

Living Church News

Vol. 2, No. 5

July–August 2000

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God Will Have to Intervene

Dear Brethren and Friends,

As I write this, my wife and I have just returned from *two* trips—our European trip and then, a few days later, a trip to Vancouver, British Columbia. Both trips went very well and we were very warmly received by God's people. It was a real joy to visit with Mr. and Mrs. Norm Aitchison and stay with them in their home in Vancouver on this latest trip. They are doing a very fine job serving God's people in the Vancouver area.

I have already commented elsewhere on the European trip, so I will not go into the particulars of it at this time. But being in Britain and Europe again impressed upon me, more than ever, that VERY FEW human beings alive today have ever heard the Truth of God.

While Sheryl and I were surrounded by approximately 250,000 people in St. Peter's Square in Rome, I remarked to her that, in this vast sea of faces, we were probably the ONLY ones with any real knowledge of God or of His true PLAN for humanity. Even in our so-called "sophisticated" age, people were virtually *worshipping* the little old man up there on the stage.

How will God really reach the more than ONE BILLION people in what is called the Great Mother Church?

How?

How will the Creator's Message be proclaimed to the additional hundreds of millions of Protestants, and to the hundreds of millions of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and others? At the rate *all* of the Church of God fellowships are growing, we will not even begin to make a dent in the understanding of the BILLIONS of human beings out there who have NEVER heard the real Truth of God!

So what is the ANSWER? As God gives me understanding, I feel more deeply every month that *God Himself* will have to intervene—to SHAKE the nations, to bring about severe *drought* and *famine*, then *disease epidemics* and scattered *earthquakes*, as the world experiences other plagues and terrorist activities. Then—and probably *only then*—people as a whole may be willing to at least "listen" to the idea of a REAL God—a personal God of POWER who intervenes directly in human affairs.

As you know, the above catastrophes are prophesied in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. So we are not talking about anything "strange,"

but about the REALITY of what will happen over the next decade or two.

A number of these prophesied events already appear to be shaping up. Our minister in Kenya, Ernest Owino, recently reported:

This is just to update you on the situation in the country which has now become so severe that 23 million Kenyans are starving and, as the president yesterday observed, “require immediate life-saving support of food, water and medical services.” On top of this severe drought and famine which has hit the country, thousands of employees are now being laid off due to severe power rationing; totaling only 6–8 hours in a 24-hour period. We are now going for 18 hours without electricity supply and the concerned experts warn that “the schedule will be very disruptive,” but adds that “there was no option because power is not there anyway.” The Federation of Kenya Employers Deputy Chief Executive said on Tuesday that “the staggered power rationing will be severe for both industry and domestic consumers.” And the Kenya Power and Lighting Co. Ltd., while delivering a new program for permanent power interruption said this: “Following persistent drought in the country and failure of the long rains in 2000, it has become necessary to further reduce hydro-power generation at KenGen’s dams in order to conserve available water to take the country until October/November when the short rains are expected. As a result, KPLC will experience a further shortfall of 396 MW during the day and 171 MW at night....” This applies to both industrial and domestic consumers. As a result, production has been stagnated and the cost of goods and services have already skyrocketed! It is becoming more difficult to meet these costs. But we have Christ’s very words to this effect: “And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved (alive)....” Both Revelation 11:15 and chapter 19 have been sources of encouragement of late. The President added yesterday “Kenya is facing its worst ever crisis.” He appeals aid, etc. Please pray with us in these traumatic conditions.

Many of us have *already* been reading for weeks about the millions of people starving in Eritrea and Ethiopia—due partly to the terrible war raging there. While my wife and I were in London, we encountered a major thoroughfare blocked by several dozen Eritreans putting on a “demonstration” to cry out for the world’s attention and intervention to stop their people back home from being slaughtered.

Meanwhile, United Press International issued this report on June 11:

One of the worst droughts on record continued in the South on Sunday, threatening wildlife and agriculture with

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The *Living Church News* is published bi-monthly by the Living Church of God. Subscriptions are sent without charge to all members of the Living Church of God and others who may request them. 16935 W. Bernardo Dr., Ste. 260, San Diego, CA, 92127.

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Postmaster: Send address changes to
Living Church News
P.O. Box 501304
San Diego, CA 92150-1304

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The Gifts of the Spirit

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

All of us in the Church of God today need to understand more fully the role of the “gifts” of the Spirit. I hope all of you will read this brief overview *along with* my lead article/letter starting on page one of this issue.

We truly are near the *end* of an age. Christ’s ruling Kingdom on this earth—with Headquarters at Jerusalem—will probably be set up soon, within the lifetimes of many of you reading this editorial. But God Himself predicts *awesome events* to occur *before* Christ’s return. The end-time false prophet will perform startling miracles. “He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived” (Revelation 13:13–14).

During the end times, a number of false ministers and even false “christs” will perform miracles. “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24). Soon afterward, God’s own “two witnesses” will begin prophesying right under the very noses of the beast and false prophet in the city of Jerusalem. “And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty

days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, FIRE proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that NO RAIN falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all PLAGUES, as often as they desire” (Revelation 11:3–6).

Certainly, since many false ministers will be performing miracles even *before* the two witnesses come along, we should expect and BELIEVE that God’s *true* ministers will also be granted extra spiritual power and signs. *This was always God’s way*. Even back in the time of Moses, when Pharaoh’s magicians would perform miracles, God’s true servants—Moses and Aaron—would perform *greater* miracles (see Exodus, chapters 7–9). Eventually, Pharaoh’s magicians told him, “*This is the finger of GOD!*” (Exodus 8:19).

Still later, God instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me, for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, *that you may KNOW* that there is none like Me in all the earth” (Exodus 9:13–14).

Today, more than ever, the world needs to know about the REAL God. For that Great God is about to intervene in a STUPENDOUS manner—pouring out unbelievable plagues

and literally SHAKING every mountain and every island out of its place (Revelation 6:14).

Therefore, *not* because we are so good or so righteous, but because of His mercy and His great wisdom, God will begin to grant His *faithful* servants increasing power to heal the sick, cast out demons and perform miracles. This will be to show HIS power—*not ours*. And we must *always* remember to give HIM the honor and the glory!

Rather than compare ourselves with the 12 Apostles, let us remember what Jesus did through 35 teams of young men—sent out even *before* they were fully converted, *before* the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. “After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go” (Luke 10:1). Jesus instructed these young men, “And HEAL the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (v. 9). When they had returned with joy, they said, “Lord, even the DEMONS are subject to us in Your name” (v. 17). So these “seventy others” were to *preach* the Gospel, *heal* the sick and *cast out demons*.

These three things were ALL part of “doing the Work.” For we read of Jesus’ commission to the 12 Apostles, “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and

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What Does It *Really* Mean to Hallow God's Name?

By John H. Ogwyn

The man sitting across the table seemed very sincere. "I believe that it is just as important to keep the third commandment as it is to keep the fourth one," he said. Of course, he was absolutely right. It is vital to keep the third commandment. The Apostle James reminds us that if we break one point of the law, we have broken the entire law (James 2:10). The question that we must then ask is: exactly what does the third commandment enjoin us to do? Does hallowing the name of the Creator mean that we should use only certain Hebrew names? This is an issue that has arisen from time to time over the years and has confused a number of people.

To begin, look carefully at the third commandment itself: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Many proponents of the so-called "sacred names" believe that when we do not pronounce God's Hebrew name, His name is rendered empty and thus the third commandment is broken.

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Archer, Waltke and Harris, Moody Press, 1980) gives a thorough exposition of the wording of this commandment. Demonstrating that the term translated "in vain" comes from the Hebrew *shaw'*, the authors go on explain that a literal rendering would be that you shall not "lift up the name" of the LORD your God thoughtlessly. "That the primary meaning of *shaw'* is 'emptiness, vanity' no one can challenge. It designates anything that is unsubstantial, unreal, worthless, either materially or morally" (Archer, vol. 2, p. 908). Let us examine the way the Hebrew term rendered "in vain" is used in the Old Testament, and let the Bible interpret itself.

Notice some examples from the book of Jeremiah. Here the word is used in its adverbial form, just as it is used in Exodus 20:7 and Deuteronomy 5:11. In Jeremiah 2:30 God states: "In vain I have chastened your children; they received no correction." Jeremiah 4:30 states: "in vain you will make yourself fair, your lovers will despise you..." In Jeremiah 46:11 the prophet declares: "in vain

you will use many medicines; you shall not be cured." Clearly, in all of these examples, the term "in vain" means something that is used in an empty and useless way that accomplishes nothing of real value.

The commandment clearly instructs us that we must not use the Creator's name in a way that is empty or thoughtless. We are not to lift up His name in a way that is useless, but rather we are to show deep reverence and respect at all times.

What Is a Name?

Can or should names ever be translated? What is the importance of names? Why is it so important to honor the name of the Creator, and what actually is that name? What, exactly, do names in the Bible encompass?

The Hebrew word for name is *shem*. "This noun appears 864 times, but less than 90 times in the plural... The concept of personal names in the OT often included existence, character, and reputation (1 Samuel 25:25)" (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, p. 934). For instance, Proverbs 22:1 informs us that a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches. Clearly, "name" is used in the sense of reputation.

Notice what God said about "making Himself a name." Nehemiah 9:9-10 explains that God "...saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heard their cry by the Red Sea. You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his servants, and against all the people of his land. For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So You **made a name for Yourself**, as it is this day." In Jeremiah 32:20, the prophet writes of God: "You have set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, to this day, and in Israel and among other men; and You have **made Yourself a name**, as it is this day." How did God make Himself a name during the time when Israel was freed from Egypt? Clearly, He did so by establishing a reputation. The important lesson that the Egyptians and all of the surrounding peoples learned was not the exact

phonetic pronunciation of God's name in Hebrew; rather it was His greatness and His power. They learned that the God of Israel was far above everything and anything else that was worshipped. God said that He got for Himself a name at the time of the Exodus, in that **He built a reputation** in the eyes of the nations.

Name clearly involves reputation, but there is also another important aspect. We find, for instance, that God changed Abram's name to Abraham at the time of the circumcision covenant in Genesis 17. Names have meanings. Because of God's promise that he was to be the father of many nations, Abram was now to have a new name that meant "father of a multitude." Many years later, the Almighty changed the name of Abraham's grandson from Jacob to Israel, meaning "prevailer" or "overcomer with God." These names had clear meanings in the language in which they were given. God did not change these names because He wanted to obtain a particular sound, but rather to reflect a different meaning. The most important feature of a name, from a Biblical standpoint, is its meaning!

Some contend that names are not translated from one language to another. This is certainly not the case. Notice some examples from the New Testament. Two primary languages were common among the early church. Among most of the Jews in the area of Judea and Galilee the everyday language was Aramaic. Christ and His disciples, and most of the early church, were native Aramaic speakers, though most probably spoke Greek as a second language. Later converts, outside of Palestine, commonly spoke Greek, but not Aramaic. The New Testament has come down to us in Greek.

Simon Peter was one of Christ's earliest disciples. Notice the account of his meeting with Jesus: "One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, 'You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas' (which is translated, A Stone)" (John 1:40–42). Notice two of the names given here: Messiah and Cephas. These were words that would have been unfamiliar to Greek speakers. Therefore, the Apostle John gave the original word as it was spoken and then he gave the Greek translation. The most important aspect of the new name that Jesus gave to Simon was its meaning. Throughout most of the New Testament, this Apostle is commonly referred to as Peter, the Greek equivalent of his Aramaic name Cephas. Peter is our English form of the Greek word for "stone"—*petros*. John also translates the Hebrew title Messiah, which means the Anointed One, to the

Greek term carrying the same meaning—Christ. Additionally, John also translated the Hebrew title "Rabbi" for his readers by explaining in John 1:38 that it meant "teacher."

There are many other examples as well. Acts 9:36 records: "At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." She was known by both her Aramaic name and its Greek equivalent. Both names had the same meaning, "gazelle." Notice another similar example in Acts 13:8: "But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith." Again, it was the meaning of the name that the author wished to stress. There are other examples. In Acts 4:36–37 we read: "And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of

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Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." Matthew interprets the Hebrew name Immanuel for his readers in Matthew 1:23 when he explains that it means "God with us." Mark explains to his readers the meaning of Golgotha, the name of the hill where Christ was crucified, by giving the Greek translation as "place of a skull" (Mark 15:22). John translates the name of the Pool of Siloam into Greek by explaining that it means "sent" (John 9:7). The Apostle Paul translated the Hebrew name Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:2 by explaining that it meant "King of Righteousness." The point is, there is ample illustration of the fact that names were often translated in Scripture to make their meanings evident to readers who did not understand the original language.

What Is the Creator's Name?

Those who adhere to the Hebrew names doctrine argue that the true name of God is the tetragrammaton, YHWH. Because Hebrew was originally written without vowels, there is sometimes disagreement over how words

should be pronounced. Such is the case here. The various factions of the sacred names movement disagree among themselves over the proper pronunciation. While most argue for Yahweh, others favor Yahveh, while yet others use slight variations. Scholars disagree as to the proper pronunciation since, after the close of the Old Testament period, the Jews, out of a superstitious reverence, ceased to pronounce the name. They became so obsessed with the worry that they might somehow take the name of God in vain, that they avoided using it altogether. The result was that over time the exact pronunciation became unclear. The form “Yahweh” has come down to us today from the early Catholic fathers who reconstructed the pronunciation from the Greek transliteration used by the Samaritans! To rely on what the early Catholics got from the Samaritans is clearly dubious. In fact, Christ made it plain that the Samaritans did not even know what they worshipped (John 4:22). **If this were essential knowledge required for salvation, this is clearly not how God would have preserved it!**

In fact, based upon the rhythm of certain poetic passages which use the name YHVH, and upon the musical notation preserved in the Hebrew text, it is most likely that the name was actually pronounced with three syllables, not two as most sacred names people use. Aside from the issue of pronunciation, however, what does the Bible reveal about the Creator’s name?

The first verse in the Bible informs us: “In the beginning God [*Elohim*] created the heavens and the earth.” This name is descriptive, as are all of God’s names. It has reference to God’s might and power. The word is plural in form, though normally singular in usage, the “*im*” ending in Hebrew being a plural form. Genesis 1:26 gives one of the clear indications that more than one Being constitute God (*Elohim*), when we are told: “Let us make man in our image.” The full implications of this verse are made clear in John 1 and Colossians 1 where we learn that Jesus Christ was the actual instrument of creation, fulfilling the instructions of the Father. Together, the Ones that we know as Christ and the Father constitute God.

In Exodus 3:13–15 we learn that when God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush and told him that he was to go back to Egypt to lead the people out, Moses asked His name. “And God said unto Moses: ‘I AM THAT I AM’; and He said: ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I AM hath sent me unto you.’ And God said moreover unto Moses: ‘Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: The LORD [YHVH], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you; this is My name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations’” (JPS version). I AM is translated from the Hebrew verb for “to be,” *haya*. It is

from this root that the name YHVH is formed. The *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Brown, Driver and Briggs) defines the meaning of YHVH as “the one who is; i.e. the absolute and unchangeable one... the existing, ever-living” (p. 218).

Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament makes the important point: “God’s name identifies his nature, so that a request for his ‘name’ is equivalent to asking about his character... Critical speculation about the origin and meaning of ‘Yahweh’ seems endless... but the Bible’s own explanation in Exodus 3:14 is that it represents the simple (Qal) imperfect of *hawa* ‘to be,’ I am [is] what I am. The precise name Yahweh results when others speak of him in the third person, *yahweh* ‘He is’” (vol. 1, p. 211).

The Creator identified Himself as the One who is ever-living, the Eternal. Notice how He identified Himself to the Apostle John in the book of Revelation. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’” (Revelation 1:8). Here, writing in the Greek language to Greek-speaking churches in Asia Minor, John uses the name by which the Creator revealed Himself to Moses, but He did so by TRANSLATING it, not by reproducing the phonetic sounds of the Hebrew original in the Greek language. The vital significance of God’s name is what it reveals about Him, not a particular phonetic sound.

God revealed Himself to His people through many combinations of names used in the Old Testament. He was *El Shadai* (Almighty God), *YHVH Sabaot* (Eternal of Hosts), *YHVH Ropheka* (Eternal our Healer) and had many other names as well. The term *adonai*—which means “lord”—is also frequently used for God. After all, He is Lord of all, the possessor and owner of everything that exists. The Greek equivalent, *kurios*, is commonly used in the New Testament and carries exactly the same meaning. When the Messiah returns to this earth we are told that: “He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16).

In the New Testament, how did Christ teach His disciples to address the Most High God? Matthew 6:9 and numerous other scriptures show that we are to address Him as Father, not by the tetragrammaton (YHVH).

Now notice the warnings about false teachers that Christ gave to His disciples. Did He say that some would come using false names? NO! He said: “Many will come in MY NAME” and would deceive many people (Matthew 24:5). The deception would involve a message of lawlessness, that obedience to God’s law is no longer required (cf. Matthew 7:21–23). The problem is the message, not the name!

Revelation 13 describes the Beast who received a deadly wound that was later healed. This refers historically to

the Roman Empire that fell in 476AD and was revived by Justinian in 554. Revelation 13:5 informs us that the revived empire, now known as the Holy Roman Empire, would continue for 42 prophetic months (i.e., 1,260 “days” from the Imperial Restoration in 554 until the fall of Napoleon in 1814) speaking blasphemies. In verse six we are told that the Beast proclaims blasphemies against God’s name. Here is clear evidence that God’s name includes much more than the Hebrew word YHVH alone. The Holy Roman Empire and the apostate Christian church never used the Hebrew name for the Creator, yet they blasphemed His name! How did they do it?

We despise and blaspheme the name of God not by mispronouncing a Hebrew word or using modern language translations of ancient Hebrew names and titles. Rather, Malachi 1:6–14 makes plain that God’s name is despised and profaned by the **actions** of those who claim to be His people, yet serve Him in a careless and begrudging manner.

In Romans 2:24, Paul states that the name of God was blasphemed among the gentiles because of the poor example of many of the Jews. Clearly, blaspheming the name of God was not simply a matter of using the tetragrammaton improperly, because the gentiles would not even have known the Hebrew pronunciation of YHVH. After all, the Jews of the first century never used the sacred name, even among themselves. Rather, what the gentiles did know was that those who professed to worship the one true Creator God, the God of Israel, were not much different than anyone else in their personal lives. The poor example of many Jews led many gentiles to disrespect the God of Israel.

The Apostles and others of the New Testament period used the language of their listeners to make known to them the Creator and His plan of salvation. From Acts 17:23, we learn that when Paul was in Athens, he saw an altar inscribed *Agnosto Theo* (the Unknown God). On Mars Hill, he told his Greek listeners about the God that was unknown to them, the sovereign Creator. Paul was addressing Greek speakers in the Greek language—and he used Greek terms to describe the Living God. There was nothing inherently pagan in the Greek words that signified God, even though the Greeks used those same words to describe “gods” that are not gods. Jeremiah 31:32 quotes the Creator saying that He had been a husband (*ba’al*) to Israel. The word *ba’al* meant “master” and is translated as “husband” (signifying master of the house) several times in the Old Testament. It was also used by pagans as a name for their false god, but that did not keep the inspired prophet Jeremiah from using the word properly to describe the Creator.

Nowhere in the New Testament do we read of the Apostles instructing their non-Hebrew and Aramaic-

speaking audiences that they must exclusively use Hebrew names in the worship of the true God. Clearly, we see the Apostle Paul using Greek names for God when preaching the gospel in Athens. The disciples were first called Christians, derived from the Greek equivalent of Messiah—the Anointed One—in Greek-speaking Antioch (Acts 11:26). This can only mean that among Greek speakers they used Greek names, just as they would have used Aramaic and Hebrew in Judea. Further, the New Testament has come down to us in Greek and this is exactly what we should expect as **most of it was written to exclusively Greek-speaking audiences**. Those who teach exclusive use of Hebrew names for God must conclude that EVERY SINGLE NEW TESTAMENT MAN-

God revealed Himself to His people through many combinations of names used in the Old Testament. He was *El Shadai* (Almighty God), *YHVH Sabaot* (Eternal of Hosts), *YHVH Ropheka* (Eternal our Healer) and had many other names as well.

USCRIPT has been corrupted. Yet Jesus Christ said in Mark 13:31 that though heaven and earth would pass away, His words never would.

Rendering God’s names, which describe His attributes and character, into a language understood by our audience is important. It enables listeners to understand who the true God and Savior of mankind really is. In Matthew 6:9, Christ taught us to pray to our Father in Heaven “hallowed be Your name.” To hallow is to sanctify, dedicate or set apart. How then do we truly hallow the name of our Creator? We do so through our words and our deeds. We are to show love, honor and reverence in every aspect of our lives for our Maker who is bringing us into His very family.

Instead of being superstitious about the Hebrew sound of the Creator’s name, we should truly honor Him and live for Him. We should focus on the MEANING of His names and titles and what they reveal about the One that we worship. In so doing we will please and honor our Father and our Elder Brother and prepare to bear their name forever (Revelation 3:12). LCN

What Is --- The Mission of God's Church?

Why is it important to know?

By Douglas S. Winnail

Jesus said “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). But *why* did Jesus start a church? What is its mission and purpose? What *should* the Church of God be doing today? Do you know—for sure?

It is *incredible* how much confusion exists today among the various branches and fragments of the Church of God about the mission of the church. You have probably heard numerous ideas about what the church should be doing as the end of the age approaches. Is the mission of the church to preach about Jesus, feed the flock, stabilize congregations, fellowship together, serve the community or be less exclusive? Should the church re-examine basic beliefs, study Jewish traditions, rejoin the “Christian mainstream,” focus on prophecy, share opinions about the Bible or “get the bride ready?”

Today many feel that all these ideas are pleasing to God and acceptable missions of the church. But do these ideas represent God's instructions—or human opinions? Is it really up to us to select the mission of the church? Or does God *plainly reveal* the mission of His Church in the Scriptures? Can you *prove* what that mission is from the Bible? Are you deeply committed to the mission that God has outlined for His Church? Divisions arise when isolated verses or human opinions replace

the biblical mission. The mission Jesus emphasized *over and over* for His Church *contrasts sharply* with many ideas circulating today. These ideas are dangerous and deceptive because they divert God's people from the *assigned* mission for which we are held *accountable*!

Called for a Purpose

Jesus started the New Testament church by calling and training a group of disciples. The Greek word for church (*ekklesia*) means a *called out* group of people. A disciple is one who follows and faithfully conveys the instructions of Jesus Christ. When Jesus called the disciples He outlined their mission very clearly from the beginning. He said “Follow me, and I will make you *fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19). He did *not* say, “follow your feelings or your own opinions.” He said, “Follow Me”—His example, His instructions. Fishermen have a job—to catch fish! They do not sit around socializing, sharing their opinions about fishing. As “fishers of men,” the disciples were commissioned to reach hearts and minds with an important message. The disciples were called and trained for a *specific and ongoing* purpose.

The disciples were *not* to rejoin the religious establishment, but were to “come out from among them and be separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17). Jesus said of His disciples: “They are not of the world” and they would be

“sanctified” [set apart or distinguished] by the “truth” (John 17:16–17). Jesus said that the world—and its religious leaders—would hate His disciples just as He was hated by people who professed to believe in God (John 17:14).

The Bible reveals that the church Jesus established would be small (Luke 12:32), scattered (John 16:32) and persecuted (Matthew 10:17). A religion with nearly two billion adherents (approximately one-third of mankind), peacefully keeping Sunday as their day to praise Jesus, is not the Church of God described in Scripture!

Jesus told His disciples their mission would be challenging (Matthew 11:29–30), but not impossible (Matthew 19:26). He promised to be with them “even unto the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20), and to *reward* them for following His instructions. God inspired John to write, “Because you have *kept My command to persevere* [remain focused on the mission], I also will keep you from the hour of trial” (Revelation 3:10–11). Those disciples who remain faithful to their mission will be protected from the tribulation and will receive a crown to reign with Christ in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 5:10).

Individuals and organizations that treat this mission lightly and fail to carry it out will go through the tribulation (see Revelation 3:14–19;

12:17). This is why it is so important to remain focused on what Jesus told the church to do! But just *what* was the mission that Jesus Christ gave to His Church?

The Mission in Matthew

Jesus' ministry involved, "*teaching* in their synagogues, *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom, and *healing* all kinds of sickness" (Matthew 4:23). This was the example His disciples were to follow. Jesus taught about the Sabbath, the Holy Days, tithing, dietary laws, repentance, forgiveness and loving your enemies. He preached constantly about the kingdom of God (see Matthew, chapters 13 and 14) and the purpose of life (e.g. Matthew 19:28). He also *warned* that climactic events would precede His second coming (Matthew 24). Compare the times Jesus referred to His death and resurrection (in Matthew), to His references to the Kingdom of God, and you might be surprised at the results. Jesus *focused* on His mission.

Jesus instructed His disciples to preach the gospel of the kingdom "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6–7). The disciples had to know the *identity* and *location* of the Israelites to do that. History indicates the disciples went into Scythia (southern Russia), Parthia (Iran) and India, and through Europe to Britain and Ireland—where many Israelites had gone. As the church grew, they were to preach this same gospel to the Gentiles.

The mission—to reach the nations of Israel—still applies to the church today. Jesus said His disciples would *not complete* the work before He returned (Matthew 10:23). Yet, in spite of what Scripture plainly states, many today are being told that the work is finished and that there is nothing to do but get the "bride" (the church) ready for Christ's com-

ing. The Scriptures do not support the idea that the work of preaching the gospel to the world is finished. That is a presumption! Noah did not wrap up his work—as a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5)—25 to 50 years before the flood! His work ended when God shut him into the ark—when it began to rain (Genesis 7:6, 16).

A *major* aspect of Jesus' ministry was *warning* of specific world events that would occur just before His return (see Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Jesus said that His *faithful* servants will provide a warning as they see the days approaching (Matthew 24:45). He also warned that "many will come in my name [claiming to be Christians and ministers of Christ]... and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4–5). He stated "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a *witness* to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). A witness is to warn and inform, not necessarily to convert. When Christ returns he wants to find His disciples doing the work He said to do (Matthew 24:46), making disciples of all nations and teaching what He commanded to be taught (Matthew 28:19–20). This cannot be done if we just sit around and discuss our opinions about the Bible!

The mission of the church, as outlined in Matthew, involves teaching God's way of life, healing the sick, preaching about the Kingdom of God and warning of events that would mark the end of this age and the return of Jesus Christ. But were these just Matthew's ideas? Or do we find similar instructions repeated *over and over* in the Bible?

The Mission in Mark

The gospel of Mark *mirrors* Matthew when it outlines the mission

of the church. Mark writes, "Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God" and emphasizing the need to repent [change] and believe the gospel (Mark 1:14–15). Preaching about the coming kingdom was the *major* thrust of Christ's work on earth. This same focus should be the mission of God's church today. Jesus called His disciples to become "fishers of men," not members of a social club, a ministerial fraternity or a private study group (Mark 1:17). He taught people how to keep the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28; 3:1–6). He also revealed His disciples would be given an understanding that the world would not have of the Kingdom of God—to aid the church in fulfilling its mission (Mark 4:10–12). Jesus said *most* who hear the true gospel would not understand, or would eventually lose interest in, the real mission of the church (Mark 4:13–20). Only a *few* would hear and would follow Jesus' instructions. How does that apply to you?

In Mark 6:7–13 we also find Jesus sending His disciples on a training mission, with instructions to preach and heal. Their preaching is understood to be focused on the Kingdom of God (see Mark 1:14–15). Mark also records Jesus' detailed instructions to *watch* for and *warn* about events that would indicate His coming was near (Mark 13). Mark states that the Great Commission of the church is to "**go into all the world and preach the gospel** [of the Kingdom of God]" and to baptize those who believe (Mark 16:15–16). This is the primary mission—the *work*—of the church. This is the reason for publishing magazines and booklets, for being on radio, television and the Internet. This mission requires a dedicated group of disciples working together as a team. Isolated individuals cannot

carry it out. It cannot be done sitting at home or in discussion groups or by socializing. Ministers who promote their own agenda or devote their efforts to building a church organization cannot accomplish it. However, as clear as these instructions are, it is amazing that some are today saying, “We will do a work when God shows us what to do” or “We cannot do a work because we do not have the money.” Others say, “We do not publish magazines and booklets because that is too elementary—we need to do in-depth research,” or “We do not accept a salary so we cannot do a work.” These are excuses that Christ will not buy! Jesus gave His church a mission, not to be debated or denied, but to be carried out! That is our job, and we will be held accountable!

The Mission in Luke

Contrary to the practice we find today in mainstream Christianity, of inviting people to the church on Sunday, we find Jesus observing the Sabbath and giving instructions on how to keep the Sabbath (Luke 4:16, 31; 13:10–17; 14:1–6). A church that follows Christ’s example will continue to do this. Luke describes *two* training missions Jesus organized for His disciples. Jesus sent the 12 on a mission to “preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (see Luke 9:1–6). Later, He sent out 70 to heal and preach about “the kingdom of God” (see Luke 10:1–12). Jesus cautioned His disciples to *beware* of the religious establishment, not to join it (Luke 20:45–47). Luke also records Jesus’ emphasis to *watch* and *warn* about specific events that will indicate His return is near (Luke 21). Thus we see, in each of the gospels studied so far, that the

mission Jesus outlined for the church is *essentially the same*.

The Church as a Watchman

A church that follows Christ’s instruction to *watch* for specific events and *warn* of their appearance *will function* as a watchman. A watchman’s job is to watch and warn. The gospel writers clearly record Christ’s instructions on this matter. The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel had the same mission. He was to be “a watchman to the house of Israel” and warn them of punishments God would send because of their disobedience (Ezekiel 2:3; 3:4–7, 17). Ezekiel was told that if he saw trouble coming and delivered a warning, he would save himself and anyone who would listen (Ezekiel 33:1–5). However, if he saw events developing and did *not* deliver a warning, he would be *held responsible* for those who died (Ezekiel 33:6–7). Ezekiel was commissioned to be God’s watchman to ancient Israel. According to Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, the Church of God *today* shares that same solemn responsibility! That is part of our mission!

Prior to the destruction and captivity of Israel and Judah, God sent prophets to point out their sins and the consequences of breaking God’s laws. Isaiah was told to “cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isaiah 58:1). Jeremiah carried a similar warning to the nation of Judah (see Jeremiah 2).

This same warning—the need to repent of breaking the laws of God—was *also* delivered by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1–12), Jesus Christ (Mark 1:14–15) and the disciples He trained (Acts 2:38). This has never been a popular message. Telling people who may already think they believe in God that they

need to change does not win friends or foster goodwill. It cost the lives of Jesus and most of the early disciples—but it is part of the mission of the church. The church must preach *more* than a gentle message about love and Christian living if it is going to fulfill the mission outlined by Jesus Christ.

John and the Mission

The gospel of John, though written from a different perspective [John emphasizes that Jesus was the divine Son of God], records the *same mission*. Jesus told His disciples to “Follow Me”—to follow His example and His instructions (John 1:43). Jesus heals the sick and infirm and gives instructions about keeping the Sabbath (John 5:1–15). He also kept, and gave instructions to keep, the Holy Days (John 7:8, 14, 37). John’s gospel reveals that Jesus clashed with the religious establishment repeatedly over doctrine. Religious leaders of Christ’s day did not recognize who He was, nor did they understand His mission or His message. It will be no different today for a church that teaches what Jesus taught. When Jesus was urged to relax, He responded, “My food [my mission] is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work” (John 4:33–34). Jesus was mission-oriented!

The gospel of John emphasizes that Jesus died for the sins of mankind (1:29; 3:16) and that Christians should “love one another” (13:34; 15:17), but this does not replace the command to preach the gospel of the kingdom and to warn the world. In John 21:15–17 we read that Jesus instructed Peter to “feed My sheep.” While this is obviously a part of the mission of the church, you can only feed those who have been attracted by the message. As we will see, this feeding should help the church accomplish its mission.

The Apostles and the Mission

Many believe today that Paul reformulated Christianity to make it more palatable to the world—altering the message and mission of the church and the instructions of Jesus. This simply does not agree with Scripture. The New Testament reveals that the Apostles were faithful to their mission. After the resurrection, Jesus continued to focus the disciples on the “kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3–6). Peter’s sermon on Pentecost emphasized that to be a Christian involved repentance (Acts 2:38). The Apostles continued to heal by miracles (Acts 3:1–10; 9:32–43; 19:1–12).

Philip “preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). Paul’s “custom” was to keep the Sabbath (Acts 17:2) and he, like Christ, taught on and about the Sabbath and Holy Days (Acts 13:13–15, 42–44; 18:21; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8). At the end of his ministry, Paul was still “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31). The New Testament reveals the mission of the church did not change under the leadership of the Apostles. This is why Paul advised the church “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

The Apostles continued to *warn*, as Christ did, of events that would mark the end of the age and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Paul, Peter and John mention additional details (2 Thessalonians 2; 1 Peter 3; Revelation 11:15–19; 19:5–21). The mission to warn the world is a *command* and is not to be taken lightly! The epistles are also replete with warnings that religious deception will increase as the end of the age approaches (1 Timothy 4:1–5; 2 Timothy 4:1–5; 2 Peter 2).

That includes being deceived about the mission of the church!

The Mission in the End Times

Today many assume the work of preaching the gospel is over, and all that remains for the church is to get the bride “ready” for Christ’s return. This is based on a lone scripture in Revelation 19:7. However, one verse does not negate a mission that is clearly described *throughout* the New Testament. *The Bible explains what getting “ready” entails*. Before Christ returns God will raise up an Elijah-type work to “restore all things” (Malachi 4:4–6; Matthew 17:10–11).

ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17). This called-out group of individuals (the church) must be *prepared* to do a work—to preach the gospel of the Kingdom, teach God’s way of life and heal the sick [as God makes possible]. This church must also *watch* world events in order to *warn* mankind as the end of the age approaches and the return of Jesus Christ nears. Preparing a people to do that job is part of our mission. If we merely focus on self—praying, fasting and studying the Bible for our own benefit—we will not fulfill the Great Commission that Jesus Christ outlined for His church.

The Scriptures *clearly* outline the real mission of the church. All

The gospel of John emphasizes that Jesus died for the sins of mankind (1:29; 3:16) and that Christians should “love one another” (13:34; 15:17), but this does not replace the command to preach the gospel of the kingdom and warn the world.

Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for the first coming of the Messiah, an end-time work will “Prepare the way of the Lord” and “Make His paths straight” (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3).

This involves straightening out centuries of confusion about the gospel, the mission of the church and God’s way of life by restoring knowledge of the Truth. This has been a major thrust of the modern era of the Church of God. The work begun by Jesus Christ and the Apostles continues today and will continue into the Millennium (Acts 3:19–21; Isaiah 2:2–4; 11:9).

Another aspect of the end-time mission of the church is to “make

the confusion today is unfortunate and sadly misguided. We cannot afford to be deceived by numerous and conflicting ideas about what the church should be doing. Knowing and doing the mission of the church is *important*, because it indicates whether or not we are willing to “follow” Christ’s instructions. Understanding and developing a deep commitment to fulfill that mission is a basic requirement for being in the Kingdom of God. This is what Apostolic Christianity is all about—carrying forward the instructions of Jesus Christ. We must work together to achieve that mission—because we will be held accountable! ☐

The Church That Is in Their House

By Kenneth L. Frank

“**W**e’re going to hold church services in someone’s home? Where are the minister, pulpit, piano and choir? Why not rent a hall? Where are the rest of the people?” Did you ask yourself these questions when you first learned about a nearby Living Church of God service you wished to attend? You were likely not the first to ask!

The membership of our church organization has the rare privilege of re-enacting the first century church experience. If we could go back in time, we would soon realize we share a similar sense of excitement and enthusiasm during our Sabbath worship service with the earliest Christians. Though this experience is new to many of us, it has been relived through the centuries among God’s true people. In fact, in-home Sabbath services or Bible studies may have been the most common form of worship experience among God’s saints through the ages. As we will see, meeting in brethren’s homes is a Biblical practice that offers many advantages.

The Home of John Mark

In one of the earliest persecutions against the first century Church of God, Herod the king harassed the Jerusalem congregation. He killed James the brother of John with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, who were antagonistic to the fledgling church, he had the Apostle Peter arrested and thrown into prison during the Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:1–4). Herod intended to bring Peter out before the people following Passover—probably to do to him what he had done to James. The brethren of the headquarters church took this as an assault, not on Peter alone, but on their whole work as a church. They offered constant prayer to God for him (v. 5).

They were not meeting for prayer in a church-owned building or rented facility. Verse 12 reveals that they met at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark who authored the New Testament book named for him. This prayer was made unitedly in a congregational meeting in her house. The fact that “many” were gathered together

praying suggests Mary’s house was of considerable size. When Peter was miraculously released from prison, he immediately traveled to Mary’s house and was met at the door by Rhoda (v. 13) who was probably one of Mary’s housemaids who served on the estate. That Mary likely had house workers indicates her home was sufficiently ample to provide shelter for this prayerful band. Mary may have been a wealthy widow who chose to serve God’s work by offering her home for church meetings.

Because the newly founded Christian faith was embryonic and scattered, there was no need to find larger public facilities for meetings. Perhaps, unlike today, meeting halls for such purposes were unobtainable. Christians were often considered “pests” in the community during those formative years. It was only prudent to meet in someone’s home for security and privacy. And it offered that all-important “homey” atmosphere during those stressful days. Historically, church buildings, as many denominations construct today, did not become common until the end of the second or the beginning of the third century. Though the early Jerusalem Church frequently met in Solomon’s Porch (Acts 5:12), meeting in-home was a far more common practice than most realize.

The Home of Aquila and Priscilla

Just as today, individuals, or husband and wife teams, welcomed the local church into their domiciles. One such serving couple was Aquila and Priscilla (Romans 16:3–5) who are always named together in our New Testament. Their names are Latin, though Aquila at least was Jewish. Jews outside Palestine commonly took Roman names then. However, the Bible does not provide us their Jewish names. Aquila was a native of the Asiatic province of Pontus that probably contained a colony of Jews (Acts 2:9).

Paul calls them “fellow workers” in Christ Jesus (Romans 16:3). You and I have been familiar with a similar term: “co-workers.” It was perilous working for God in the first century. Aquila and Priscilla had risked their own necks for Paul and the churches of the Gentiles (v. 4).

When Paul at Corinth wished to acknowledge the church group at Rome, he sent greetings through Aquila

and Priscilla because this “ekklesia” met in their residence (v. 5).

Paul first met this dedicated couple in Corinth after the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from the city of Rome (Acts 18:1, 2). This anti-Semitic, political action occurred about 49/50AD. Suetonius said this decree was issued due to tumults raised by the Jews. In particular he mentions followers of one agitator named “Chrestus,” which name may have been confused with “Christ.” The earliest Christians were almost entirely Jewish and together they were considered a “sect” of Judaism by the Romans and at least some Jews (Acts 24:5). Though Christianity was originally recognized as a segment of that legalized religion of the empire, this protection was soon lost when they began to be expelled from the synagogue by their unbelieving fellow Jews. In their vulnerable state, they became easy scapegoats when the source of civil unrest could not be easily found. The sometimes-vocal controversy that developed between unbelieving Jews and Jewish Christians may have sparked Claudius’ decree to rid the city of them all.

Corinth was the next best business center of the Roman Empire after Rome itself. Apparently Aquila and Priscilla decided, after their expulsion from Rome, to move there, to pursue their tentmaking business in freedom. It was here that Paul met them on his second evangelistic journey. Perhaps it was his preaching that led to their conversion to the Christian faith.

What drew Paul and Aquila and Priscilla together in Corinth was their common tentmaking trade (Acts 18:3). This vocation could either have been the weaving of cloth or the cutting and sewing of tents. Aquila may have acted as a contractor who hired the Apostle to enable him to earn income for his personal needs (1 Corinthians 4:12). The home of this service-minded pair was sufficiently spacious to also accommodate Paul during his stay in the city.

However, it is evident this couple did not permanently stay in Corinth. We read in 1 Corinthians 16:8, 19 that while Paul was in Ephesus intending to stay until Pentecost, he relayed greetings from Aquila and Priscilla and the church that met in their house to their brethren back in Corinth. This couple had traveled with him to Ephesus (Acts 18:18–19). Again they unselfishly opened their home to God’s assembled pilgrims and sojourners. After this couple matured in the faith, God also used them to update Apollos, an eloquent preacher who was mighty in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24–26), on the distinguishing doctrines between Judaism and Christianity.

Since Claudius’ decree of expulsion against the Jews was temporary, Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome after a time. It was here that we earlier read in Romans 16:3–6 about the church meeting in their house. Years later still,

Paul sends his greeting from prison to them when they seem to have returned yet again to Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:19). Timothy, the recipient of this epistle, was probably at Ephesus (1:18) where he may have fellowshipped with this outstanding and well-traveled duo. Wherever they were living at the time, this couple made it a habit to entertain a group of fellow believers for worship.

Other Bible Examples

The church that met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla may not have been the only one in the city of Rome. In Romans 16:14–15 Paul greets by name several of God’s people there and similarly greets all the brethren “who are with them.”

Could these not also have been in-home churches? If so, then the “church at Rome” may actually have comprised several small groups, which assembled in the homes of their hosts and hostesses. Church services may then have been conducted simultaneously on the Sabbath.

We must remember this is before the age of convenient and rapid transportation. Rome was a large city and it may have been more than a “Sabbath day’s journey” to meet with brethren in another part of the metropolis. The practical solution was to establish several smaller groups meeting simultaneously.

These groups may have shared their elders just as we do today. Perhaps these first-century ministers had a rotating schedule to visit personally and preach to all the church groups just as our ministers do today. Of course, this was before the age of audio and videotapes, so they depended upon “live” sermons and Bible studies.

At Colosse we know a church met in the home of Nymphas (Colossians 4:15), who is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture and is therefore distinguished solely by this unselfish act of spiritual hospitality. Paul also greets the Colossian brethren that gathered at the home of his friend, Philemon (Philemon 2). Being a slave owner, Philemon must have been a man of some means who could adequately provide the necessary facilities for that congregation. Paul also asks Philemon to provide him lodging (v. 22). It is evident from these several examples that meeting in brethren’s homes was the *norm* in the earliest years of the church.

Advantages of the In-home Meeting

Though many of us miss the special opportunities provided by a larger congregation that regularly meets in

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The Importance of Maintenance

By Jonathan McNair

At one time or another, nearly everyone has had something brand new. There is nothing like a new toy to brighten the eyes of a young child. A new dress or pair of shoes is a special joy to the lady in our life. And driving a car for the first time is a thrill for the whole family.

New is great! When we meet new people, and discover that we instantly click with them, we feel the joy of a new friendship growing. If friendship blossoms into marriage, we live the joy of having a new husband or wife.

God understands what a joy this is for us. He even created a statute for the ancient Israelites that gave men an exemption from military duty during the first year of marriage. In Deuteronomy 24:5 we read: “When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.” God recognized the specialness of a new marriage. And those blessed with children have known the delight of holding a new baby in their arms for the first time.

Indeed, “new” is great! But it does not only apply to the physical things around us.

Ephesians 4:24 instructs us to “put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” When we begin our new life as we are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, we are given a new start. We are given an opportunity to put everything we ever did—everything we ever were—behind us. In God’s eyes, we start

with a clean, new slate. We are given a new way of life.

But it does not stay new. What was new becomes old. That new toy loses its shine. It gets stepped on. The dog chews on it. That new dress begins to fade a little, collecting ketchup stains. The new car loses its new car smell.

Our Christian life can also lose some of its shine. Over time, it can begin to rust and break down. The Apostle Paul encouraged us to be vigilant about our Christian condition. He told the Corinthians that they needed to examine themselves (see 2 Corinthians 13:5), and honestly judge if they were holding fast to their original faith. We spend the Passover season focusing on growth and change. That is good. But just as in maintaining a vehicle, we cannot expect to maintain our Christian way of life on a once-a-year service plan.

The church leases vehicles for the ministry through a fleet program. The lessor owns the vehicles, which they provide for the ministers’ use. Since the vehicles will later be sold to other customers, the lessor expects the ministry to take proper care of the cars. Ministers using the cars receive reminders when it is time for an oil change or a brake job, or when other required maintenance is necessary. We even receive phone calls to remind us!

Maybe you are just as diligent in the maintenance of your car. And maybe you are extremely careful to maintain your house or yard. But are we as careful to maintain our spiritual walk? What are some of the areas that require special attention? And how do we go about it?

Christian Maintenance?

Maintenance is not usually a very exciting topic. If one had a choice between getting a brand new vehicle or crawling under the old car to change the oil and do a grease job, I know which choice I would make. I imagine most people would feel the same. Maintenance may sound like an unwelcome chore. Besides, are we not supposed to be growing—getting more knowledge and getting better all the time—instead of just “maintaining?”

Unfortunately, many Christians have thought this way, have lost sight of the fundamentals and have gone off the track into spiritual confusion.

Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defines “maintain” as, “to keep in an existing state (as of repair, efficiency or validity): preserve from failure or decline.” In other words, maintenance is concerned with keeping something as close to new as possible. If something is well taken care of, we say that it is “as good as new.”

The Bible gives us many examples of maintenance—of preserving, of keeping in good repair. God gave the Israelites extensive instructions about how to maintain their health. For example, in Leviticus 13 and 14, He explained how to handle infectious skin diseases. He also showed them the danger of mildew. This mildew was dry rot or mineral crystals, which affected the stone walls and could spread rapidly, promoting diseases. God promised not to curse them with the diseases He had used to strike Egypt (Exodus 15:26), but

they had the responsibility to maintain their health, through cleanliness.

In the Proverbs, Solomon encouraged his son to maintain the wisdom, which had been given to him. “I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching... lay hold of my words with all your heart... do not forget my words or swerve from them... do not forsake wisdom...” (Proverbs 4:2–6, NIV). He hoped his son would preserve the words of wisdom that had been given to him, even as he grew in knowledge and maturity.

In the New Testament, Paul encouraged the Christians of Thessalonica to maintain their new way of life. “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). He told Timothy the same thing. “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13). In Hebrews, the same encouragement is given. “Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23).

Growing in knowledge is good. Growing in experience and maturity is good, but not at the expense of our job to maintain the way of life that we committed ourselves to at baptism. In fact, three of the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are given specific warnings to “hold fast,” to preserve their commitment to God (Revelation 2:25; 3:3; 3:11).

Maintaining Our First Love

In Revelation, we find a very positive message to the Ephesian church (Revelation 2:1–7). They had great works. They labored long and hard in God’s Work. They were patient and did not tolerate false teachers. But they also had a major flaw—one

so insidious that it actually caused them to “fall” (see v. 5). What was this flaw? “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Revelation 2:4).

Most of us have read this scripture often in recent years. But the warning is still serious, no matter how many times we read it. Take another look at it.

From early on, the first-century Christians had a love of God. This

Spirit. That ingredient is very real. It is related to a word that was used to record Christ’s statement in Mark 12:30. “‘And you shall love [*agapoa*] 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.”

This was the type of love that the Ephesians had at the beginning, but did not keep in good repair.

As we go through life, we can be fooled into assuming that we are still in our original “new” condition. But perhaps we have not maintained our *agape* love as we should have. Maybe we assume that we are growing, when in fact we are not even maintaining what we started with.

“first love” was not the love we hear about in romantic pop songs on the radio. This was not the emotional infatuation of a teenager encountering the explosive mixture of hormones and the opposite sex for the first time. And it was not just a special exuberance because of the newness of their calling. We might find ourselves talking about a “first love” when we were new to the church. We refer to it as if it were a less mature, less real type of godly love. In our “we have seen-it-all” approach to God’s Church, we can easily excuse our lack of dedication and commitment, to being “past that first love.”

But in reality, there is no special Greek word for “first love.” The Greek word translated as “love” in verse four is the familiar word *agape*, the word describing the ingredient added to our minds and attitudes when we are imbued with God’s Holy

They did not maintain their existing state. They did not protect that love from failure or decline. For us, it may seem hard to believe. Some of these people had personally known Christ’s original disciples. Some may have actually met Jesus Christ, or at least knew people who had. Some observed amazing miracles. Many of the saints who had died had been raised to life (Matthew 27:52). Yet the warning is clear. The stinging rebuke of that era is that they left the godly love that they had at the first. *It is not that they did not start out with it. They did not maintain it!*

How easy is it for us to do the same? As we go through life, we can be fooled into assuming that we are still in our original “new” condition. But perhaps we have not maintained our *agape* love as we should have. Maybe we assume that we are growing,

when in fact we are not even maintaining what we started with.

Maintenance is rarely exciting. It can seem tedious at times. But things have a natural way of falling apart, and if we do not constantly work to keep them together, they will fall into disrepair. Peter wrote, “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble” (2 Peter 1:10). And there is another area that we must maintain, if we are to maintain our commitment to Christ.

Good Works Towards Men

In Paul’s letter to Titus, we read, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men” (Titus 3:8).

A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to meet, and later baptize, a man who had no previous contact with the church. At first he was suspicious. Later, he saw that this was the Truth, and that it was God’s church, and he became more serious. After some months, I was thrilled to be able to baptize him. We conducted the baptism at a local health club pool. After it was all over, we returned to his home. He stopped me, though, just as I was beginning to leave. He said, “There’s something I’d like to talk about.” I said to myself, “Uh-oh. What’s he going to bring up that could sound so serious?”

He said, “I just feel like I’m not serving enough. How can I serve more in the church?” It was the last thing I had expected.

When we are new to the church, we often have a great desire to serve and help, and to be with other brethren. We tend to talk with everyone at church, instead of falling into a

clique. We visit all the shut-ins, instead of avoiding those with annoying personality quirks. And nothing will stop us from fellowshiping with our brethren at Sabbath services.

Some of us, however, after years in the church, again begin to think of ourselves more than others. We allow our good works to dwindle. We do not maintain the service that we used to devote to others around us. We find ourselves saying: “I have gotten burned out with serving. I just want to take a rest for a while.” Yet that does not correspond to the Biblical instruction. As Paul exhorted Titus: “And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful” (Titus 3:14).

Paul was not suggesting that we ruin our health, go bankrupt or neglect our own family, frantically “doing things for people in the church.” We should always be wise in the use of our time and resources. We should help and serve others, including our family, our brethren and others, as we are able. The way we serve changes over time. Our physical abilities change. Our skills, strengths and weaknesses change. Other people’s needs also change. But the fact remains. As part of our Christian way of life, we are commanded to maintain our good works, our service, for others. There will never be a time to “take a break” from doing good works.

Three-Step Maintenance Plan

If we want to maintain our vehicles in “like new” condition, we must have a plan in mind. It has an “owners’ manual” that came with it, to help formulate that plan. Likewise, there are points to keep in mind for our spiritual maintenance plan.

First, learn to be aware constantly of our current state.

We can pretend that our car is new, even though it is five or ten

years old. Some do-it-yourself car washes even have “new-car” fragrance that can be sprayed into your vehicle. We can treat ourselves to the illusion that we have a new car, but we know that we really do not. That is why we are always listening for knocks and squeaks.

Yet, spiritually, we may ignore the knocks and squeaks that signal possible problems. We can go through a time of soul-searching and review during the Passover season, and forget that maintenance is a year-round job. Our best friend has not spoken to us in a month, but it does not occur to us that there might be a problem with our relationship. We cannot seem to get past “Father in Heaven” when we kneel down to pray, but do not realize there is a problem with our relationship with God.

In Psalm 51, David showed that he was willing and able to recognize the warning signs whenever they came. He could have glossed over the episode with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 11). He could have told Nathan (2 Samuel 12), “Look, Nathan, you really do not understand what it is like being king. You do not understand the pressures I am under. And you do not understand how lonely I am. Sure, I make mistakes now and then, but just get past it and forget about it.” But he did not.

Instead, he grasped that his episode with Bathsheba revealed a critical flaw in his character. We read his thoughts in Psalm 51. “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean... Create in me a clean heart, O God...” (vv. 2, 7, 10). As David did, an important part of maintenance is to regularly, and often, review our current condition.

Second, develop a maintenance schedule

The ministry’s fleet lease agreement requires that we change the oil in our vehicles every 3,000 miles.

This is part of a maintenance schedule. We have other instructions about changing filters, brakes, tires and other items. We would be foolish to say, “Well, it was new when I got it. Why should I have to do any of these things?”

When we learn the Truth, we are given a ready-made maintenance schedule. God gave us His Holy Days. Leviticus 23 lists the basic yearly schedule. Just as the owner’s manual does not explain every reason why we should change the oil every 3,000 miles, Leviticus 23 does not explain every detail about the lessons of the Holy Days. But the rest of the Bible does. There we learn in fine detail why we need to cover the Holy Day topics each year. Without this schedule in our hands, we might not be conscientious enough to review these topics as regularly as we should.

Third, prepare for emergencies

Even with regular maintenance, we cannot guarantee that normal wear and tear will not make a repair necessary. We can be doing all the right things to take care of our car, and still have a breakdown or an accident. We have to prepare for what might happen. We are foolish if we do not take precautions such as learning how to change a tire, or putting some money aside for a possible car repair, or signing up for emergency roadside assistance.

Wise spiritual maintenance is similar. Peter reminds us that trials will come. He said, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (1 Peter 4:12). Trials that we do not expect will occur in our lives and the lives of those around us. If we are mentally prepared to accept this, we will be better able to handle emergencies.

God is concerned about maintaining and preserving us. When God brought the Israelites out of

Egypt, He did not bring them to the other side of the Red Sea, then say, “Okay, I have brought you this far. Now you are on your own.”

Deuteronomy records these very encouraging words that God gave to Israel: “When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day’” (Deuteronomy 6:20–24).

God gave the Israelites His protection and His laws, but for what purpose? To preserve and maintain them—to keep them well, prosperous and in peace. He wanted to ensure that they would maintain themselves as a nation that would remain under the guiding and blessing hand of the Eternal God.

Similarly, the Apostle Paul knew that God was concerned about maintaining and preserving him, whatever trial and tribulation came. He said to Timothy, “And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!” (2 Timothy 4:18). We can be just as confident as Paul.

Many of today’s true Christians learned deeply about the Bible, and overcame many challenges and struggles as they began to live God’s way of life. But their knowledge and experience did not prevent them from

falling down when it came to maintaining their Christian way of life.

Peter wrote about a condition in the early church that mirrors our present situation. He described people who had known the truth but had forsaken it (2 Peter 2:15). These were not outsiders, people who did not know and understand God’s ways. They were members of the church (vv. 13, 15).

Peter’s condemnation is sobering. “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (vv. 20–22).

If we do not change the oil in our car, and we damage the engine, we can buy another car. But if we do not maintain ourselves spiritually, the damage could be much more costly.

There will come a time when we will be new beings. We will not have to worry about maintaining these physical bodies. We will be new, clean and complete in glory like Jesus Christ, our elder brother. We will even be given a new name to go with our new bodies.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a *new* name written which no one knows except him who receives it” (Revelation 2:17). As we wait for that time, we must remember the importance of maintaining the Christian way of life that God has given to us. ☐

God Will Have to Intervene

(continued from page 2)

no relief in sight. The National Weather Service said this could be the driest 6-month period in southern Alabama in more than a century unless rainfall comes soon. Only 8 and one-half inches of rain has fallen in the area this year. Rainfall is 14 to 18 inches below normal in Alabama, where corn has grown only waist high and some cattle are being sent to slaughter because farmers do not have enough hay or water to give them.

“Several streams in South Georgia, which normally have a trickle of water even during a drought, are now completely dry,” stated Mike Gennys of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. In Tallahassee, Fla., hundreds of turtles have died crossing U.S. Highway 27 as they fled 4,000-acre Lake Jackson, which has dried up because of sinkholes and the drought. Alabama Gov. Dan Siegelman has asked for a federal disaster declaration that would provide low-income loans and emergency assistance for some farmers.

“Even a tropical storm, which could cause major flooding anywhere in the state, probably would not bring us out of the drought,” said David Stooksbury, state climatologist and professor of engineering at the University of Georgia.

Reports of spreading drought and upset weather are coming in from all over the world. This will cause lasting damage to crops and will spawn WILD FIRES and terrible destruction.

Rather than quote from reports of upset weather all over, let us zero in on one report that helps us understand one of its major CAUSES. Cable News Network reported on June 12:

Global warming will produce widespread changes in the U.S. climate in future decades, a government report released Monday predicts. DROUGHT-LIKE CONDITIONS WILL HIT EVERY REGION OF THE COUNTRY, SEA LEVELS WILL RISE AND URBAN POPULATIONS MAY REEL UNDER SEARING TEMPERATURES. [Report: *Climate Change Impacts On The United States*]

As all of the above weather conditions continue to intensify, people may be more willing to consider the title of our new booklet, *Who Controls the Weather?* Remember, brethren, just because the meteorologists and

other scientists explain the possible *physical* causes of these storms and other conditions, that does not in ANY way mean that these carnal men understand the REAL cause of what will soon happen on the world scene! For it is the CREATOR—not *puny men*—who ultimately orchestrates or at least allows such things as “global warming” and “tectonic shifts” beneath the earth’s surface, which bring about earthquakes and the other physical manifestations of HIS intervention in the weather and natural affairs.

As God’s people, we must NEVER forget that! We humans and physical circumstances have a part, but GOD is in charge over all.

Will these weather upsets, earthquakes and disease epidemics help men everywhere “wake up” and turn to the true GOD? Indeed, these events may help shake people out of their “comfort zones” and get them to thinking. But, without God’s *further intervention*, it will only cause many to become more conscientious in their current religious practice—Hindu, Catholic or whatever.

For God intervening in the weather and in the “around” will NOT—by itself—make most people aware of *where* they should turn and *what* they should do. That knowledge will have to come through the powerful preaching of God’s Word—backed up by the “accompanying signs” (Mark 16:20).

Brethren, with the confusion caused by so many religions and ideologies in the world—and now by the divisions and confusion even among the Church of God fellowships—most people are simply not sure where to go, who to join or what to do. Knowing that Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), *how* will the Living Jesus Christ solve this problem? We remember that in the Old Testament people heeded Elijah when they saw the “signs” that he performed. After Elijah had healed her son and brought him back to life, the widow of Zarephath declared: “Now *by this* I KNOW that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth” (1 Kings 17:24). Then after Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal by bringing down fire from heaven, remember what happened? “Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!’” (1 Kings 18:39).

In the New Testament, the Apostle John was inspired to tell us one reason *why* Jesus Christ performed so many miracles: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30–31).

The book of Acts confirms this same principle as in the instance of Philip preaching to the Samaritans: “Then

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (Acts 8:5–6). And in the very next chapter of Acts, we read of people being “turned to the Lord” because of a healing performed through the Apostle Peter, who had come to Lydda. “There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.’ Then he arose immediately. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord” (Acts 9:33–35).

So I simply want you to realize, brethren, that we are now in what I feel is a “transition period” between the Work Christ performed through Herbert Armstrong and the final *powerful* Work through His Church before the end. We *do* have many blessings. And we *have* had a number of miracles and divine healings in the Church. But, generally, they are “few and far between.”

At this point, God is “testing” ALL of us in *every Church of God fellowship*. How close to the *real* Jesus Christ are we striving to be? How much “fire” is in our belly to *serve* and to *sacrifice* in order to reach others with the Truth of God? Are we *really* willing to submit to God’s kind of government—the kind that is clearly described over and over in the Bible? Or do we have marvelous “excuses” as to *why* we should not practice correct government, *why* we “shouldn’t” or “can’t” do a real Work of preaching the Gospel to the world, *why* we need to “water down” many of the basic teachings and approaches God taught the Church for decades through His servant Herbert W. Armstrong. God is allowing a few years of this transition in order to “watch” us. He is taking time to “test” (see James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:6–7) our deep-down attitudes to see what we will do even *before* He intervenes in

human affairs and *before* He pours out the “gifts” of the Spirit in POWER upon His servants.

Meanwhile, we had all better see how *close* we can get to Jesus Christ and to His true ways as revealed in Scripture. We had better let God know by our actions that we *deeply desire* to share His precious Truth with others all over this earth. And we must NOT get discouraged or ever turn aside from God even without immediate dramatic miracles and healings. We need to remember that Jesus Christ said: “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11). Yet God’s Word also tells us: “Then many came to Him and said, ‘John performed NO SIGN, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true’” (John 10:41). So it was clearly not God’s will for John to perform miracles or healings. Yet *no prophet* was reckoned as greater than John the Baptist!

It is clearly not “God’s time” for dramatic healings and miracles—YET. But the examples and parallels in the Bible indicate that this time should not be far off. So we need to be READY. We need, together, to *beseech* God to build within us a genuine atmosphere of FAITH. We need to CRY OUT for God’s intervention in world affairs and for the POWER of His Spirit to be manifested soon in many healings and miracles.

Jesus Christ tells us: “And shall God not avenge His own elect who CRY OUT day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?” (Luke 18:7). Let us all sincerely and fervently lift our hands to God in prayer and ask for His powerful intervention. He *wants* us to get involved. John was inspired to quote Jesus Christ’s words in Revelation: “Surely I am coming quickly.” But, in his own words, John was inspired to add: “Amen. Even so, COME Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).



Tomorrow’s World Bible Study Course Reminder

Those who have received Lesson Four of the *Tomorrow’s World Bible Study Course* must return the test included in that lesson if they wish to receive Lesson Five through Lesson Eight.

If you have not already subscribed to the course, it is not too late to begin: just return the card in *Tomorrow’s World*, or e-mail your request (including your PIN and address) to media@cogl.org.

The Church That Is in Their House

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a rented hall, benefits are provided in our smaller, residential gatherings.

The first advantage is the *family atmosphere* that such meetings naturally afford us. We can all meet in a single living room or den. It is like a reunion in which members of a nuclear family, separated for several days, assemble for a weekly special gathering. We can literally “reach out and touch someone” we love each time we meet.

A second bonus is the *love* that is expressed by all participants. Because we are only a few people, we come to know everyone closely and affectionately. One’s love needs not be dispersed to many, as in a larger church group, but instead is concentrated upon only a few. The “love of the brethren” can deepen quicker this way. We come to know each other well—“warts and all.” This is how mature Christian fellowship is developed.

Thirdly, *unity and harmony* should be easier to maintain with our smaller groups. With fewer people involved, fewer need be satisfied. The more people who have different ideas on how things should be done, the harder it

is for leaders to bring them into some kind of agreement. Aiding oneness is our being bound by common emotionally charged experiences of leaving an apostate church organization for the truth. We have a common faith and a united purpose. We vitally need this singlemindedness in our worship service (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Our fourth advantage is the *cooperation and sharing* anticipated from the entire assembly. Everyone can contribute something to make the sacred meeting pleasant and profitable for all. No one should feel overlooked or be taken for granted. From giving the opening or closing prayer to pushing the start button on the VCR or cassette player; from the reading of the announcements to leading hymns and from serving as greeters at the door to laying out refreshments, everyone can make God’s Sabbath a day of delight for the entire local spiritual family.

I hope we never lose this exceptional small-church dynamic we now share as God begins again to bring new people to our fellowship. Let us count our blessings and thank God for our in-home church service or Bible study. And let us savor this rare opportunity to relive the first century Church of God experience. LCN

The Gifts of the Spirit

(continued from page 3)

to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14–15). And again, Jesus Christ is, “the SAME yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Remember also that Jesus specifically stated that His servants would be doing these very things. Notice what Jesus said of His followers at the end of His own earthly ministry: “And these SIGNS will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17–18).

Mark then writes that God’s servants of that age “went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying SIGNS” (v. 20). Notice that it was the Living Christ who was “working with them” in performing these signs.

Dear brethren, *all* of us need to read, to *study* and to meditate about these truths more and more deeply. We need to more fully SURRENDER our minds and hearts to Christ so that He can *use us* to do these signs. For that is HIS will for His servants in these end times!

The whole world out there is “waiting”—and is in suffering and utter confusion. The world needs to receive a clear and powerful WARNING before the darkness falls. If *we* in God’s Church will not fully yield ourselves to God—as His faithful instruments to give the “Ezekiel warning” and preach the inspiring message of His soon-coming Kingdom—God can always “raise up stones” to finish the job! Yet Jesus wants to use us—and has called us *for this very purpose*.

Jesus said, “when the Son of Man comes, will He really find FAITH on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). We *must learn* to be men and women of FAITH. So, again, we need to genuinely *study* the Bible and “FEED”

on Christ in a way many have never done before (John 6:57). We need to CRY OUT to God to bring us closer to Him so we can be more powerful servants in His hands. We need to remember the inspired words of Jesus to the Apostles when even they were weak in faith: “This kind can come out by nothing but PRAYER and FASTING” (Mark 9:29).

If we so yield ourselves *more zealously* than ever to the Living Christ, He *will* build within the Church a genuine “atmosphere of faith.” In *God’s time*, we *will* be granted the “gifts” of the Spirit in order to have a real impact on this confused world. We *will* be blessed FOREVER for having gone “all out” to prepare for our Savior’s return. And IF we do these things with *all our hearts*, we certainly *will* hear those exceedingly precious words of Jesus Christ, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the JOY of your lord” (Matthew 25:21). LCN

Ordinations

Several ordinations were conducted during the Days of Unleavened Bread across the Southern Region.

Evangelist John Ogwyn ordained Mr. Daniel Friz as an elder to serve in the Lufkin, Texas, area. Mr. Ogwyn also ordained Mr. and Mrs. Burl Taylor as deacon and deaconess for Lufkin and Mrs. Marvin (Naomi) Harmdierks as a deaconess to serve in the Gladewater congregation. Her husband has been serving as a deacon for a number of years. The ordinations were on the First Day of Unleavened Bread.

Florida Pastor Ben Faulkner ordained two new elders in Florida congregations: Mr. Gilbert Baust for the Ocala area and Mr. Larry Rawson for the Tampa area. Mr. Faulkner also ordained Mr. Milton Pantzloff as a deacon in the Tampa congregation. The ordinations were conducted on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread.

Western Regional Pastor Douglas Winnail ordained two new deacons and a deaconess during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Demas Nunes was ordained as a deacon for the Phoenix, Arizona congregation. Cecil and Diana Roach were ordained as deacon and deaconess for the Albuquerque, New Mexico congregation.

Anniversary

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Phelan of the Reno, Nevada, Living Church of God congregation celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on May 20. They were married on May 26, 1950. The brethren of the Reno congregation organized a special evening in honor of the couple. Friends from other Church of God fellowships also attended, as well as Dr. Douglas Winnail, regional pastor for the area. Mr. Phelan is a long-time deacon.

Births

David and Margie Crockett, of Gladewater, Texas, are pleased to announce the birth of their 5th child, **Emily Rose**. She was born on March 1, 2000, weighing 8 pounds, 12 ounces.

Sarah Rae Rude was born to Michael and Pamela Rude of Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 5, 2000. She weighed 6 pounds, 14 ounces and was 20 inches long.

Wyatt and Tess Ciesielka, of Austin, Texas, are happy to announce the birth of their first child, **Chloe Renee**, the granddaughter of Keith and Renee Walden and Phyllis Ciesielka. Chloe was born at home on May 1, 2000 and weighed a healthy 8 pounds, 12 ounces.

Reginald and Mia Angquico of San Diego, California, would like to announce the birth of **Matthew Timothy**. Matthew was born on March 24, 2000 at 7:53 am. He was 19.5 inches long and weighed 8 pounds, 1 ounce.

In Loving Memory

Donald Contardi, 63, died June 15, at his Holley, New York, home after a long battle against pancreatic cancer. Mr. Contardi was the pastor of 12 Living Church of God congregations in the eastern United States. He was baptized in 1973 and ordained as a minister in the Church of God in 1981, serving congregations in California, Alabama and New Jersey prior to his current pastorate. He was a veteran of the United States Navy and a 1979 graduate of Ambassador College.

Evangelist Carl McNair conducted graveside services in Iron River, Michigan, on Monday, June 19. "Mr. Contardi was a true and faithful servant of God who was loved and will be missed by many. His son Dan was baptized recently, which no doubt gave him great joy," Mr. McNair said. He is survived by his wife Carol and his three children Don, Dan and Christine.

Mickey Marcantel, 70, of Rayne, Louisiana, died June 5 from complications of emphysema that afflicted him for many years. He was baptized in 1975 and was a member of the Lafayette Living Church of God congregation. Mr. Marcantel was unable to attend services due to his illness. He is survived by his wife Peggy and his children.

Evangelist Visits Philippines Churches

MANILA—The Living Church of God in the Philippines hosted a special guest from Headquarters during the Spring Holy Days this year. Mr. Carl McNair, evangelist and Director of Church Administration, arrived on Tuesday, April 25. On the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, April 26, he addressed 87 brethren at a combined Metro-Manila Holy Day service. Two services were held, with a potluck meal at noon, during which the brethren were able to fellowship with their visitor.

The next day, Mr. McNair joined Metro-Manila minister Mr. Gorgonio de Guia and Regional Director Mr. Rod McNair in traveling 1 hour and 45 minutes by air to Davao City, on the southern island of Mindanao. Five Filipino ministers from all over the region attended meetings that began on Friday, April 28. During the three-day meetings, the ministers viewed several video tapes of Presiding Evangelist Dr. Roderick C. Meredith from the San Diego conference in March, including his keynote lecture on the “Vision of the Work” and the final send-off, “The Key to Our Success.” They also heard Mr. McNair address various aspects of “Maintaining Ministerial Qualifications,” and other inspiring words of encouragement. The Regional Director gave additional presentations on administration of the Philippines Work.

The ministers gave individual reports on their areas. It was exciting to note that there is growth in virtually every region of the Philippines. Mr. McNair reminded conference attendees that the Church is “not out for numbers.” He emphasized that numbers by themselves do not mean anything—Gideon’s army shows that. However, growth of numbers of truly converted and dedicated people means a great deal. There is strength in those kinds of numbers because it represents growth in the Church’s collective ability to do the Work.

Other items discussed in the 3-day meetings, included the hiring and moving to Tacloban of Mr. Eleno Cabahit. Mr. Gideon Benitez, son of Mr. Tex Benitez, pastor of Western Mindanao, was ordained an elder on the first day. During one of the afternoon sessions, sev-


eral surplus computers from Headquarters were passed on to the ministers, to help them in their ministerial responsibilities.

Mr. McNair also discussed the plan to move the Regional Director’s office from Manila to the United States, to satisfy U.S. manpower needs. The men discussed the detailed systems and procedures that are being put in place, including quarterly visits to the Philippines by Mr. Rod McNair to ensure the smooth continuance and oversight of the Work and the Church in the Philippines.

On the Sabbath of April 29, 53 brethren from Davao and the

East Mindanao region heard the visiting evangelist speak on “Teamwork.” He pointed out that through the years, God’s faithful servants like Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong have “caught the vision” and labored to pass on that vision to others. He emphasized that the Church is “not in the business of colonialism.” The Living Church of God is not just an American church, but also an international brotherhood, and the Church is committed to developing the leadership that God calls, to contribute to the Work in the international areas. During the service, Mr. Freddie Benitez, son of Mr. Encardio Benitez, pastor in Central Mindanao, was ordained a deacon.

After returning to Manila following the conference, Mr. McNair traveled eight hours north into the mountains of Northern Luzon, where he gave a Bible study to the Baguio City video group on Thursday, May 4. Returning to Manila, Mr. McNair spoke to 78 brethren in Quezon City on the Sabbath of May 6. On Monday, May 8, he departed Manila for the return flight back to San Diego.

Despite many obstacles, including airline delays (27 hours in Japan en route to Manila), rigorous travel, sweltering summer-time heat and a deteriorating peace-and-order situation in the Philippines, Mr. McNair’s trip was a great success. His two-week visit was a tremendous boost to the ministry and brethren, who are committed to being on God’s Team for the Work and the Church. The vision is clear for the Living Church of God in the Philippines! 



Feast of Tabernacles Updates

San Diego Site

The San Diego Feast site is full; no more applications can be accepted. Brethren who have been accepted to the site should by now have received a letter confirming their attendance at the site. If you applied but have not received a letter indicating whether or not your application was accepted, please contact Mr. Don Davis by phone at (858) 673-7470 or by email at festival@cogl.org.

Trinidad & Tobago Site

Brethren from around the world are invited to join the 65 local brethren on the beautiful island of Tobago, situated in the southern Caribbean. Hotel accommodations are available starting at \$35 USD. For information about

this site, please contact Mr. Ramsumair Sookram at sookram1@mailcity.com.

Barbados Site

Living Church of God brethren will keep the Feast on the beautiful island of Barbados, at the Caribee Conference Center. For further information about Barbados site, please contact Mr. Clyde Skeets at tyroneyarde@caribsurf.com.

Cranbrook Phone Number

The correct phone number for the Prestige Rocky Mountain Resort is (250) 417-0444, for those wishing to book a room there for the Feast.

California Singles Weekend

–By Carol Blanchard

The California Singles Weekend, held April 21–23, during the Days of Unleavened Bread, provided 55 singles from around the nation with a weekend of friendship, bonding and spiritual nourishment.

“I was thrilled to come away with new friends,” said Jaci Stiffler of Jacksonville, Ark. “I didn’t expect to click so well with complete strangers.”

Forming and strengthening friendships was the major highlight of the weekend. “It was very gratifying to see how well our singles of various age categories interacted together. Many new friendships were formed which will last long beyond this life,” said Pastor Jeff Fall of Glendora, Calif.

Forming strong relationships with God and man was the overarching theme of the weekend, which began Friday night with a dinner and Bible study on the beach. Although the wind and the cold weather caused nearly everybody to bundle up in winter coats and wool blankets, hearts were warm and spirits were high. The

study was led by Dr. Fall, who delivered an appreciated message about making a relationship with God the most important one in our lives.

Saturday was a very full day. The day began with a brunch at the home of Christina Patterson in Pasadena. Her gracious hospitality gave everyone an opportunity to get to know each other and enjoy the Sabbath.

The singles were welcomed into the La Crescenta congregation for services. Dr. Fall gave the sermon, speaking this time about issues of relationships that affect all of us. More important than a marriage relationship, he said, is our relationship with God and Jesus Christ. Our relationship with the begotten family of God is the next most important.

The sermon set the tone for the fellowship that followed. The singles were then treated to a chili potluck. Fellowship and a hymn sing kept everyone happily busy until the square dance began after sundown.

Debbie Woods, from Glendale, Calif., also played a large part in the

planning of the weekend. She said the square dance at last year’s Feast in Tucson inspired the group to have one of their own. “We wanted something that would be fun for everyone and keep the group mixing,” she said. And mix they did! The square dance caller kept everyone moving, teaching different moves and dances.

Dancing shoes were exchanged for hiking boots the next day, when a hike in the mountains took place. The singles wound their way up the mountain through lush forestation, taking a short hike that ended at a rock face with a small waterfall.

“We really wanted to incorporate the best L.A. had to offer by including the beach and the hike,” said Woods.

“The only difficult part of the weekend was seeing so many having to leave before they were ready to, due to work or college,” said Dr. Fall. “Hopefully we will be able to do this again another year.”

Everybody else does, too. “I had a blast!” said Stiffler. “I hope more of these can be done.”

Is There Any Hope?

By Richard F. Ames

With all the suffering in this world, we all may rightly ask, “Is there any hope for the future? Is there any hope for my children and family?” Yes, there is! One definition of hope is “a positive, assured expectation.” What is it that we can be assured of that gives us encouragement and support? Certainly, we should have learned by now that the answer is *not* in the nature of human beings. Human governments and institutions have not brought us lasting world peace! As the inspired book of Psalms tells us, “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man” (Psalm 118:8). Our hope and help must come from the ultimate spiritual source!

Many of us have personally experienced hopelessness—perhaps even depression. But personally, even in my darkest hours, I somehow experienced some deep-down, ingrained feeling of hope at a time when hope was not in evidence. The Apostle Paul wrote about the patriarch Abraham in Romans 4:18, “who *against hope* believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken.” The external evidence gave no hope, but Abraham believed God’s great promise.

We have been given the greatest promise of all—the hope of a great future as announced by Jesus of Nazareth, the prophets of old and the Apostles of the New Testament. The *Tomorrow’s World* magazine and the *Tomorrow’s World* television program strive to reflect that message, the good news and the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God.

You and I must never allow ourselves to give up hope. Jesus said, “He who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Jesus also promised in Matthew 24 that He would come back to save the world. Yes, there is such abundant hope and promise for a wonderful world to come—a world of peace, productivity and fulfillment. There is a way to conquer despair. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

If you feel hopeless and helpless, read in your Bible about the wonderful Kingdom of God to come on this earth. Read the promises of help and encouragement that God will give you now, in this life—yes, even in a society that in general has “no hope and [is] without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Is there any hope? Absolutely! There is a way of life and hope available to you now through the Savior of the world—and a Kingdom to come that is *way beyond* our greatest expectations. It is sure and absolute. As the Bible assures us, “The mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 40:5, KJV). Look forward to a positive change in your life now—and a glorious future to come. It is time for you to take positive action and seek the promised spiritual solution! Paul wrote in Romans 15:13, “Now may the *God of hope* fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may *abound in hope* by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

This commentary can be found on the Church Web page, www.livingcog.org, in the Commentary Library, along with many other commentaries on key topics facing our world.