the disciples whom Jesus had called and trained. What happened on Pentecost in 31AD was part of the plan of God, and has important implications for each of us and for the Church of God today.

ADMONITIONS AND WARNINGS

The Apostle Paul admonished the ministry of God's Church, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not

endure sound doctrine... they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:2–4). Paul told the ministry to deliver messages appropriate to the season—which means that messages on the Holy Days should explain the meaning of those days, so the understanding of



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what those days picture would not be lost or forgotten. However, Paul also warned—in the context of the “last days” (2 Timothy 3:1–5)—that many would follow false religious teachings and practices.

In another letter, Paul warned that prior to the return of Jesus Christ, a “man of sin”—a “lawless one”—would appear on the world scene and deceive many with miraculous signs and false doctrines, but that real Christians should “stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught” (2 Thessalonians 2:1–15). The “lawless” teachings include the ideas that because of Jesus’ sacrifice, Christians are not to strive to keep God’s law with the help of the Holy Spirit—rather, they can continue in their sinful ways with God’s blessing.

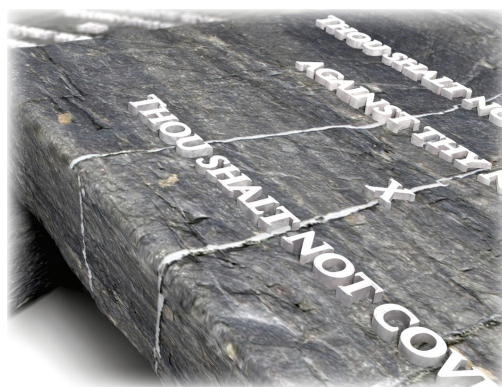
However, such teachings do not agree with the teachings or example of Jesus, who said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). Scripture plainly teaches that Jesus came to “magnify the law” (Isaiah 42:21, KJV) and to show that the letter of the law (such as Exodus 20:13–14, forbidding murder and adultery) also has a spiritual dimension (Matthew 5:21–28, warning against anger and lust). It is clear from Scripture that Jesus kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days, and that He taught others to follow His example (Luke 4:16; John 7:1–10).

The Apostle Paul warned that false teachers would preach about another Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:3–4). His warning has come to pass in stories about an effeminate, law-breaking individual whose birth is celebrated on December 25. These false teachers would preach a different gospel (such as the idea that you can be saved merely by “giving your heart to the Lord” and that your reward for doing so will be to spend eternity in Heaven). These false teachers would be led by a different spirit that promotes lies and fables instead of the Truth, and that turns a blind eye to the facts of history. This is why the Apostle Jude warned Christians to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Jude was writing ca. 65AD, when men had entered the Church with an agenda of turning “the grace of our God into lewdness” (Jude 4). Among those

promoting such misleading ideas were Gnostics who used Jesus’ name, but referred to the law of God as a burden (contrary to 1 John 5:3). These Gnostic teachers, though claiming to be Christians, told people that it was acceptable to keep other religions’ holidays to honor Jesus, and that they could choose their own day of worship instead of the seventh day. These false Gnostic ideas, along with other heresies, were absorbed by the Roman Catholic Church, and were later transmitted into Protestant churches where they are still believed today (for an excellent account of this process, read *Primitive Christianity in Crisis* by Alan Knight). This is why Catholics and Protestants have lost sight of the Holy Days and their meanings, and why they do not understand the truth about the plan of God.

HOLY DAYS: COMMANDED ASSEMBLIES

What is the purpose of keeping the Holy Days? What truths are they intended to convey? What lessons can we learn—especially about Pentecost—that are relevant to Christians today? Scripture states that the Sabbath and the Holy Days are not the feasts of Moses or the Jews, but are “the feasts of the LORD” (Leviticus 23:2). These festivals are also referred to as “holy convocations”—they are commanded assemblies that were established to be kept “forever” (Leviticus 23:4, 14, 21, 31, 41). God did not establish His Sabbath and Holy Days as nice options for us to observe, out of the goodness of our hearts, if we are so inclined. Rather,



He commanded His people to observe the festivals He established. We are told in three different passages in the Old Testament, “Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year”—in the spring at the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, in early summer at Pentecost [the Feast of Weeks] and in the autumn at the Feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14–

17; 34:22–23; Deuteronomy 16:16). It is interesting that the idea of “firstfruits” is closely associated with the Feast of Pentecost in these passages, yet this idea is not fully explained in the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul mentions that the festivals of God provide “a shadow of things to come” (Colossians 2:16–17), and it is in the New Testament that we learn the real significance of “firstfruits” in relation to the plan of God and the events that occurred on Pentecost in 31AD.

But what instructions did God give to the ancient nation of Israel, and how do those instructions relate to Christians today? In Deuteronomy 4, Moses reviewed the conditions of the covenant that God had made with the

nation of Israel. He explained that God gave them His laws—including the Sabbaths and Holy Days—for their benefit, and that they were not to add to, nor to take away from, any of His commandments. This would include not rejecting the Holy Days and replacing them with pagan holidays. Moses explained that God gave Israel His laws to set them apart from other nations, so they could be an example to the world of a wise and understanding people—setting an example that the peoples of the world would want to emulate when they saw the blessings that the Israelites would experience by following God’s laws. Jesus gave similar instructions to His disciples when He told them to keep His commandments and be lights to the world (John 14:15; Matthew 5:14–16).

Moses also instructed the Israelites to teach the laws of God to their children and grandchildren, so that they would never forget the covenant they made with God nor how God dealt with their nation. Yet, in spite of these warnings,

they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–8). It was on the Day of Pentecost—a Holy Day that God’s people have been commanded to observe forever (Leviticus 23:21)—when God poured out His Spirit and began the New Testament Church of God (Acts 2). We are told that God gives His Spirit “to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32). Because Jesus’ disciples were following His commandments and instructions, God poured out His Spirit in a dramatic and visible way, enabling the disciples to speak in different languages so the Gospel could be understood by people who spoke other languages (Acts 2:1–12).

This sudden capacity to speak in a different language or tongue was not—as most of today’s professing Christians mistakenly assume—a personal ecstatic experience in which participants began to babble a series of unrecognizable syllables. Rather, God supernaturally gave the disciples the ability to communicate with each listener in his or her own language, so the Gospel message could be understood and

Repentance involves changing our lives and coming ever closer to God by living ever more fully according to His laws. Remember, Jesus told His disciples to keep His commandments, and taught that God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

Moses perceived that these instructions would be forgotten (Deuteronomy 4:9–40). Moses reminded the Israelites that God chose them and raised them up from humble origins to be His “special” people—to be blessed and be an example of holiness to the world if they would obey His instructions (Deuteronomy 7:6–26). God gave the Israelites His Sabbaths and Holy Days as a sign to set them apart from the nations of the world, and keep them mindful of His great plan (Exodus 31:12–18). Those God is calling into His Church today have been called for the same reason (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Sadly, the ancient Israelites forgot God’s instructions, rejected His laws and failed to observe His Sabbaths and Holy Days. They lost sight of their special mission, corrupted themselves, went into captivity and lost their national identity (see Deuteronomy 31:26–29; 2 Kings 17:18; Ezekiel 20). Those whom God has called in our present day to become part of His Church, to be lights to the world, must be alert to these lessons of history—and not repeat the mistakes of the past!

NEW TESTAMENT PENTECOST

As we have seen, Jesus did not come to do away with the laws of God. Jesus kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days all His life, and taught His disciples to follow His example (Luke 4:16; John 7:37). Jesus’ disciples taught the early New Testament Church to do likewise (Acts 17:2; 18:21; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 11:1). In the days after His resurrection, Jesus commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until

spread. This miraculous sign of speaking in another tongue is also mentioned in Acts 10:44–48 and Acts 19:1–6. In each case, the ability to speak in a different language was a sign that God was leading His Church—not a personal ecstatic experience meant to give the speaker some enhanced personal sense of spirituality.

Scripture shows how God began His Church—and added to it—by calling individuals out of this world, to whom He gave the Holy Spirit to guide them into understanding His truth and His plan. On several occasions, Jesus said that to be called by God, and to be given the capacity to understand His truth, is a unique opportunity and a special privilege. Those who made a baptismal commitment on the Day of Pentecost took advantage of that opportunity to become part of the New Testament Church. If God has called you and given you the capacity to understand His Truth, you, too, have been given this same unique opportunity and special privilege to become part of His Church and play a role as a “firstfruit” in God’s plan of salvation that will change the whole world. The Day of Pentecost should be a sobering and exciting reminder of that special calling.

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Those whom God called to be part of His Church on Pentecost in 31AD were told that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit if they would repent and make a commitment

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SINGING TOGETHER ON THE SABBATH

By Don White

Why do we sing together when we assemble as a congregation for Sabbath services? Singing together is not wallowing in emotionalism, pretending that it is true spirituality. It is not “downtime” while we take a break before a more important part of the program. No, it is a special part of our Sabbath worship, and is beneficial in a variety of ways. There are very good reasons why we sing together on the Sabbath.

Some Protestant congregations devote as much as one-third or even half of the Sunday service to congregational singing and musical performances. By comparison, the traditional five songs sung at each weekly Sabbath service in the Living Church of God are but a small part of our worship by comparison.

So, why do we take this valuable time to sing together as a congregation? And, when we do so, what makes our singing different from ordinary singing in other circumstances?

As Christians, we should consider how God instructs us to come before Him.

This article is meant to answer that question. We should understand the value and the benefits of singing together on the Sabbath. We should understand that song services are much more than a break between the “important” parts of the services.

First, notice how we are instructed to come before God. Psalm 100:1 “Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!” (Psalm 100:1). The Hebrew word used here for “shout” has the sense of “to split the ears”—to make a powerful sound.

The psalmist continues: “Serve the LORD with gladness [joy, mirth, pleasure]; come before His presence with singing” (v. 2).

This all sounds very uplifting. But why are we to do this? We know that God’s instructions are for our benefit. His way works for us. Somehow or other, we can be confident that singing together is good for us.

Aside from the spiritual application, you might be surprised to learn that scientists have determined that group singing can lower stress, relieve anxiety and improve our general wellbeing. Group singing releases endorphins—those elation-building hormones in our

bodies that are associated with feelings of pleasure. Among its other benefits, group singing simply helps us feel better!

What other instructions does God give us about singing? He tells us how to sing. “Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises **with understanding**” (Psalm 47:6–7). Notice that we are not just supposed to mouth the sounds of the song. We are to understand what we are singing. This means that we need to **think about** the words we sing.

Interestingly, research has found what we also know from common experience, that words accompanied by music tend to be “stickier”—more accurately retained—in our minds. They are easier for us to remember. Music enhances our ability to learn and recall the words of the songs we sing together.

And the benefits go deeper still. We all know that the Sabbath

is a time for renewal—a time when we can recharge our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual “batteries.” So it should be no surprise that this commanded activity actually helps to rewire and rebuild the human brain! “Researchers have recently found that teaching stroke victims to sing rewires their brains and allows them to regain their speech. This process, called ‘melodic intonation therapy...’ (“Singing ‘rewires’ damaged brain,” *BBC News*, February 21, 2010).

Dr. Douglas Winnail has talked to participants at recent Regional Conference meetings, and emphasized that use of the Internet affects neural pathways in the brain, and in fact “conditions” the brain by how it is used. The more we use certain areas of our brain, the stronger the neural circuitry becomes; the less we use them, the weaker they become. Music and singing works similarly; it is a “brain conditioner” that brings about changes in the brain that are just as profound—or even more so—than what a surgeon might try to do by using a knife.

Yes, singing together can actually have a healing effect on the brain! In fact, it has a potentially unifying



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LIVING YOUTH CAMP CHANGES LIVES!

By Sheldon Monson

In my years of working with Living Youth Camp, in various capacities, I have seen again and again how it makes such a difference in the lives of young people who attend and who take advantage of what it has to offer.

This is not an automatic process; a young person has to be ready for the experience. It can give motivated young people many opportunities to grow in ways they might otherwise never have imagined. Below is an account written by a bright young woman whose life has been shaped by her camp experience. I hope you find it as encouraging and inspiring as I did when I first read it.

The first year I went to Living Youth Camp, I was 15 years old. I was awkward and shy. I did not want to be there. Truth be told, I was terrified. I had never liked talking to people I did not know, and there were a lot of people there I did not know. When I first arrived, I stepped into a culture that I did not understand. The rules were different, the way of doing things was different, and the traditions were well-crafted and established. I was so far out of my comfort zone. I wanted to go home.

Fast-forward to today. I am now 29 years old. I have not missed a year of camp since that first year. That is 14 summers of camp at LYC—three as a camper, eleven as a staff member, and all but four of those eleven as a counselor. That does not include the years I have been a staff member at preteen LYC camps. I have eaten, drank, slept, breathed—I have lived—camp every summer since that first year. You could call me a “camp junkie”—I mean, nearly half the summers that I have lived I have attended Church youth camps, and during several summers I attended more than one. When I graduated from college and knew that my summers would no longer be free, I prayed for God to grant me a job that would allow me the flexibility to still attend the youth camps (at least one) every summer. He was gracious to allow such a job opportunity. I continued to go to camp—two each summer.

Why?

Why did I keep going all those years, serving as a staff member, working, giving up time and money to attend, especially since I did not even want to be there when I first went to camp at 15? What changed? What drew me to that event each and every year? What made it something I wondered how or if I would ever give up and stop doing?

Living Youth Camp changed my life.

You can read that sentence and think I am sensationalizing. I assure you that I am not. My experience

at camp shaped, so very deeply, the person that I am today. Despite my shyness and dislike of talking with people I did not know, I met a lot of friends that first year. It helped that it was so strongly encouraged to get to know everyone, to “M&M” (Mix & Mingle), to not leave anyone out, and to make a concerted effort to involve those who may otherwise be left out, ignored, or overlooked. The traditions, the rules, the different ways of doing things all worked in concert to create a culture that was so drastically different from the world that I had no choice but to stop and think, “Why is this so different?” and “What are the reasons for these differences?” That way of thinking and questioning directly impacts my life and how I view the word of God. When I read the laws and statutes or about the things Jesus did that were “counter-culture” to the world around Him, I cannot help but ask those same two questions. In that asking, I can learn the mind of God—what reasons did He have for the laws He created, why are they so different from the world, and what is the purpose behind it all? For the Christian walk we must change our way of thinking to align with God’s, so we can understand His purpose and how to think like He does. At camp, I learned to change my way of thinking to align with the direction and purpose of the camp itself. Same principle. Powerful concept.

As I progressed through my years as a camper and on into years as a staff member, I learned more about the purpose of the Church’s youth programs. In staff orientations, the directors were not shy about stating, “We are selling something,” “We have a product we want these young people to buy into,” and that product was a different way of life. I believed in that product. I believed in that mission. I understood that in order for the Church to continue strongly, the youth of the Church must understand how to live a different way of life, how to have a godly way of thinking. They will have to continue the struggle against sin, society, and Satan long after we are gone (should the Kingdom not come first). As Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

This is the core of why I have been to camp for so many years. I was changed by the culture, I believed in the purpose, and I wanted to give those who are younger than me the same opportunity to connect with their peers in the faith and to learn a different way of life—“a way of life that works.” Without dedicated people willing to serve at our summer camps, they would not be able to continue. There were absolutely wonderful people who made camp possible and wonderful the years I was

a camper. Seeing their sacrifice and dedication, I could not help but be compelled to “pay it forward.” —*Leona Dorothy*

Editor’s Note: It is not too late to sign up for Summer 2014 Living Youth Camp activities! Learn more by read-

ing the Living Youth Camps promotional piece, which will soon be sent to all Living Church of God member households. You may also go to www.LivingYouth.org to find out how you, or a Church youth for whom you care, can attend. ■



Woman to Woman

By Faye League

Women of Courage and Fortitude

There have been reams of material written and also verbally expressed down through the ages concerning courage and courageous acts. Some of these accounts are very deeply inspiring and motivating. Many women have shown great courage at times.

To have courage is a very commendable trait. However, for courage to endure, especially in times of adversity, it must continue to be strengthened with fortitude. These attributes go hand in hand.

Fortitude, according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, is strength that enables one to meet danger, or bear pain or adversity with courage.

There are times when women are faced with dire circumstances which are beyond their control and life becomes very difficult for them. In their sorrow and grief they are sometimes forced to make tough but necessary decisions that require courage and fortitude.

Such was the case for Naomi (we read of her struggles in the book of Ruth), who with her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, had moved from Bethlehem-Judah to the country of Moab to escape a famine in the homeland.

In the course of time, while living in Moab, Naomi's husband Elimelech died and she was left a widow with two sons. Her sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Later on, both Mahlon and Chilion died (Ruth 1:1-5). What a shock it must have been for Naomi to lose all three members of her immediate family in such a short period of time—about ten years (v. 4). So with courage and fortitude, Naomi had to make some very tough decisions concerning her future. The only family members she had left there in Moab were her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah—now widows themselves—with whom she apparently had a very close relationship. These two ladies loved Naomi so much that they wept at the very thought of parting from her as she made her journey back to the land of Judah (She had heard that the Lord was again providing grain—bread—for His people there). Naomi implored Orpah and Ruth to return to their gods and their people in Moab but they wept all the more. Finally Orpah sadly turned back toward Moab, but Ruth clung to Naomi and prevailed through her impassioned plea to continue on with her mother-in-law. “But Ruth said:

‘Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me’” (Ruth 1:16-17). Here again is another example of courage and fortitude. Ruth was determined to go with Naomi to seek the true God of Israel—leaving her former gods and her people behind—to serve God and begin a new way of life in a strange land. So Naomi relented and allowed her to continue on with her to the land of Judah (v. 18).

We pick up the story in verse 19: “Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’” Then Naomi could not contain her grief and anguish any longer. “But she said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi [pleasant]; call me Mara [bitter], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me’” (v. 20). “I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?” (v. 21).

This is not to say that Naomi was angry at God, nor bitter toward Him, since she was apparently a God-fearing woman. She was just sorely lamenting the fact that her situation was a bitterness to her soul and very grievous to her heart. She was clearly struggling to fight through the pain and suffering with courage and fortitude.

So these two brave women, Naomi and Ruth, continued on their course, rebuilding their lives through courage and fortitude—with God's help in giving them favor with Boaz, a close relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech, who was very wealthy. Boaz allowed Ruth to glean in his fields for barley, redeemed the land of Naomi and also married Ruth. “So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne



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him.’ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him” (Ruth 4:13–16). What a blessing of joy and comfort this must have been for Naomi!

“Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, ‘There is a son born to Naomi.’ And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David” (v. 17). And as we know, this birth perpetuated Christ’s ancestral lineage.

Naomi and Ruth must have learned some difficult but valuable lessons during their adversity as they rebuilt their lives, but having the courage and fortitude to see things through, they became stronger women as a result.

Queen Esther found herself in quite a dilemma when Mordecai, the relative who had raised her as his own daughter after her parents died, informed her of a wicked plot to kill the Jews of the land. He admonished her to go before King Ahasuerus and petition him to deliver the Jews from annihilation. There were two major problems that stood in her way, which would make this a very formidable task.

First: the perpetrator of this evil plot was a man named Haman, whom the king had recently appointed to the highest and most honorable position in the palace (Esther 3:1). Haman had a grudge against Mordecai because he would not bow to him nor pay him homage in the king’s gate—thus the plot to kill all the Jews, including Mordecai, in order to take revenge on Mordecai. Haman had even obtained permission from the king to kill the Jews—the king being unaware that Esther was Jewish.

Second: it was against the law to appear before the king without being summoned by him. If one did appear before the king, and was not accepted by the king extending his golden scepter, then the penalty was death. Esther had not been summoned by the king for 30 days. So she informed Mordecai of this (Esther 4:11–12).

In the face of these problems, Mordecai sent word back to Esther: “And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: ‘Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’” (Esther 4:13–14).

Then with courage and fortitude (the strength of mind to face this danger with courage), Esther made a very difficult, gut-wrenching decision. “Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: ‘Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!’” (Esther 4:15–16). “So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him” (v. 17).

“Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, across from the king’s house, while the king sat on his royal

throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house” (Esther 5:1).

What a beautiful sight she must have been, regally arrayed in her royal robes, having the strength of mind (fortitude with courage) to face this life-or-death situation.

“So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter” (Esther 5:2). “And the king said to her, ‘What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!’” (v. 3).

Then through a series of events, with God’s favor and guidance, this gutsy queen was able to expose Haman and his evil plot to King Ahasuerus at just the right time (Esther 7:1–10). Thus Haman’s evil plot turned around on him. This is a classic example of reaping what one has sown. “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him” (Proverbs 26:27). King Ahasuerus was so shocked and enraged that Haman would devise such a plot—to kill all the Jews—including his own queen—that he took drastic action to deal with Haman, having him hanged on the same gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordecai. “So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s wrath subsided” (Esther 7:10). Then, in order to deliver the Jews from annihilation, Esther implored the king to rescind the order to kill all the Jews, which he had given to Haman and which had gone out into all the lands. The king gave Esther the permission to take the proper steps to neutralize his previous decree, which she did—thus delivering not only Mordecai and the Jews, but herself as well (Esther 8:1–17). God was with Esther in all that she did, from the moment she decided to seek His help through fasting and prayer, and to rely on Him for the courage and fortitude that she would need.

I have known of cases where courage was definitely needed, was prevalent and endured for a time, but eventually failed due to the lack of fortitude. And when courage fails, then hope is lost. Losing hope can result in various negative and destructive emotions and actions such as: depression, drug addiction (to numb the suffering) and even giving up on life. One must hang on to courage and fortitude; it is of the utmost importance!

Fortitude is the key element or component that enables one to see the glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. It gives the impetus to press on toward the goal—no matter what the circumstances are. The synonyms for fortitude are: grit, backbone, pluck and guts (*Merriam-Webster*). The aforementioned ladies certainly had all of these qualities in abundance.

So with our goal as God’s Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33), let us continue to go forward toward this goal of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus with courage and fortitude. ■

The Importance of Pentecost

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to accept Jesus Christ's sacrifice to pay for their sins (Acts 2:38). Repentance involves changing our lives and coming ever closer to God by living ever more fully according to His laws. Remember, Jesus told His disciples to keep His commandments, and taught that God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). We also learn from Scripture that God imparts the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by God's ministers after baptism (Acts 8:14–18). This is how we receive the Holy Spirit—not through some emotional project we undertake on our own effort.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth,” and said that the world “cannot receive” that Spirit, which it neither sees nor knows (John 14:16–17). Scripture plainly states that people are not real Christians—and will not receive the Holy Spirit—unless they are called by God, they repent and accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as payment for their sins, and at baptism they make a commitment to obey God (Romans 8:9).

Jesus also said that God's Spirit will lead Christians and His Church “into all truth” (John 16:13). These verses explain why the Church of God understands the meaning of the Holy Days and that these days picture the plan of God. This is also why the Church of God understands the “mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11), and why the Church of God is able to have a “more sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19–21, *KJV*). God makes these gifts available to His Church so it can accomplish the mission He gave it.

The gift of the Holy Spirit comes with a responsibility. Once we receive the Holy Spirit, we must nourish that Spirit—by daily prayer, Bible study and meditation (2 Corinthians

4:16). Jesus told His disciples that we glorify the Father when we bear much fruit (John 15:8). Scripture describes the fruit to which Jesus referred. Individuals whom God calls and chooses to be Christians must be distinguished by genuine outgoing love and concern for others (John 13:35; 15:12–13). They must strive to develop the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). They must become peaceable, easily entreated, full of mercy and without hypocrisy (James 3:13–18). The Apostle Paul explained that when we are plagued with doubts, we are not using or being led by God's Spirit. However, those who are continually renewing and being led by God's Spirit are confident about what they believe, and can discern where and how God is working (2 Timothy 1:6–7). Another visible fruit of the Holy Spirit is unity—that those renewing and being led by God's Spirit will be able to work together in harmony because they share the same mind and the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1–3).

When we gather together to observe the Day of Pentecost, we need to remember these important concepts. We are commanded to remember and observe a day that pictures an important step in the plan of God. It pictures the fact that God is calling a few to become the firstfruits of what will ultimately become a great harvest. It is a reminder that God is calling a few into His Church now, to be educated and trained to teach others God's way of life in the coming Kingdom of God. God is giving His Spirit to those He calls so that we can develop the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which will enable us to become as He is. As we observe the Day of Pentecost, let us remember and deeply appreciate this unique opportunity and very special calling! ■

Singing Together on the Sabbath

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effect. Scientists know that the hormone oxytocin is released during group singing. That hormone enhances feelings of trust and bonding, and alleviates anxiety and stress.

Furthermore, researchers in Sweden monitored the heart rates of singers as they performed a variety of choral works. Their finding? “The pulse goes down when you exhale and when you inhale it goes up.” They found that as the members sang in unison, their pulses began to speed up and slow down at the same rate. This study suggests that choir singers not only harmonize their voices, they also synchronize their heartbeats. (“Choir

singers ‘synchronise their heartbeats,’ *BBC News*, July 8, 2013).

So, what have we learned? Group singing has been scientifically proven to lower stress, relieve anxiety and improve well-being; it enhances feelings of trust, bonding and unity and it rewires the brain. Researchers have found that singing is like an infusion of the perfect natural tranquilizer, one that both soothes the nerves and elevates the spirit—and does so with no negative side effects. There is no downside.

But what if you feel that you are not a good singer? It turns out you do not even need to be a good singer to reap the rewards of singing. According to one 2005 study, group singing “can produce satisfying and therapeutic sensations even when the sound produced by the

vocal instrument is of mediocre quality” (“Singing Changes Your Brain,” *TIME.com*, August 16, 2013).

Singing has long been a part of Christian worship. Thirty years after the death of Christ, the early New Testament Church continued the custom of singing. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).

Remember, we are instructed to sing. “Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing” (Psalm 100:1–2).

So, sing out at Sabbath services. It is good for you—in many, many ways. ■

We Must Increase Our Faith!

Continued from page 4

receive from God powerful answers to prayer—“whatever we ask”—“because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

Since so many of us are getting older in the faith, we should, dear brethren, truly be drawing closer and closer to God in everything we think,

say and do. If we, through God’s Spirit, so discipline ourselves to do this, and specifically cry out to God for more faith, He will certainly give us that faith!

Then, those of us who do this will have a profound peace of mind, a sense of confidence and assuredness in God and in His will for us and we will know that God will do what He says—in His time and His way. This living faith will enable us to become far more powerful

instruments of God and to be truly “ready” to be His instruments when it is His time to pour out the spiritual power and the gifts of His Spirit on His church at the very end of this age. May God help all of us catch this vision and learn to walk with our Father—in faith—in the way I have tried to describe to all of you. May God be with you and help each of you to build this profound relationship with God and with Jesus Christ in your daily lives. ■

A Godly Fear Is Necessary!

Continued from page 2

all of our might for help and deliverance! For such a habit, left unchecked, will become *part of us*. It will become like our own eye or ear or hand. Yet our Savior, Jesus Christ, powerfully warns: “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, *into the fire that shall never be quenched*—where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9:43–44).

Many times, brethren, it may be necessary to literally “flee” a situation that could cause us to act on a terrible temptation. Certainly, the powerful urge to *act* on a sexual temptation may be one of those circumstances. For the Apostle Paul was inspired by God to write the Corinthians: “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Yes, we may need to literally “flee” a situation that is pulling us into illicit sexual activity. We may need to “flee” the temptation to be around our former friends who smoke or who drink heavily, if we ourselves might easily be drawn into such bad habits again. We may have to “flee” any other situation that we—in our hearts—know might pull us down and out of God’s Church and into the Lake of Fire!

In sermons, I have recited the humorous and yet very meaningful example of my dear friend and brother of the past, Herman L. Hoeh—the first male Ambassador graduate and Executive Editor of the Worldwide Church of God publications for many years. Herman and I were in Ensenada, Mexico, along with Dick Armstrong and Raymond Cole back in 1950 or 1951. We had been staying in a reasonably nice hotel—since the American dollar bought a lot in those days in Mexico. We had a reasonably clean and nice room and a very nice dinner at the hotel, where some Mexican “folk dancing” entertainment was furnished with the meal.

The next morning, we were all heading for breakfast and wondered where Herman was. Normally, he was up early—since he grew up on a farm and **always** got up early. We waited a bit, but finally had to start breakfast—then Herman came up to us, actually puffing and panting, because he had been

running! We asked, “What happened, Herman?” He replied, “I was taking an early morning walk over in this normal-looking neighborhood, when I was approached by these women wanting to **sell themselves** to me!” Apparently, Herman had **never before** been approached by a prostitute. He was *shocked*, and realized that he had to “flee” just as the Bible stated! So, he **ran** all the way back to the hotel to get away from the situation.

That may seem *amusing*. And, in a way, it was. Yet it does show to us that we need to take action of this sort if it will keep us **out** of the very Lake of Fire which Jesus talked about! For the Lake of Fire is real!

Yes, there is an **actual** “Lake of Fire” that awaits those who are so weak, so careless and so slothful in their approach to God that they show the Creator by their very lukewarm attitude that they **do not** really worship God with all their heart, and **do not** really put God’s righteousness and His Kingdom above *everything else* (Matthew 6:33). Remember, when Jesus was asked what is the “first” of all the commandments, He answered: “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. 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” (Mark 12:29–30). If we truly **love** and **worship** God with *all our being*, we will *fight against* or *flee* any urge to turn away from our Creator.

We in the Living Church of God must **not** believe in “cheap grace.” We must recognize God’s repeated commands, which tell us to **forsake everything** for the sake of God’s Kingdom: “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33).

May God help **all of us** do *everything we can* to pray for, strive for and exercise the genuine “fear” of the great God in whom we live and move and have our being. This genuine **awe**—this **total respect**—is the “key” attitude God is looking for in each of us. May we desire so much to be in God’s Kingdom that we will truly **worship** and **honor** our Creator and heavenly Father in this way.

With Christian love,



LOCAL

CHURCH NEWS

In Loving Memory

Mr. Roy Michelson, of Horsham, West Sussex, UK, died on October 22, 2013 at the age of 70, after a short illness. Mr. Michelson was called by God 40 years ago while living in New Zealand. In 2010, he and his wife Kathy moved to the UK to be nearer to their three children who had moved to the UK and Europe some years earlier. Since returning to the UK, Mr. and Mrs. Michelson have been blessed with four grandchildren. The family is very grateful that they were able to spend this last Feast of Tabernacles all together in Buxton. Mr. Michelson, known for his quiet, steady manner and dry sense of humor, is greatly missed by all who knew him and especially his wife, children and grandchildren. He never wavered in his love for God and His commandments, and now rests awaiting the resurrection.

Mrs. Flora B. Pifer, 76, of Lafayette, Louisiana, died peacefully November 11, 2013. Mrs. Pifer is survived by her loving

husband of five years, Mel Pifer; son Perron Sutton; son-in-law and daughter Daniel and Tammy Friz; granddaughters Emily, Elizabeth, and Olivia Friz; daughter Janny Foreman; granddaughter Anna Marie Richard (Ron) and other beloved family and friends. She was preceded in death by her parents; husband of 53 years, Larry Sutton; a brother; and three sisters. Baptized in 1963, she was thoughtful to everyone, gave of herself to others and was rarely without her sunny smile. She left a beautiful legacy and her future is secure.

Mrs. Agnes Belanger, age 88, of the Calgary, Alberta, congregation died on January 30. Mrs. Belanger, a long-time faithful member, was born in May 1925 and baptized in 1969. She was preceded in death by her husband in 2009. A memorial service was conducted on the evening of February 1. Mrs. Belanger will be greatly missed by family, friends, and brethren.

Upcoming **TOMORROW'S** **WORLD** Telecasts

MAY 1-7	THREE DANGEROUS LIES OF EVOLUTION
MAY 8-14	GOD HEALS
MAY 15-21	DOOMSDAY AND ARMAGEDDON
MAY 22-28	COMING SOON: GOD'S NEW WORLD
MAY 29-JUNE 4	THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION
JUNE 5-11	THE PROPHESED DAY OF THE LORD
JUNE 12-18	SEVEN PROPHETIC TRENDS

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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

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).

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Matthew (Naomi) Lyons of the Walterboro, South Carolina, congregation are pleased to announce the birth of their first child, **Andrew “Drew” Michael Lyons**, born on January 27. He weighed in at seven pounds, two ounces, and was 21.5 inches long. Grandparents are delighted and happy over the new addition to their families: Mr. and Mrs. Scott Lyons (Jenny) also of the Walterboro congregation, and Mr. and Mrs. Michael Kreyer (Kimberly) of the Minneapolis, Minnesota, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Tim (Jessica) Wilson of the Indianapolis, Indiana, congregation are happy to announce the birth of

their fourth son, **Samuel Wesley Wilson**, born on February 11. He weighed seven pounds and was 19 inches long. Samuel joins his brothers Allen, Jonathan, and Benjamin in keeping the Wilson home lively.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles (Cathrine) Ogwyn of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation are pleased to announce the birth of their son, **Matthew Charles Ogwyn**. He was born February 11, weighed seven pounds, 14 ounces, and measured 21 inches. Emily and Amy are delighted at the arrival of their baby brother.

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Mike Alamilla was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of September 7, 2013, by Canadian Regional Pastor Gerald Weston and Area Pastor Winston Gosse. Congratulations to Mr. Alamilla on the opportunity and blessing he has received to continually serve God's people in the Toronto area.

Mr. Dwayne Wilks was ordained a deacon on Sabbath, November 23, 2013 by Area Pastor Stuart Wachowicz. Mr. Wilks serves the brethren in the Calgary, Alberta, Canada congregation.

Mr. William (Bill) Long was ordained an elder on Sabbath, February 22 by Regional Pastor Lambert Greer and Area Pastor Jason Fritts. Mr. Long serves the brethren in the Detroit, Michigan, congregation.

Young Adult Weekend at the UK Office

From January 18 to 19, 22 young adults from various parts of the UK and France travelled to the Kings' home (aka the UK Office) in Kettering to enjoy a weekend of fun, fellowship and good food!

On Saturday afternoon, some of the Birmingham congregation joined us for Sabbath services, fellowship and refreshments, bringing our number up to around 30. The Kings' living room was filled with a “joyful noise” as everyone saw old friends and improved acquaintances. We felt truly

blessed for this opportunity to spend time together because, normally, the physical distance that separates us makes this virtually impossible.

After bidding farewell to the members from Birmingham, we enjoyed a friendly and relaxed evening, with no shortage of smiles and laughter as everyone played “Apples to Apples” and had more chance to talk... ending in an unavoidable late night for many!

Sunday brought a fresh, sunny start and Mr. Simon Roberts gave an encouraging forum on the blessings

of being single, which helped those of us not (or not yet) married to see “singledom” from a new and positive perspective. This was followed by a walk to the nearby park—where we indulged in the “Young” side of the Young Adults' weekend!

We all extend a big thank you to the Roberts family and Jamie Meakin for organising everything and ensuring that all ran smoothly, to the Kings for generously allowing us the use of their home, and to God for blessing this memorable event. —*Debbie Bennett*

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COMMENTARY

THE SPIRIT OF PENTECOST

The 50 days following Christ's crucifixion and resurrection had been an unforgettable time for His disciples. Their Teacher had come back from the dead after a brutal execution, and had taught them for 40 days. More than 500 at one time had seen Him (1 Corinthians 15:6). The disciples ate with Him, talked with Him and even touched the wounds where His body had been pierced.

But that was not all. After 40 dramatic days of instruction, the Savior ascended into the clouds, while His disciples watched with wonder and amazement. But He did not leave them alone—He promised to give them something that would empower them with spiritual vitality they had never before experienced (Luke 24:49).

The disciple Luke describes Christ's encouraging words. "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'" (Acts 1:4–5).

What event was the risen Christ speaking of? What was this "promise" to come? Most Bible students know the basic story, but many are not fully aware of the profound impact this momentous 50th day would have on the Church of God from that point forward. It was the day of Pentecost—the day of miracles—the day the New Testament Church began!

What happened on that amazing Day of Pentecost in 31AD? Luke records the day's events: "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1–4).

The beginning of the New Testament Church was characterized by astonishing sights and sounds. It was a powerful display of divine power, reminiscent of the awesome sights God had shown on the day He gave Moses the law on Mount Sinai (Hebrews 12:18–21). In fact, according to Jewish tradition, the law of God at Mount Sinai was given on the Day of Pentecost many centuries earlier!

But more important than the sights and sounds were the events that could not be seen or heard. These manifestations of God's majesty signaled the outpouring of the power of the universe—God's Spirit! The same power that ignited the sun and the stars—the power that formed and set the planets in motion—would now literally abide in human beings on Earth (John 14:17).

—Rod McNair