

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

LCG.org

March-April 2018

The New Challenge of Reaching the Secular-minded

Dear Brethren,

Shopping is distasteful to me. When I go into a store (with the exception of Bass Pro Shop) I have a purpose in mind and want to get out as fast as I can, but that is not always easy. It was relatively easy to buy “tennis shoes” when I was young. Even if you did not play tennis, that’s what everyone called athletic shoes. There might be two brands and all you had to do was find the right size. Today, there are a multitude of brands, styles, colors, prices and considerations: running shoes, walking shoes, basketball shoes, cross trainers, etc., etc., etc. Does this one or that one pronate inward or outward? I need help, but that is when a salesman is never available!

Now don’t go away, because there is a purpose to all this! My wife, on the other hand, loves to look, and that is mostly what she does. She can spend ten minutes smelling different brands of coffee before choosing one. I guess that is why we always have good coffee in the morning. One thing that turns her off is a sales representative who is *too* helpful. “I’m just looking, thank you.” But, she is gone if the sales person hovers around her too much.

Have you considered that the Church, in a way, is in the sales business? We have something to “sell”—***the truth and a better way of life***. Of course, we are not salesmen in the traditional sense, since what we have to “sell” is FREE. God counsels all: “Buy the truth, and do not sell it” (Proverbs 23:23). Yet how can people “buy” it if it is not available? So, we reach out to the world with the good news of the coming Kingdom of God, a kingdom they can be born into for all eternity; but we also warn them that, if they reject this better way, pain follows—a reality for many! We are seeking to give the entire world the opportunity to “buy” this truth, free of charge!

It is difficult to “sell” to someone who finds your “store-front” distasteful. Different stores and different approaches work for different people. We know we have the right message, but how we present it is important in a world where professing Christianity is an ever-shrinking population.

We have a difficult challenge. Consider Matthew 28 and Mark 16—take the gospel to all nations and baptize all whom God calls. Consider that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations” before the end comes (Matthew 24:14). It WILL be done! Consider the warning given in Ezekiel, that we will be held accountable to warn the house of Israel to repent.

How do we do this among the Israelite nations filled with “shoppers” who have no interest in anything religious? The overwhelming majority are skeptical of, if not hostile to, our message.

We learned at Ambassador College that the first rule of public speaking is to consider your audience. The Apostle Paul gives us the same advice in 1 Corinthians 9:19–22. He wrote that he made himself, “a servant of all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

Paul considered his audience. He did not approach the Gentiles as he did the Jews. He spoke in the Hebrew tongue when addressing a hostile Jewish crowd. He began with the story of his conversion and they listened to him until he mentioned the word *Gentile* (see Acts 21:40 to 22:22). It went

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downhill from there, but he got them to “come into the store” and see what he had to offer.

The overwhelming majority of our world reacts the same way to our telecast, except that they never “come into our store.” Let us be honest. Only a tiny fraction of our populations has any interest in religion. They come across the religious hour, see the “storefront,” and are gone!

Stephen knew his audience and drew them “into the store” with a history lesson. They did not buy what he had to sell, but they listened—up until the punch line, when they killed him. However, he had their attention long enough to give God’s warning message.

Paul spoke on Mars Hill to a very religious Gentile audience (Acts 17:22). He did not review his conversion or Israel’s history. He began with something they could relate to—the “unknown” God—and he challenged them by saying they were worshipping Him ignorantly (v. 23).

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was a master communicator. He understood his audience. Most in his day had some sense of God, many regularly attended “the church of their choice,” and many read the Bible. He knew how to challenge them concerning their beliefs about the Bible, often provoking them to “prove him wrong,” only for them to discover that they were the ones who were wrong! But, when he went to “non-Christian” emperors and kings, he spoke to them in terms they could understand: There are two ways of life—give and get. He also spoke of the need for “a strong hand from somewhere” to solve man’s intractable problems. Had he come to them as a televangelist with a non-mainstream message, he would never have gotten through the front door!

How did Mr. Armstrong come to visit so many world leaders? King Leopold III of Belgium was introduced by someone to the beautiful 1965 *Ambassador College Envoy*. The King was so impressed by what he saw that he wanted to meet the man responsible for building three magnificent campuses, not only the buildings and grounds, but the faces of well-dressed, happy students. That is how it all began! That is how the door was opened to preaching the gospel to scores of world leaders!

So how do we attract people to walk through the door of our “store”? We must never forget that we have some-

thing unique. The real gospel of the Kingdom of God and the true Jesus Christ is radically different from anything found in professing Christianity. It is the only hope for this very troubled world. This is our message, but as with Paul and Stephen, we must capture people’s attention. God told Ezekiel to portray a siege against Jerusalem as a sign to the house of Israel (Ezekiel 4:1–3). Jeremiah wore a yoke of wood around his neck—something that would garner attention and make a point (Jeremiah 28:10–14). Read through the prophets and see the many ways God got the attention of rebellious nations.

Ecclesiastes advises us, “In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

We must continue to preach to those who are most likely to listen—professing Christians—but we must also gain the attention of a skeptical, secular world. Most will not “buy” God’s truth, but we must get them to look in the storefront window by offering common ground. An example of this is the Canadian-produced Viewpoint video, “Where Do the Celts Come From?” It is not overtly religious, but at the end advertises the booklet *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*. As of this writing, it has more than 68,000 views, more than 20,000 during a two-and-a-half day stretch, without advertising during that time.

Who would guess *that* subject would bring people “into the store” to look? Whether they pick up the free literature inside is yet to be seen, but we turned their heads and got their attention for a few minutes, and maybe more!

And we will continue to explore ways to grab the attention of a hurting world, that we may warn them of the coming time of trouble ahead and give them the good news of Christ’s coming to save us from destruction. Please pray that God will show us how to best do this.



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The *Living Church News* is published bimonthly by the Living Church of God, 2301 Crown Centre Drive, Charlotte, NC 28227. Subscriptions are sent without charge to all members of the Living Church of God.

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Postmaster: Send address changes to

The Living Church News • P.O. Box 3810 Charlotte, NC 28227

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EDITORIAL By Gerald Weston

How Will You Approach Deleavening?

Jesus gave four categories of people in the Parable of the Sower. Some seeds landed by the wayside and birds of the air devoured them. Other seeds fell on stony places with little soil. They came up quickly but then died in the heat. Then there were the seeds that fell among thorns and failed to produce, because the weeds choked them. Finally, we read about the seeds that fell on good ground. These produced well, with crops of varying size (Matthew 13:3–8). Jesus later gave the spiritual significance, showing that different people respond differently to the message of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 13:18–23).

Similarly, four categories of people will read this article—but I will get back to that later. Let me first address the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. These Festivals and High Days are special times for the people of God, and we look forward to them for a variety of reasons. Some reasons are physical and some are spiritual. The emphasis should be on the latter.

Ministers often sense a greater level of inspiration for sermons given on these specially ordained High Days. When several congregations meet together, more voices sing out with greater power, making the occasion joyous as we praise our Creator. Youth look forward to seeing their friends that they may not have seen for some time, and each year we take note of personal and collective growth in our understanding of these days, and in overcoming sins.

While some stick with peanut butter and Matzos, others branch out to create special breads that become family favorites. Husbands and children eagerly open their lunch boxes to see what special treats are inside. Unconverted husbands are sometimes more accepting of the Festival when wives make creative special unleavened meals during this time. Yes, we look forward to these days for both spiritual and physical reasons.

One physical task that we may not find so pleasant is obeying the command to put leaven out of our homes (Exodus 12:15). Some go to extremes, spending days in what becomes *spring cleaning* in the northern hemisphere, and I suppose, *fall cleaning* south of the equator. Others barely give it a *lick and a promise*, taking a very casual approach toward the task.

Wisdom of Age

Those of us who have been in the Church of God for 50 or more years have a unique perspective on deleavening. We have seen ministers, members and the Church as a whole sometimes fall into opposite ditches. Growth is a process, and we can, perhaps, have a few laughs along the way, such as the year I destroyed two toasters during the deleavening process. However, we also saw on more than one occasion where God's instructions were watered down.

We all appreciate a clean house, but we must never forget that the purpose of this cleaning is to identify and remove leaven, and it is important that each member of the family take part in this process. Both removing leaven and avoiding eating leaven during this time provide valuable insights into our sinful nature.

Occasionally, some well-meaning speaker reads from *Clarke's Commentary* on Exodus 12:19, where it says, "To meet the letter of this precept in the fullest manner possible, the Jews, on the eve of this festival, institute the most rigorous search through every part of their houses, not only removing all leavened bread, but sweeping every part clean, that no crumb of bread shall be left that had any leaven in it. And so strict were they in the observance of the letter of this law, that if even a mouse was seen to run across the floor with a crumb of bread in its mouth, they considered the whole house as polluted, and began their purification afresh" (Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 354).

What are the odds of a mouse running across the floor with a piece of bread in his mouth on the eve of this festival? Actually, not as remote as you might think, based on my experience. Twice while living in Canada, we had a bird or a squirrel leave bread on our front porch right before or during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and they were more like *chunks* of bread than *crumbs*! As trite as it sounds, you can't make this up! At least they were on the porch instead of in the house. The timing was remarkable, as neither my wife nor I ever remember such a thing happening at any other time of the year. Maybe it was a kind Jewish neighbor disposing of leavening where wildlife could get to it. It seems to me that God has a sense of humor.

We stopped buying cookies from Girl Scouts (or, in Canada, Girl Guides) many years ago, because no matter how the Holy Days fell each year, the leavened cook-

ies always seemed to arrive in the middle of the Feast. And have you ever noticed that it is during the Days of Unleavened Bread that the neighbor brings over a freshly baked cake?

Jesus corrected the Jews for their oppressive interpretations of the law. He is to be our guide, not the Jewish custom described in *Clarke's Commentary*. There is something about human nature that exalts physical activity over activity of the heart. Some, who once understood the truth, have joined Messianic Jewish groups that focus on the physical rather than the spiritual: prayer shawls, circumcision, certain kinds of dress, and other customs and rituals.

There were also times when we heard comments that *downplayed* the need to deleaven. Such comments usually preceded or accompanied times of apostasy. How easy it is to make fun of or ridicule deleavening practices, and while some take deleavening to extremes that God never intended, but some of us have been around long enough to attest to the fact that when deleavening is abandoned, other apostasies follow. God clearly instructed Israel, "For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land" (Exodus 12:19).

Some claim this is only for Israel, but we are, through the Holy Spirit in us, children of Abraham and spiritual Israel (Romans 2:28–29; Galatians 3:26–29). We keep the Feast as Paul commanded the Gentile Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:7–8): "Therefore let us keep the feast...." Paul then explains the symbolism of leaven in this context: "...not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Malice involves the thought process of an evil heart. Wickedness refers to wrong actions. These are to be replaced with a sincere heart and righteous behavior. Truth is described in 1 John 1:6 as something we practice. In other words, truth is more than academic. It is the way we act, what we do. So, we are to change in mind and in actions.

Verified by Historical Records

The early Church of God put the physical leaven out of their homes. This is confirmed in a passage from Eusebius over the Quartodeciman controversy—the proper day to celebrate Passover. The Church of God in Asia Minor continued to follow the example of keeping the Passover on the 14th day of the first month in the sacred calendar. *Quarto decimo* is Latin for "fourteenth." The burgeoning counterfeit church substituted the pagan celebration of Easter for Passover. Eusebius shows us that

Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John, was at odds with Anicetus, a Roman bishop. Polycarp's disciple, Polycrates, also disputed with Victor of Rome over the same question.

Eusebius describes the controversy between Polycarp and Anicetus as follows: "For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John, the disciple of the Lord, and the other Apostles with whom he had associated; neither could Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, as he [Anicetus] said that he ought to follow the customs of the elders who had preceded him" (Ayer, Joseph C. *A Source Book for Ancient Church History*, p. 164). How interesting! Even Eusebius points out that Polycarp was following the Apostles of Christ, and that Anicetus was following a different set of spiritual leaders!

Polycrates followed Polycarp as leader in Asia Minor and addressed Victor as follows: "We observe the exact day, neither adding nor taking anything away. For in Asia, also, great lights have fallen asleep, which shall rise again on the day of the Lord's coming, when He shall come with glory from heaven and shall seek out all the saints..." (ibid., p. 162).

Note these points from this passage. Polycarp did not add to or take away from Scripture, death was like a sleep, the sleeping dead are resurrected at Christ's coming, and saints are true Christians, not individuals "sainted" by men.

Eusebius tells us that Polycrates named those he followed:

"Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who fell asleep at Hierapolis, and his two aged virgin daughters and his other daughter... moreover, John, who reclined on the Lord's bosom ... and, further, Polycarp of Smyrna, both a bishop and a martyr.... All these observed the fourteenth day of

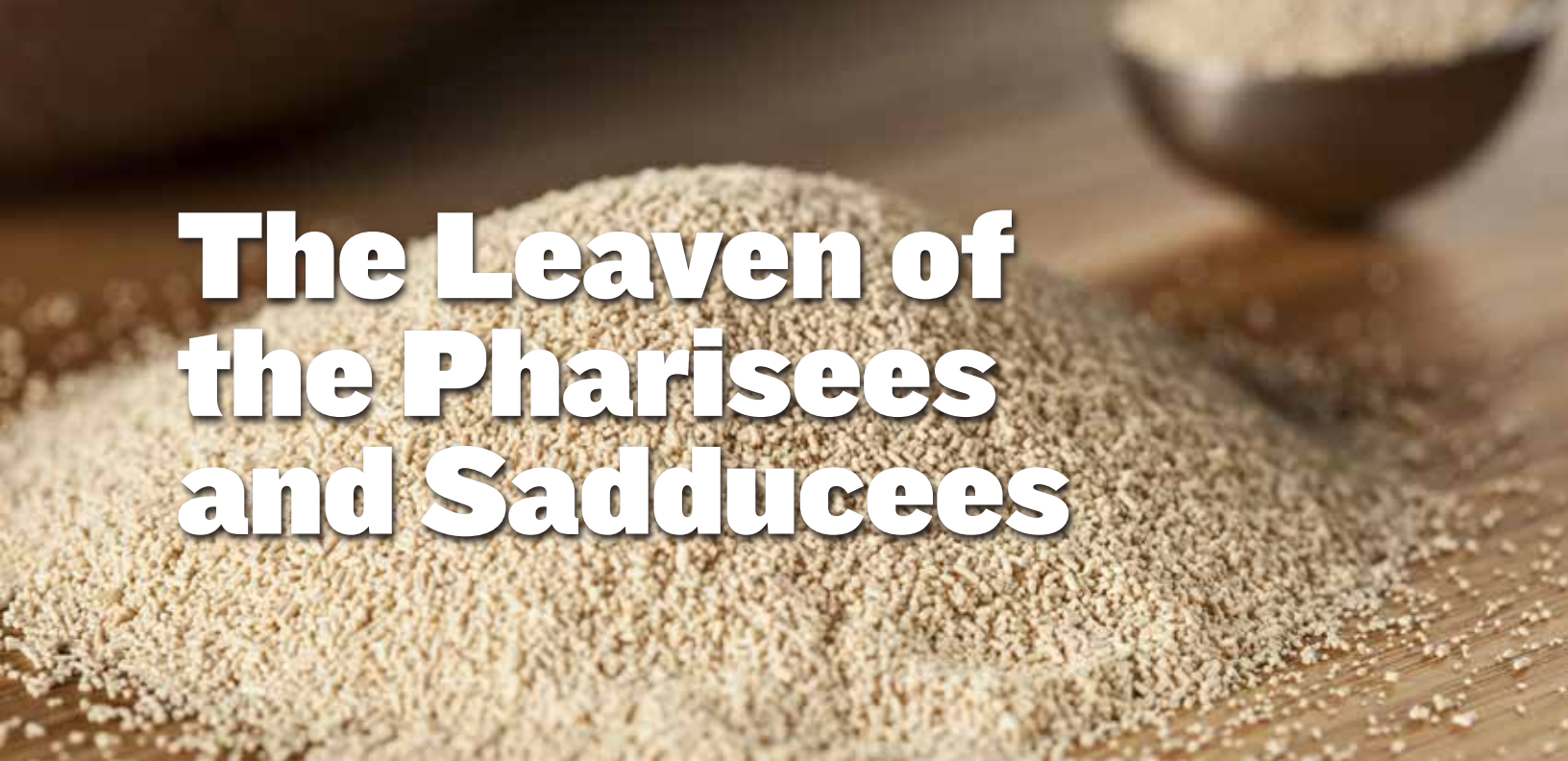
the Passover, according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith. And I, Polycrates, do the same, the least of you all, according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have closely followed. For seven of my relatives were bishops, and I am the eighth. And my relatives always observed **the day when the people put away the leaven**; I, therefore, am not affrighted by terrifying words" (ibid., pp. 162–163).

Does Our Approach Reflect God's Mind?

Balance is difficult for human beings—that's us. As one minister once pointed out, the only time we are in the middle of the road is when we are on our way to the ditch on the other side! The emphasis must be on spiritual deleavening.

We should take time each year for fasting and introspection, praying as Jeremiah did: "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O

Malice involves the thought process of an evil heart. Wickedness refers to wrong actions. **These are to be replaced with a sincere heart and righteous behavior**



The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

On the evening beginning the 14th of Nisan, we take the Passover, as instructed by Christ and the apostles. We do it at the same time and in the same manner that the Church of God did it in the first century (1 Corinthians 11:23–25).

As we take that bread and wine, we remember the magnitude of the sacrifice that Christ made to enable us to be cleansed from our sins. The Passover evening is different from other gatherings of the Church in that it is a somber occasion, when we remember the gravity of that final evening that Jesus spent with His disciples. Shortly after that Passover meal was over, His suffering began, and then ended with His death the following afternoon. As the sun was setting, ending that Passover Day, Jesus' disciples hurried to place His body into the tomb before the high Holy Day began at sunset, Nisan 15 (Leviticus 23:5–7; John 19:31).

At sunset beginning Nisan 15, we enter into God's Holy Day, and the mood is quite different from that of the Passover the night before. The First Day of Unleavened Bread is a feast day and begins with a joyous feast, "The Night To Be Much Remembered." In that day, we rejoice, remembering that we have been cleansed by Christ's shed blood and made "clean every whit" (John 13:10, KJV).

Having been cleansed of our sins by the sacrifice of Christ, we remember that we are commanded to keep the leaven of sin out of our lives. Paul instructed the Corinthians on how to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out

the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. **Therefore let us keep the feast**, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:6–8).

We "keep the feast" of Unleavened Bread, just as the Apostle Paul instructed both the Church in the first century and the Church today.

In keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread, God is having us act out an important part of this wonderful plan—so that we do not forget it. We keep leavening out of our homes and diets for seven days. A very important lesson of this Feast is that the guilt of our sins has been washed away by our Passover, Jesus Christ, making us justified and unleavened in God's sight. But in order to remind us that sin can find its way back into our lives, we continue to keep leaven out of our homes and diets for the full seven days. So, the Days of Unleavened Bread also remind us to lead repentant lives throughout the year.

Finding hidden leaven during the Days of Unleavened Bread can be a good reminder to be vigilant about hidden sin. In a personal example, one year during the Days of Unleavened Bread, I took my family out to dinner. I thought that a custard and berry dessert on the menu was sure to be unleavened (and delicious too), but when I scooped up a bite with a spoon, I discovered that it had a thin layer of leavened cake hidden inside the custard and berries. Clearly, putting the leaven out is one thing, but keeping it out is another! As we have these experiences, we remember that sin, like leaven, can hide in unexpected places.



A great lesson of the Days of Unleavened Bread is that, having been cleansed by Christ's sacrifice, we must be vigilant to keep the leaven of sin out of our lives.

The Leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees

Often the leaven of sin is in *what we do*, but sometimes it is in *what we think*. Jesus pointed out to His disciples a source of spiritual leaven that they might not have identified.

Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, “Take heed and *beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.*” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we have taken no bread.” But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, “O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the **doctrine** of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:5–12).

Christ also cautioned His disciples against the leaven of hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), which often goes hand in hand with doctrinal error.

Christ is our bread—our spiritual food—and our source of doctrine. He supplies all our needs, and we feed on

Him. Just as a little bread—like righteous doctrine from Christ—fed a multitude (Mark 8:3–9, 17–21), a few apostles spread the Gospel of the Kingdom of God around the ancient world. In our time, a few ministers using modern technology can spread God's truth to billions of people. All of the Church's literature and media are free and accessible around the world.

But false doctrine remains a dangerous form of spiritual leaven. Like leaven, it starts with a small error and grows into a major spiritual problem. *A little error can leaven a lot of truth.* A big problem for these Jewish leaders of the first century was the leaven of false doctrine. They used their traditions to circumvent God's commandments.

Christ identified the leaven of false doctrine as a type of sin. One of the things we have to put out in this season—and keep out throughout the year—is false teachings.

The Days of Unleavened Bread are a good time to look at the subject of this leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees: false doctrines.

Identifying False Doctrines

As we approach Passover each year, we often hear a sermonette about what constitutes physical leaven. Similarly, before we can put out the leaven of false doctrine, we must be able to identify it. So, it's good to remember where false doctrine comes from. “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, *who deceives the whole world*; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:9). Doctrinal deception is the Devil's specialty.

To understand the disputes that Jesus had with the Pharisees and Sadducees, it's important to understand who

they were. Their views of the law were quite different. Both were well educated but had different approaches to their faith. Here are some basic facts about them.

The Pharisees believed that the law was to be interpreted by the rabbinical tradition. They also believed in the resurrection, whereas the Sadducees did not. When a Pharisee said that Jesus broke the Sabbath law, he meant that Jesus violated the traditional Pharisaic interpretation of the law. The Pharisees sometimes used their traditions to circumvent the intent of the law when they found it convenient. But Jesus corrected them when their tradition was in error, resulting in much animosity against Him. Generally speaking, Jesus had conflicts with the Pharisees over matters of their interpretation of the law, while the Sadducees were incensed when He told them that He was the Son of God. Modern Judaism is an evolution of the Pharisaic tradition as recorded in the Mishnah of the second and third centuries AD.

The Sadducees were the descendants of the Aaronic priesthood through the sons of the high priest, Zadok, who didn't go into apostasy and idolatry. They were of the priestly class. The word "Sadducees" (*Seduqim*) is thought by some to have been derived from the name Zadok. Among the major differences with the Pharisees was that the Sadducees believed that the law could only be interpreted by the Aaronic priesthood. The Sadducees also denied the truth of the resurrection, as well as the existence of spirits or angels. In Jesus' day, they controlled the Sanhedrin. In the Living Church of God, we count Pentecost as directed in Scripture, as did the Sadducees, whereas the Pharisees advocated keeping Pentecost every year on a fixed day of the month, Sivan 6.

The Adversary's Playbook

Satan often influences people to sin by two chief means: temptation and deception. Where the Church is concerned, he often prefers deception. A person who yields to temptation and sins as a result may feel guilt and repent. But a person who sins in deception thinks that he or she hasn't done anything wrong, which makes repentance less likely. You can imagine how much Satan likes that! For example, deception regarding the calendar is a fine way for Satan to sow confusion about God's Holy Days, with different people keeping them on different dates.

In 1 Timothy 2:13–14, the Apostle Paul instructed the Church that although Adam was tempted, Eve was deceived.

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." Some misunderstand Paul's admonition and think he is saying that women aren't as smart as men and that his comments were a product of the culture of his day, which saw women as inferior. That is incorrect.

But keeping in mind Eve's mistake, note what Paul said to the Church in Corinth: "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you [the Church] to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2–3).

So, false doctrines come from the adversary—the father of lies—and he especially likes to target the Church with doctrinal deception.

We Got It Right the First Time!

Another way to identify false doctrines is to recognize that they conflict with *the faith once delivered*.

Because of the adversary's attacks, true doctrines are something we must struggle earnestly to keep, reflecting the same righteous concern as Jude: "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation,

I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you *to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3). His concern was spurred by the teachings of "certain men [who] have crept in unnoticed" (v. 4)—like a little leaven, which can leaven the whole lump.

The apostles didn't give one set of doctrines to the Jewish Christians and another to converts among the Gentiles. And they didn't teach one belief on one occasion and something else on another occasion. They delivered *one faith* "once for all" (Jude 3). Paul praised the Gentile Church in Thessalonica because they "became imitators of the churches of God *which are in Judea* in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 2:14).

Both the Gentile and Jewish members of God's Church kept all ten of the Ten Commandments and believed the same Gospel of the Kingdom of God. By keeping God's Sabbaths and Holy Days, the Greeks in Thessalonica were not trying to be Jewish; they were obeying God.

Beware of people who say that they have "new truth"—it's usually old errors. The Church's doctrines have been researched and thoroughly vetted for decades under Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith and now

The Pharisees sometimes used their traditions to circumvent the intent of the law when they found it convenient. **Jesus corrected them when their tradition was in error, resulting in much animosity against Him**

Mr. Gerald Weston, and we are convinced that we have God's truth. With God's help, we want to go *deeper and broader* in our knowledge and understanding—but we should beware when someone wants to go *differently*.

The Apostle Paul cautioned the Church in Corinth to be constantly vigilant for those who preach doctrinal error. “For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough” (2 Corinthians 11:4, *ESV*). Here's an action item: ***Don't put up with it!***

Peter also was aware of the spiritual danger of ongoing doctrinal attacks on the Church. He counseled the churches to maintain growth in their knowledge while resisting deceptive changes. “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:17–18).

We always want to grow in grace and knowledge, and from time to time, a member may think we've made a mistake. Or perhaps he believes he has found something new that we should look into. When that's the case, there's a procedure that should be followed. Don't advocate your idea among the congregation; rather, discuss it with your minister. But be prepared for him to engage in helpful analysis. The minister may have seen your idea before and, as a result, may have a ready answer with scriptures or related doctrines that you haven't considered. That's often the case. Or, if you both think that the idea needs to be considered further, it can be sent on to his Regional Pastor and possibly the Personal Correspondence Department.

If so, be patient in waiting for a response. If it's worthy of further investigation, the Council of Elders does consider study papers and thoughtful commentary.

God's Truth Is Precious

God's truth *sets us apart*. Jesus said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). He also said that we are sanctified by our faith in Him (Acts 26:18) and by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:16).

People love to reason about religious matters, and often their conclusions precede their rationale. The ancient Greeks believed that they could create spiritual knowledge by rea-

soning—as do their spiritual heirs, many of today's theologians. But *God reveals His truth*:

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Colossians 2:6–8).

Often, the leaven of false doctrine is used by individuals seeking to form their own little church group. They need a different doctrine or two to distinguish them from others in order to corral the sheep they need to support their small ministry. Those who have done this typically have several characteristics in common:

- They assert some unique doctrine or “revelation” that distinguishes their splinter group from others.
- Their evangelistic work is ineffective, and few new people join their group. So, they seek to take sheep from other organizations and fellowships rather than evangelizing the world.

- There is often a high degree of control of the group.

Christ warned us about these false ministers when He said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in

sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore *by their fruits you will know them*” (Matthew 7:15–20).

In the ministry, we have dealt with many of the same doctrinal questions for years: the proper dating of the Holy Days and calendar issues, private prophetic interpretations and many others. These issues come back year after year, decade after decade, as new people discover old errors. The Bible teaches us that Satan stalks about the fringes of the flock “like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Those who regularly search the Internet for doctrinal issues

What are our obligations when we identify a true minister of Christ? We gladly accept the authority and service that Christ provides through His ministry and His Church. **Sheep flee a wolf but follow a shepherd.**

probably do not appreciate the precious truth we have and may find themselves within that lion's range of attack.

The Apostle Paul knew that the leaven of doctrinal error would be a major problem for the Church, so he exhorted Timothy, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they **will not endure sound doctrine**, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

A big reason that members turn aside to the leaven of false doctrines is that they don't value the truth they have.

The Ministry and the Church Maintain the Doctrines

God said that He uses His ministry and His Church to maintain doctrinal integrity. The Church is the bulwark of the faith. The Apostle Paul reminded the evangelist Timothy, "These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, *the pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

The ministry has both the responsibility and authority to maintain the doctrinal integrity of the Church. Even in the world, we don't give a person the responsibility to do a job without also giving the authority that is required to accomplish it. Failing to do so would defeat our own purpose. And God is far wiser than we are.

Paul explained in his letter to the Church in Ephesus why offices of authority are so important:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, [why?] for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, [for what goal?] till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, *tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine*, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting (Ephesians 4:11-14).

God uses His faithful ministry to preserve the truth in His Church. That's a big reason why the Church is the "pillar and ground of the truth." And we're required to judge

who is a true minister of Jesus Christ, and, again, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). But what are our obligations when we identify a true minister of Christ? We gladly accept the authority and service that Christ provides through His ministry and His Church. Sheep flee a wolf but follow a shepherd.

The Church encourages its members in the faith, and we are supportive of one another in the faith. Paul wrote, "And let us **consider one another** in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but **exhorting one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The ability to effectively teach sound doctrine is one of the qualifications for an elder. Again, Paul wrote that an elder should be found "*holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught*, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9).

The ministry is instructed: Teach what you've been taught and make the truth plain. *Christ uses His faithful ministry to keep His Church on track doctrinally and to keep this leaven out of God's Church.*

Keeping Out the Leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees

So, what are some things we can do to keep out the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees during the Days of Unleavened Bread and the rest of the year? Here are a few:

First, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Next, be vigilant to identify the leaven. Paul cautioned Timothy, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in *latter times* some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1-2). We are in those "latter times" now.

Also, value the truth you have and be prepared to contend for the faith. "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Revelation 3:11). Also, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that *you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*" (Philippians 1:27).

Holding onto God's truth requires constant vigilance. God's truth is precious. Value and protect it! Let's "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered" (Jude 3). Having been washed by Christ's sacrifice and made unleavened in God's sight, let's put out the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, which is false doctrine. And let's *strive together* to keep it out throughout the coming year. (LN)



Paid in Full: The Completeness of the Price Christ Paid

By **Wallace Smith**

If one contemplates it, even for a few moments, a truth about our faith stands out as something truly remarkable. The Creator of all things, the Ever-Living One, became flesh and blood just like us and died to pay for our sins. His sacrifice was prophesied to our first parents (Genesis 3:15). And it is pictured by Passover, the very first of the seven Festivals God uses to explain His plan of salvation (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The price paid on our behalf, to cover our sins, should highlight to us the truly terrible nature of sin. Our Father wants us to fully and deeply understand the connection between sin and its consequences. Jesus Christ led a pure and sinless life—a life of loving obedience and unwavering devotion to God—and it is not a stretch of the imagination to believe that one factor in that feat was the Savior’s perfect understanding of the terrible price sin exacts of the sinner. He had to know that price, because it is a price He had committed from the foundation of the world to pay in full (Revelation 13:8).

When we consider carefully the final events of the last Passover of Jesus’ earthly ministry, almost two millennia ago, we see displayed multiple elements of the price of sin. And we see a Savior who was willing to pay the full price for those He loved.

Let’s take some time to review three of those elements and their reflection in Jesus’ sacrifice, and let’s seek to come closer to God’s own perspective on the consequences of sin.

Sin Causes Death

Death is the most obvious consequence of sin that many associate with Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. And Scripture is certainly clear about it.

Romans 6:23 declares that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And those wages have been earned by each and every one of us (Romans 3:23). Death is a natural consequence of sin. The Lord’s brother, James, details very plainly the pathway we tread to sin: “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:14–15). It is not sin to be tempted—even Jesus Christ faced temptation (Hebrews 4:15). That is part of what makes Him our compassionate High Priest. But He did not entertain the thoughts that temptation engenders.

Had He, even once in His 33½ years of life, committed a single sin, then He, too, would have earned death.

But His death was to be reserved to pay our debt, not His own.

Jesus Christ, the most innocent Man ever to walk the earth, was nailed to a piece of wood—crucified like a despised and hated criminal—and died. While most modern translations make the exact events less obvious than they should be, an accurate account of His death is supported by some of the oldest extant copies of the New Testament. Motivated by unknown reasons, but certainly in fulfillment of prophecy, a Roman soldier approached the Son of God—already hanging helpless and in agony—and

rammed a spear into His exposed side (John 19:34), spilling His blood and fulfilling what was predicted of Him (vv. 35–37). Upon being stabbed, He cried out with a loud voice and died (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46).

For those who are new to this understanding of Jesus' death, I highly recommend the article "How Did Jesus Die?" by Mr. Peter Nathan in the March-April 2015 *Living Church News*. He makes the case plainly, simply and solidly. In the same issue, a letter from our Personal Correspondence Department also goes into detail on the matter, using multiple translations and references to ancient copies of the New Testament.

And it is important. In Hebrews we learn that it is only through the spilling of Jesus' blood—shed for us—that remission of our sins is possible (Hebrews 9:12–14, 22).

But what does this price Jesus was willing to pay teach us about the price of sin?

The profound and unalterable connection between sin and death is easy for us to miss in our day-to-day lives. When sin presents itself as an option, it is usually quite tempting. Even God's word affirms that the choice to sin can bring momentary pleasure and satisfaction—can feel right—though it is pleasure that, ultimately, does not last (Hebrews 11:25).

When making a choice to sin, we are choosing death over life, however deceptively it may be disguised. Solomon tries to make such a connection in the Proverbs, for example, explaining that the home of an immoral seductress promises to be a source of pleasure and delight, but it is quite the opposite. "For her house leads down to death, and her paths to the dead" (Proverbs 2:18). Who would go to the dwelling of a loose woman if they saw adultery and fornication as God does and perceived her home as one filled with corpses?

The price Jesus paid by sacrificing His own life for our sins makes that connection between death and sin very clear. It demands that we recognize the truth that the only death significant enough to free us from the debt we owe was the death of our own Eternal Creator. All other payments would fall short. Only the death of the Ever-Living One was sufficient to pay the price for the sins of all mankind and redeem us from the fate we earned.

The Eternal had to die like the finite, that the finite might have the opportunity to live for eternity. No other payment would suffice to remove the curse that our sins have brought upon us. And He was willing to pay that price.

Sin Causes Physical Suffering, Sickness and Broken Bodies

But Christ's death was more than simply a cessation of life. In the United States, convicts who have been sentenced to death are executed in a manner designed to reflect inherent human dignity and avoid being "cruel and unusual." Most commonly today, the prisoner is given a sequence of chemical injections

designed to first render him unconscious, then to paralyze his muscles so that no spasmodic movements diminish the dignity of his death, and then to stop his heart.

Such a respectfully managed death was the exact opposite of what Jesus Christ experienced.

The Scriptures make clear that first His body was brutally and painfully broken for us. Explaining the symbol of the bread at the Passover the night before He died, Jesus said to His disciples, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you" (1 Corinthians 11:24). And His body was broken, indeed. Pontius Pilate had Jesus Christ scourged before His crucifixion (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1).

Roman scourging was a horrific practice, in which a person—generally with his hands tied above his head and stripped, exposing his body—was whipped by one or two *lictors*. The whipping instrument was usually a specially designed leather whip of multiple strips of varied lengths, in which were embedded small iron balls or sharp pieces of animal bone that would tear and rip at the flesh. In its famous 1986 publication, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," the *Journal of the American Medical Association* described the scourging from a physiological point of view:

As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim's back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock (JAMA, March 21, 1986, Vol 255, No. 11).

Such a terrible treatment calls to mind the prophecy that "His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men" (Isaiah 52:14).

In addition, we are told that a garrison of Roman soldiers created a crown of thorns for Him to wear, spat on Him and beat Him in the head with a reed (Matthew 27:29–30; Mark 15:16–19).

If Christ's death was the only goal, why did it have to be a brutal death involving the mutilation of His body?

There are a number of benefits we, as His people, gain from His willingness to experience such horrors. For instance, when we ourselves suffer, we can look to Him who went through great suffering so faithfully, and find encouragement to face our own trials. One of the keys to suffering in this world with faith intact is to recognize that our Creator was willing, Himself, to become flesh and blood and personally experience suffering—to share in our severe trials with us, so that we might share eternity with Him.

However, Scripture records a very specific role that Christ's stripes, cuts, wounds and bruises serve, described by the Apostle Peter. In his first letter, he speaks of the Messiah "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). Here, the Apostle is referring to the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53:5, which says that "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

How does this price Jesus paid relate to sin?

Take the time to reflect: What is the source of sickness? Disease? Injury? Infirmities?

Such physical afflictions are present in the world due to sin. It is part of the price that is paid for a world in which sin is a frequently chosen option. God speaks of diseases and afflictions as being part of what comes on a people who reject their Creator's commands (Deuteronomy 28:27, 60), and He similarly associates obeying Him with freedom from sickness and with healing (Exodus 23:25). He declares Himself the God "who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:3). In James' instruction to request anointing from the elders of the Church when we are sick, there is a connection suggested between illness and sin: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14–15).

This does not mean that we are always the ones who have sinned when we become ill—after all, if a sick coworker ignores the biblical principle of quarantine (e.g., Numbers 19:13, 20), we may become sick, too! But the cause is still sin. (See also John 9:2–3.)

God did not create a world destined to be infected with disease, sickness and disability. Such conditions in our world are the result of the presence of sin. Broken bodies are part of the price we pay in this world for sin. And Jesus bore *that* price on Himself as well, in His own broken body. He Himself broke none of the laws of God that are meant to protect our health. He ate no unclean thing. He would have treated His body with the respect God expects (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19). The gluttony and abuse of drink and other substances that destroy our bodies would have been foreign to Him. And yet His body was broken beyond what most of us can even imagine.

Why?

As we read earlier from Peter: It is by His stripes that we are healed (1 Peter 2:24). This physical price that is exacted by sin, He paid in full, as well.

Yes, God sometimes allows our sickness or infirmity to continue for His own purposes, just as He did in the case of the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). God has our salvation in mind—with glorious bodies that will last forever—and these relatively few years we now live in these temporary dwellings here on earth (2 Corinthians 5:1–4) are training and preparation for that eternal good.

But this does not take away from the fact that Christ's broken body does thoroughly reflect the consequences of sin that manifest in our flesh and that it represents an important part of the price

God did not create a world destined to be infected with disease, sickness and disability. Such conditions in our world are the result of the presence of sin. **Broken bodies are part of the price we pay in this world for sin.**

He paid. Paul told the Corinthians at the Passover season, "many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [have died]" due to a failure to eat and drink of the Passover bread and wine in a worthy manner. Among the unworthy elements he identifies? They were "not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:29–30).

It is interesting that the Old Testament, as well, describes individuals in need of physical healing due to keeping the Passover in a manner unworthy for the times (2 Chronicles 30:18–20).

Jesus Christ did not deserve to have His body ravaged. But ravaged it was. He was willing to pay that price.

Sin Causes Separation from God

A third unavoidable cost associated with sin is separation from God. It is expressed, perhaps, most simply in Isaiah 59, where the prophet warns the house of Jacob, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (vv. 1–2).

If we refuse to separate ourselves from sin, sin separates us from God.

The purity and holiness of God is clearly and unmistakably taught throughout Scripture. Psalm 5:4 tells us that God will not dwell alongside evil, and after fire struck down Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, for their disregard of His holiness, He warned, "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy" (Leviticus 10:3).

We are assured that, at the completion of His plan for mankind's salvation, He will ensure that His glorious Kingdom and Family are forever separated from evil



(Revelation 22:15). He dwells in “unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:16), and there is no place for wickedness and unrighteousness—sin—in His presence.

Again, in the words of Isaiah, our sins separate us from God. It is part of the price.

And Jesus Christ paid that price, as well.

While hanging there, crucified like a criminal for our sins and not His own, the Savior cried out loudly, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabach-thani?*” which Mark 15:34 tells us is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Jesus was quoting Psalm 22: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?” (v. 1).

We need not presume that Christ was in confusion as to why He was in such a state, but His cry does reveal the burden of that state: He was, at that point, forsaken by God.

It was not that He was not loved by the Father—the One who had known and loved Him from eternity past, in a relationship of intimacy and trust that we mere mortals can scarcely imagine. He was loved dearly. But that distance in that moment was part of the plan. For that distance is part of the price of sin.

Some theologians have resisted the idea that God would abandon Jesus in that moment, saying that it removes from us the confidence we should have that God would never abandon *us*, with an eye to the promise He will never leave us and never forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). However, they miss the point. We can trust that promise *all the more* because Jesus Christ paid that part of the price of sin.

On this point, the Apostle Paul uses clarity of words that offend many, but which are true nonetheless: “For He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to *be sin for us*, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”

(2 Corinthians 5:21). This doesn’t mean that sin is some sort of “substance” that Christ was changed into—which is, of course, patently absurd. But at that moment, on that stake of torture and death, Jesus Christ represented all of our sins. And because sin separates from God, that separation became yet one more aspect of *our* penalty that the Son of God willingly bore for us, so that those who turn to God need not bear it themselves.

Paul explains in Galatians 3:13 that Christ became a curse on our behalf, taking our curse upon Himself, since “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” Paul was referring to Deuteronomy 21:23, which says of those who are put to death and hanged on a tree that “he who is hanged is accursed of God.”

Jesus Christ did nothing to deserve being accursed. He did nothing to deserve separation from God. The profound loneliness He bore in those final moments of His suffering—when He no longer felt the presence of the One He had never been without—was a loneliness He did not earn. We earn it. Our sins separate *us* from God. It is part of the price, and He took on that price willingly so that those who turn to Him need never have to suffer that price, themselves.

Paid in Full

We don’t always appreciate the price that sin exacts. But in His final moments during the last Passover of His earthly life, Jesus Christ illustrated the terrible fullness of that cost. Sin earns for us nothing but death. It destroys us physically. And it separates us from our Creator.

Yet the Son of God faced those consequences and willingly paid in full the price exacted by sin. He did so in order to open the door for us to an eternal future in His Family, in which we will never know sin again. Instead of death, we can enjoy eternal, unending *life* (John 3:16). Instead of the suffering of sick and broken bodies, we can access healing in this life and, ultimately, enjoy bodies of power and glory that will never know pain (1 Corinthians 15:42–44; Revelation 21:4). And instead of separation, we can enjoy dwelling in God’s loving family, alongside Him forever (Revelation 21:3).

This spring, let’s remember and reflect on this remarkable truth. For those willing to repent, turn aside from sin and turn toward their Creator, there remains the opportunity to experience the joy of knowing the debt of their sins has been *completely removed*. Because that Creator, Jesus Christ, was willing to pay the price of sin—and to pay it in full. (U)

50 Years in the Ministry— and Counting

An interview with *Lambert Greer*

In October of last year, Mr. Lambert Greer observed the 50th anniversary of his ordination into the ministry of Jesus Christ. As the U.S. Mideast Regional Pastor, he and his wife Nancy serve congregations and ministers across 13 states, directly pastoring congregations in Indiana, Kentucky and Ohio.

He was kind enough to respond to our request for an interview concerning his personal experiences and what he's learned after a half-century in the service of God and His people. Our questions and his responses are below.

– Editorial Staff

Living Church News: *Where and when were you ordained, and who performed the laying on of hands?*

Mr. Lambert Greer: I was ordained during the Feast of Tabernacles in Long Beach, California, October 25, 1967 into the ministry of Jesus Christ. At that time the Church was called the Radio Church of God. Mr. Herbert Armstrong, who led in the prayer of my ordination, was joined in laying hands on me by the ministry present at the Feast site.

LCN: *How did you come into contact with God's truth?*

Mr. Greer: Through my parents. I was 15 when our family traveled 100 miles to Seattle, Washington to attend our first Church of God service. It was the First Day of Unleavened Bread. My parents were very new and did not realize there would be an afternoon service, but decided to stay. However, being unprepared, they sought something quick and reasonable in price for lunch. I remember my parents being a bit uncomfortable with the stares of a few members walking by as we enjoyed hamburgers on the First Day of Unleavened Bread! On reflection, the minister explained “unleavened” in detail in the afternoon service.

In June of 1960 our family moved to Eugene, Oregon. Our first Sabbath service was in the small white Church building on the west side of Eugene. I attended; my parents gave me no option. This period of my life is well described by Romans 9:16, “[It] is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” I did not resist my parents, nor did I hate the Church. In many ways I enjoyed the Church, the socials, the brethren, the sermons about marriage, the laws of success, and prophecy.

During this time in God's Church in Eugene, there were several remarkable healings. I was inspired by them, but at the same time wondered, rather than believed. I was playing varsity baseball on my school team when I was spiked, opening a ragged cut on my heel just above the shoe. I hid this from my parents, as they often pressured me to quit the school team, even though I did not play on Friday evening or Saturday. The wound became infected, spreading in my body with a cut on my hand turning red with inflammation and infection. This had gone on for days and then in just a few hours I had a fever, felt weak, sick and had streaks running from the infected cut on my heel and my hand. My parents talked of taking me to the hospital, but decided to first call the pastor for anointing. It was late at night when the minister anointed me and prayed for God's intervention. After he left, my parents decided to wait, and—if I did not show improvement in the morning—to take me to the hospital. I fell asleep sometime after midnight and awoke at first light. I could not believe God's healing! My open and festering wounds were healed, the streaks were gone, and only two areas of pink skin remained. It is one thing to hear of a healing, but it is totally different when it is *your* flesh and *your* body.

LCN: *What prompted you to go to Ambassador College?*

Mr. Greer: It was a combination of many different influences—my parents, friends in Church, the ministry—and my atti-



tude had changed toward the Church. It was 1962 and I was 17 years old, and it was Southern California, beautiful campus, employment on campus, why not? I was very excited by the prospects of Ambassador College, but I felt I would not be accepted. Even as I applied I was thinking I would only attend for one or possibly two years.

LCN: How would you describe your experience at AC?

Mr. Greer: Life changing! Growing up Catholic, I never read the Bible. My first test in Freshman Bible class prompted the instructor, Mr. Roderick Meredith, to ask me to come to his office. The meeting was short. He informed me that without improvement I would fail his class. God made me a student of His word. I read for hours beyond my class assignments, but it was later that I came to appreciate the understanding God granted as I read. God called me, and my life and heart changed.

LCN: Do you have any memories you would like to share of Mr. Herbert Armstrong?

Mr. Greer: Mr. Herbert Armstrong was my instructor in the Christian Living class, and I was a guest at a reception in the Armstrongs' home, with a group of classmates. My experience was common as a student. This changed in my sophomore year. I was told Mr. Herbert Armstrong wanted to see me in his office. I entered with anxiety, only to have Mr. Armstrong stand up from his desk and begin to apologize. The previous day in a campus forum, Mr. Armstrong announced from a

list which students had been selected to transfer to the new Ambassador College Big Sandy campus the following year. I had prayed and fasted several times that I would have this opportunity. I was very disappointed when the list was read. As Mr. Armstrong continued, he explained he was beginning to have difficulty seeing with one eye and had skipped my name in going down the list. I was going to Big Sandy! I think my joy and excitement prompted Mr. Armstrong to sit down and visit with me for quite a while.

I sincerely believe God put in my heart the desire to go to Big Sandy. I worked on the grounds the summer prior to the opening of the campus in the fall of 1964. We worked hard during the day and were isolated, living on an undeveloped campus. In the evenings there were no distractions, and I turned to God in study and prayer.

On the first day of the opening of the Big Sandy campus, I shared lunch with the beautiful coed who became the love of my life, my wife Nancy. God blessed our home and marriage. We were blessed with a daughter and two sons. Today we have seven bright and healthy grandchildren.

LCN: Out of your 50 years serving in the ministry, could you share some of your favorite memories?

Mr. Greer: During the summer between my junior and senior years at Ambassador College, I was sent to Phoenix, Arizona as a ministerial trainee. The pastor I worked under taught me by example the bonds that can and should exist in family, both our personal family and our Church family.

After graduation in 1966, I was sent back to Phoenix to serve as a ministerial assistant. During the time I served in Phoenix, Mr. Gerald Weston was sent as a ministerial trainee to Phoenix. We shared a summer working together, which has linked our lives in friendship and we established a bond in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Certainly, one of my favorite memories is being a part of the beginning of the Living Church of God. Dr. Doug Winnail and I were asked by Mr. Meredith to come to San Diego a few days in advance of the first Council of Elders meeting of the Living Church of God. Mr. Meredith asked us to answer the many calls coming to his home from the ministry and membership from around the world. Mr. Meredith, Mr. Carl McNair and the supportive office staff were busy looking for office space, a Sabbath hall and making the needed physical arrangements for the Work. The first Council of Elders meeting was incredibly inspiring. It wasn't just the reality of the support and unity of so many ministers and brethren, it was a oneness of spirit to not in any manner hurt the Church of God or any of God's people, including those members who were not with us and did not support Mr. Meredith's leadership.

In the first Council of Elders meeting the name “Living Church of God” was unanimously approved. I was invited to go along to witness the submission of the “Name Reservation Request Form” to the State of California authority. At the counter, the completed form was handed to a clerk. I remember she took the form to her desk and viewed a computer screen for a while, then asked a supervisor to join her. Together they looked at the application and computer screen and there was a brief conversation. The document was signed and returned, officially reserving the name, “Living Church of God.”

As a minister I have witnessed a number of healings which those who do not share our faith could not explain. In the Living Church of God one of our members was rushed to the hospital with heart pain. The events of her dramatic healing occurred while she was in ICU and under the care of medical specialists. One of her daughters, not a member of the Church of God, was a head nurse in the operating room for cardiac patients at the hospital. After the mother was stabilized and moved to ICU, the family was informed by the cardiac surgeon reviewing the charts and monitoring her heart trauma in the Emergency Room that their mother would need major heart surgery. I went to ICU and anointed the mother. I received a call the next day—the mother’s kidneys had shut down. A specialist was called in, but her condition worsened. The specialist told the family their mother was very critical and may not survive even another day, as she had not responded to any treatment. I went to ICU and again anointed the mother late in the afternoon.

The next morning, she was stronger and to everyone’s amazement her kidneys were functioning—not barely, but in a normal manner. That afternoon all of her vital signs were so strong they moved her from ICU. I was told by family that the kidney specialist said he could not explain the turnaround. Her recovery was so fast that the very next day the heart surgeon scheduled testing to begin preparation for major heart surgery. With all the testing complete, the cardiac surgeon set up a meeting to include the other daughter, who was a member of the Living Church of God and a licensed physical therapist. The surgeon pulled out the test results and was studying them as the daughters sat waiting in the same room, watching him study scans, etc. He did this for a much longer period than expected. When he turned to face the daughters, he said, and I paraphrase, “I don’t understand. Your mother’s heart appears to be in a condition that is probably better than either of you.” This wonderful lady, known for her love of the Church, her brethren and the word of God, was sent home, discharged from the hospital the next morning.

I have so many fond memories: the joy of sharing the truth with a new person, of counseling and baptizing them, being a part of couples joining their love in marriage, the ceremony

of the blessing of the children, and especially having a part in leading others in worshipping God.

LCN: You were active in the online community early when the Worldwide Church of God began changing doctrines. What stands out most to you from that time?

Mr. Greer: My activity in the online community centered around the doctrinal changes, so I would like to address this first. The doctrinal changes were introduced with a publication sent only to the ministry, “News and Reviews,” and via the presentations of the regional “Ministerial Conference Programs.” Both the publication, subsequent presentations and even sermons given introducing doctrinal changes used an approach of ridicule, name-calling and deprecating humor as a method of persuasion. Many are influenced by this approach of using emotion to influence the thinking of others. It is humanly effective. But our emotions should not influence our judgment in understanding God’s word.

Two of the Ministerial Conferences, 1993–1994 and 1994–1995, included presentations and workbook handouts titled “Hermeneutics.” Hermeneutics is defined as “the study of the methodological principles of interpretation (as of the Bible).” The first year this was presented, I recognized accepting “new rules” for understanding the Bible was foundational, and it was the foundation of the doctrinal changes. I decided that if these rules were used by Christ and the apostles of God in the New Testament, then I would find them clearly demonstrated when they quoted the Old Testament. I started in Matthew, going through the entire New Testament and reviewing every quoted passage to find evidence of these “new rules.” In the *New King James Version*, every New Testament quote of the Old Testament is in italic print, providing a simple road map for my study. I found none of the rules presented in the Hermeneutics workbook being used in the Bible. At the next Ministerial Conference, 1994–1995, following the second presentation of “Hermeneutics,” I went to the evangelist who presented Hermeneutics II, and explained my process and findings. I did not know what to say when he responded, “Well, I know that.”

What I did find strengthened and confirmed the doctrinal teachings given to us under Mr. Herbert Armstrong’s ministry. I became much more aware of the logic and reasoning of God’s servants in the New Testament. My study helped me to appreciate why Mr. Armstrong would often begin sermons and doctrinal discussions in Genesis. In my work as a minister, I generally was answering questions of difficult scripture or the false teachings of this world. It opened my understanding to realize that when we frame our thinking

on the concepts of modern-day Christianity, we risk overlooking evidence in the Holy Scriptures.

The lessons I learned were exercised in the online community discussions and greatly aided me in personally understanding and addressing those who challenged the teachings and doctrines taught to us by Mr. Herbert Armstrong.

LCN: *What do you find most satisfying about being in the ministry and serving God's people?*

Mr. Greer: The work of the ministry to teach, baptize and be helpers of the joy of those God is calling. I also appreciate how much I learned from the brethren. If we accept God's Word, Ephesians 4:15–16, we realize every member has a share that contributes to the Body of Christ. If we turn our head and don't accept that we can learn from every member, even from the children (Matthew 18:2–5), we block out lessons and understanding that God intends for us to experience in preparing us for His Family. It is why attending Church services and fellowshiping with our brethren is so important to what God is doing in our life.

LCN: *What are some of the challenges?*

Mr. Greer: In today's ministry, distance and travel are a challenge. However, I find great joy in being a minister of Jesus Christ.

In the later years of my ministry in the Worldwide Church of God, I often felt more like a social worker and counselor for all areas of human weakness: addictions, conflict within families and homes, depression, anger management, sexual orientation and more. These were expectations of the new Worldwide Church of God leadership. There was a turning away from the promises of God, from the foundation of living faith, putting *God* first, trusting in Him and walking in His ways, so that He will be a light to your steps and will bless you when you come in and bless you when you go out (cf. Deuteronomy 28:6).

LCN: *How has the world changed since the earliest days of your ordination?*

Mr. Greer: We have many more conveniences and material blessings than we did in 1967, but we live on a much more dangerous and ungodly planet. There are many prophecies in the Bible we read in the context of the future, "the days to come," which now describe "our world today."

In the 1960s, the cell phone, Internet, texting, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, video gaming and other social media were not yet invented. This has become the technology that

is changing our world. The most dramatic change has been the influence this technology has on our children and young adults—actually, on everyone everywhere. Technology has opened the door for the expression of uninhibited human nature. Evil, hatred, anger, disrespect and offence instantly reaches across the rivers, mountains and oceans into the hands of a child.

LCN: *With that in mind, what advice would you give to God's people today?*

Mr. Greer: My advice would be to seriously listen to the words of Christ when He spoke of the end of the age in Matthew 24:4, "Take heed that no one deceives you." During the past 50 years I have known many, including ministers and leaders in the Church of God, who did not heed the words of Christ.

Revelation 18 reveals a future judgment of Babylon, and there is a warning to all who live in the days of her evil influence: "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (v. 4).

In Matthew 24, Christ gives us an overall perspective and approach for the end time. In verse 45, "Who then is a faithful and wise servant...?" and in verse 46, "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing."

LCN: *After 50 years in the ministry, what do you look forward to the most about the future of the Church?*

Mr. Greer: We can have great faith in meeting the challenges ahead, not because of ourselves, but because we know God prophesied that what we seek to do will be accomplished: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

Scripture clearly reveals that, through the protection of God, a remnant of His servants will remain alive for the return of our Messiah. Consider these excerpts from God's Word: "...for the elect's sake, those days will be shortened" and "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" and "...the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them" (Matthew 24:22; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

I have the same desire as all who believe these words and live with faith in God: to be alive and witness how God through His Spirit will work in His people to accomplish the prophesied events which will be fulfilled. The scripture in Zechariah 4:6 is clear: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts." ^(LN)

The Crucifixion Darkness and the Events Surrounding Christ's Sacrifice



By **Wyatt Ciesielka**

Awesome signs and wonders accompanied the death of the Messiah (Matthew 27:51–53). The earth shook. The temple veil was torn in two. The tombs were opened and, later, many of the saints were resurrected from the dead! Even the sun “failed” for about three hours. The Creator of the universe and “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” had died (John 1:29).

The amazing truth—that God gave His Son to die for the sins of the world—is something for which Christians are *deeply* thankful, and as we grow in spiritual maturity and understanding, we become even more grateful for the love that the Father and the Son have for Their creation and for each one of us individually. As Psalm 145:3 records, “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.”

While it is the actual sacrifice, death and resurrection of our Savior that is the greater reality and subject of the gospels, the specific events surrounding His crucifixion are also worthy of study and meditation. How can we know the year of His crucifixion? How can we understand the timing of when He was in the grave? And what about the signs that accompanied His death? As is always the case, a close study of Scripture and an honest look at history reveals that the Bible remains without error in its original writing. And there is one event that accompanied Christ’s sacrifice in particular—the darkness that fell on the earth—that is especially instructive to study, because it helps us answer some of the above questions.

The Counterfeit Solar Eclipse Theory

Some believe that it was a solar eclipse that marked the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Was it? Were the gospel writers *wrong* in their observations? Did they confuse a routine, natural solar eclipse—moments when the earth’s moon blocks the light of the sun—for a miraculous sign from God? Or can we trust that Scripture is inerrant and can we believe the literal biblical account? These are *very important* questions because not only does the solar eclipse error cause *confusion in dating Jesus’* ministry, it also *ignores historical accounts and science* and, most problematically, it *contradicts Scripture!*

There is a *truth* about the darkness during the crucifixion that has been *obscured* for nearly two millennia and continues to be obscured today! What *really* happened at Jesus’ crucifixion was both amazing and was well-documented—and *it was no mere solar eclipse!* It is no wonder that the false solar eclipse narrative has been presented for nearly 2,000 years—Satan wants to undermine the authority of Scripture and the deity of the Son of God!

Supporting the “solar eclipse” theory, many attempt to date the crucifixion to either 29AD or 33AD because of known solar eclipses in Judea at those times. In fact, numerous lists of “famous eclipses in history” will place the crucifixion of Jesus as possibly occurring on one of those dates. As *Space.com* noted, “Some historians tie the crucifixion to a one minute 59 second total solar eclipse that occurred in the year 29 C.E., while others say a second total eclipse, blocking the sun for four minutes and six seconds, in 33 C.E. marked Jesus’ death” (“The 7 Most Famous Solar Eclipses in History,” November 13, 2012). Even NASA lists 29AD and 33AD as possible years of the crucifixion of Christ on their list of “Solar Eclipses of Historical Interest.”

But as will be shown, the 29AD and 33AD accounts do not match the biblical account. Moreover, the Bible does not recount an eclipse-event of less than a mere two minutes! And according to NASA and NOAA, the longest duration of a solar eclipse is just over 7.5 minutes. But as Mark 15:33 reads, “Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.” That is a full *three hours!* While God *could* make an eclipse last three hours, as we will see, we can know from the biblical account that this is *not* what happened at Jesus’ crucifixion nearly 2,000 years ago.

Ancient Accounts

The solar eclipse theory actually goes back almost 2,000 years and was argued by such famous figures as the Greek scholar (and Christian apologist) Origen. In the third century, Origen wrote in *Against Celsus* that the darkness, earthquake and opening of tombs was all *proof* that the crucifixion had indeed happened. In his writings, Origen referred to an earlier account by one Phlegon of Tralles, who stated that it was an *eclipse* during the reign of Tiberius—probably in 29AD—that accompanied the crucifixion of Christ. However, the “eclipses” that Origen and Phlegon are referring to were natural solar eclipses, such as those listed by NASA on its website. But, as we will see, when darkness fell upon the earth for three hours, it was not—and *could not have been*—a solar eclipse that occurred during Jesus’ crucifixion!

Notice another ancient account, one that gives more details and precisely matches the gospel records. The respected third-century historian Sextus Julius Africanus wrote, “[I]n the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth—manifestly that one of which we speak. But what has an eclipse in common with an earthquake, the rending rocks, and the resurrection of the dead, and so great a perturbation throughout the universe?... But it was a darkness induced by God, because the Lord happened then to suffer” (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, p. 137).

Africanus was quoting an earlier historian named Thallus. Thallus wrote his history in 52AD, which was only about twenty years after the crucifixion, at roughly the same time the Apostle James wrote his epistle and Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Galatians, and about a decade before Matthew, Mark or Luke were written! Notice that Thallus points out that the “eclipse” occurred during the time of a “full moon,” and that it was no normal eclipse: *it was “a darkness induced by God.”* Thallus understood what we also know today: that solar eclipses only occur when the moon is between the earth and the sun, which is impossible during a full moon. In ancient Greek, the word translated as *eclipse* does

not always mean that the moon has blocked out the sun from shining on the earth, or that the earth has blocked the sun from shining on the moon. The word originally simply meant “to fail” or “to come to an end” such as in Luke 22:32 where Jesus said, “But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not *fail*.” The Greek word for “fail” in that verse is a form of *éklepsis*, from which we get “eclipse.”

Thallus’ writings reveal that, like many of the learned ancients and like the gospel writers, he understood the basics of astronomy. In fact, later in the same passage of his writings, Thallus comments, “Let no one now think us unskilled in the calculations of astronomy” and then goes into considerable depth discussing things such as intercalary months, lunar periods, the exact computation of lunar months and years, and the counting of years from Nehemiah and Artaxerxes to the reign of Tiberius Caesar.

Simply stated, Thallus knew this was no regular eclipse, but rather that the sun failed because of the death of the Savior. Thallus understood the simple concept that a solar eclipse occurs when the moon comes *between the sun and the earth*, and therefore this would be impossible during any Passover, regardless of the year! As the gospel records make clear, the crucifixion occurred during the Passover season, and that is always during the time when there is *a full moon*. Thus, this was no “solar eclipse.”

Dating Jesus’ Ministry and Crucifixion

At the age of thirty (Luke 3:23), in the fall of 27AD, Jesus Christ was baptized by John (cf. Matthew 3:13–16). Based on the gospel accounts, the prophecy of the Messiah in Daniel 9, and an understanding of the observance and the meaning of the annual Holy Days, the Church has long taught that this began Jesus’ three-and-a-half year ministry and that Jesus was crucified in the spring of 31AD. (For a more detailed study on the dates of Jesus’ ministry and crucifixion, please read our booklet *Easter: The Untold Story* and “The Hebrew Calendar and God’s Church” in the March-April 2000 *Living Church News*.) What do we know about the timing of Jesus’ crucifixion?

The Bible is clear that, just as Jesus promised, He would spend three full days and three full nights in the tomb, just as Jonah spent in the body of the fish. This is a crucial point because according to Christ Himself, *this was the sign of His messiahship*: “But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’” (Matthew 12:39–40).

Then, just as He also promised, exactly at the end of those 72 hours—*not an hour early and not an hour late*—He was res-

urrected. As is often overlooked, Jesus was *already risen* and had *already departed* from the grave when the women arrived to embalm Him early Sunday morning: “Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.... And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him’” (Mark 16:2, 5–6). He was already gone from the tomb! He had *already* been resurrected!

Scripture tells us that Jesus was crucified on the preparation day before a “Sabbath.” Notice Mark 15:42, for example: “Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath....” But the “preparation day” referred to in this passage was not a Friday as many presume, and the Sabbath referred to here was not the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath (although many Bible commentaries are confused on this point). Jesus was crucified on Nisan 14, during the daylight period of the Passover. In 31AD, the Passover (always on the 14th day of the month of Nisan, also known as the month of Abib—see Leviticus 23:5) occurred on a Wednesday and was the “preparation day” before Thursday, which in 31AD was the *annual* Sabbath (or “high day”) beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31).

Jesus was the ultimate and perfect Passover sacrifice. He was “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), and the authenticating sign He gave was that He would be in the tomb for three full days and three full nights—a full 72 hours, like Jonah was in the fish! *It is simply impossible for a full three days and a full three nights to fit between Friday afternoon (before sunset) and Sunday morning (before sunrise)* in the manner of worldly “Good Friday” and “Easter Sunday” celebrations. A 31AD crucifixion fits the prophesied dating of Jesus’ ministry and exactly fits the timing of the Passover, the annual Sabbath beginning the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the weekly Sabbath! It is impossible for a 29AD or 33AD crucifixion to meet all of these criteria! Those who attempt to place Jesus’ crucifixion in these two years because of documented solar eclipses are simply at odds with Scripture on multiple levels!

Satan wants to counterfeit and deceive. Just as Satan has tried to substitute Sunday for the Sabbath, and a false version of Christianity for the true, he also attempts to counterfeit in small but important details, including the details around the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ.

Whether suggested innocently or not, the *erroneous* “solar eclipse” assertion has ancient roots going back nearly 2,000 years. It eventually became dogma and is occasionally heard in “mainstream” thinking today. However, the solar eclipse

claim denies other ancient accounts, has led many to inaccurately date the year of Jesus’ crucifixion, and most importantly, contradicts the explanation given in Scripture.

Reflecting the Magnitude of the Messiah’s Sacrifice

When “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) became our perfect Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), the creation groaned at the death of the Savior. When the Messiah died, the Father marked His death with awesome signs! “Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:51–53). When the Son of God died for the sins of man, darkness fell over the land, and it appeared for a period of three hours that *the sun had failed!* This was no solar eclipse!

The “solar eclipse theory” is another lie propagated by the one Jesus calls the father of lies (John 8:44). Satan continually attempts to attack the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ (1 John 4:3) and the awesome reality of what the Son of God did when He died for the sins of the world. When the Creator of the universe (Colossians 1:16), who became the Savior of the world, died that Passover, the reaction in creation and the abundance of miraculous signs left even Roman soldiers fearfully amazed and convinced that they had indeed murdered the Son of God! “So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:54).

Christians are profoundly thankful, not for the awesome signs that accompanied Christ’s sacrifice, but for the fact that *the Son of God did give His life for us*. We are thankful for the amazing truth that the Father loved the world enough to give His Son as a sacrifice for the sins of all—and that the Son loved the world enough to become that perfect, willing sacrifice! “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Thank God and Jesus Christ for Their love for us and for our Savior’s perfect sacrifice. And thank God that the very same Savior will return, this time as Lord of lords! Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, He overcame Satan, He died and was resurrected, and He sat down at the right hand of the Father to prepare for His return with a reward for His saints (Hebrews 1:3–4; John 14:3). And He *will return* and establish His Father’s Kingdom over all kingdoms and all dominions at the appointed time. (L)

Vanuatu Living Youth Camp

The Vanuatu Living Youth Camp was held at the Living Church of God centre in Orap, from **December 12–15, 2017**, with great success. Fifty-two campers and 20 staff members, mainly from the island of Malekula, really enjoyed the three-day camp. The staff arrived on Monday, a day before the youth. The program began on Tuesday evening with fire lighting and song performances from our Bible Hymnal. The opening message was delivered to the campers on Wednesday morning by Elder Jerry Sam, followed by a Bible Study until lunch. All the games were planned for the afternoon sessions. Daily activities commenced with a 30-minute devotion period, clean-up, breakfast, then showers. After showering, the Bible Study lasted from 7:30 to 11:30 a.m., with a 30-minute break for refreshments. In the afternoons, the activities included volleyball, beach volleyball, canoeing and the water game “Treasure Hunt.” Many friendships and skills were developed throughout the three-day camp, along with everyone having lots of fun. Everyone is doing well and looking forward to the Youth Camp in 2018. Many thanks to all those who gave their time and effort to make this camp possible and successful.



Weddings & Anniversaries

On November 25, the Louisville, Kentucky congregation celebrated **Mr. and Mrs. Lambert Greer's** 50th year in the ministry. The Greers were presented with signed cards and gifts, including a gift certificate from the five congregations they currently serve: Berea, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Louisville and Terre Haute. Mr. and Mrs. Greer expressed their gratitude to God for allowing them to serve the brethren for such a long time. All the congregations feel very blessed to have them as their ministry family! After the presentations, all enjoyed a meal together.

Mr. James Meakin from the U.K. and **Miss Veronica Clayton**, from Michigan in the United States, were married on August 27 under sunny blue skies by the shores of a small lake near Brighton, Michigan. About 120 guests traveled from all over the U.S. and from several other countries to attend

the outdoor wedding, while others watched live over the Internet. The ceremony was performed by Presiding Evangelist Gerald Weston. Following the ceremony, the guests enjoyed a picnic-themed reception, speeches, a fun photo booth, lawn games and dancing. Later, another reception was held for the new couple in Bournemouth, so the U.K. members could view the wedding video, meet the new bride and toast the happy couple. Mr. and Mrs. James Meakin now reside in Kettering, England, where he works at the LCG Office. Veronica is enjoying the adventure of being a wife *and* living in a new country.

Mr. and Mrs. Cornelis (Leona) Heykoop of the St. Catharines, Ontario congregation, celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary on January 7. The congregation surprised them after services on December 30 with a special cake and a card signed by the brethren. Long-time members, they serve the brethren in St. Catharines as deacon and deaconess. Mr. and Mrs. Heykoop have been blessed with five children and twelve grandchildren.

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

ORDINATIONS

Mrs. Anneleise Roemer was ordained a deaconess on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, in Panama City Beach, Florida, by Area Pastors Anthony Stroud and Ed Breaux. Mrs. Roemer serves the brethren in the Montgomery, Alabama congregation.

Mr. Richard George was ordained a deacon and **Mrs. Denise DeSimone**

was ordained a deaconess on the Sabbath of November 11, by Area Pastor Jason Fritts. Mr. George serves in the Norfolk, Virginia congregation and Mrs. DeSimone serves in the Richmond, Virginia congregation.

Mr. Cary Bracken was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of December 2 by Area Pastor Martin Fannin and

Elder Travis Nicholson. Mr. Bracken serves in the Blairsville, Georgia congregation.

Mr. Jody Mayes was ordained a deacon on the Sabbath of December 9 by Regional Pastor Rand Millich and Elder James Wells. Mr. Mayes serves in the St. Joseph, Missouri congregation.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Eric (Julia) Lundgren, of the Columbus, Ohio congregation, welcomed their first child, a baby boy, **Noah James** on December 28. All extended family members are excited about the new addition to the family.

In Loving Memory

Mrs. Therese Arseneault, of the Quebec City congregation, died on November 1, at the age of 76. Mrs. Arseneault was born in 1941, grew up in Montreal, Canada, and was married in 1967. She and her husband were married 50 years and had two sons, including Mr. Marc Arseneault, Area Pastor in Canada, two daughters, and eleven grandchildren. She was able to see all of them again before she died. She had a wonderful life and fought a great fight. Mrs. Arseneault was baptized in 1975 and always had the mission of the Church at heart, asking how she could serve and pray for others. She was so looking forward to the Kingdom and the resurrection, and at her next conscious moment she will be there.

Mr. Steve Morrison, 70, of the Columbus, Ohio congregation, died unexpectedly on January 13. Baptized in 1966, he was a dedicated member of God's Church and a deacon. He is survived by his wife Connie Johnson Morrison, four children, ten grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Mr. Morrison's fine example of a Christian life and service are greatly missed by his family, friends and all of the area brethren.

Mrs. Emalene (Penny) York, a member of the Banning, California congregation, died November 25 at the age of 92, just a couple of weeks before her 93rd birthday. She had been a member of the Church of God since 1974. Mrs. York was pre-

ceded in death by her husband Harold in January, 2013. She is survived by two daughters. She was a deaconess, and served faithfully until age and health problems made it necessary for her to relinquish her duties to "the younger women." She will be very much missed by all who knew her.

Mr. John Wayne Cox died on December 3 at the age of 73, after a short battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife Freda, son, Travis, and two grandsons. Mr. and Mrs. Cox were married for 52 years. They were baptized in 1975. Mr. Cox was a deacon in the Macon, Georgia congregation. He was a kind and giving gentleman who, along with his wife Freda, often hosted the brethren in their home after services.

Mrs. Jo Milne, of the Jacksonville, Florida congregation, died on December 19 at the age of 83. She had been baptized in 1961 and was a faithful Christian until her death. Mrs. Milne will be very much missed.

Mrs. Alice Nixon, of the London, Ontario congregation, died on December 24 at the age of 89. She was baptized in 2003, but because of poor health she had not been able to attend services for the last few years. She was predeceased by her husband John.

Mr. Melvin Young, 97, of the Knox, Indiana congregation, died peacefully on January 4. He was a faithful member and pillar of God's Church for 55 years. After serving in the U.S.

Navy during World War II, he enjoyed working in a variety of occupations in the maintenance field. He was most pleased with the fact that, other than to attend Church, he never missed a day of work in his life. All who knew him will miss his wonderful example of service and his ever-ready sense of humor. He was preceded in death by his wife Altha, one son, and his siblings. He is survived by two sons, one daughter-in-law, eight grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren, and six great-great-grandchildren. Mr. Todd Lawrence conducted the memorial service.

Mr. Kevin Scott Smith, of the Dallas, Texas congregation, died peacefully on January 8 at the age of 60. He was born in Buffalo, New York, but reared in Pasadena, California, where he attended Imperial Schools. He was baptized in 1979 and ordained a deacon in 2015, serving the Dallas and Big Sandy, Texas congregations. Mr. Smith was a marketing operations and advertising professional. He loved to travel, play golf, and especially to spend time with his family and friends. He is survived by his beloved wife of 37 years, Debbie; one son, one daughter, one granddaughter, one sister, two brothers, and numerous other relatives. He was preceded in death by his parents, Robert and Shirley Smith, and one brother.

Mr. Willem (Bill) Heykoop, age 91, of the St. Catharines, Ontario congregation, died peacefully on January 25, a cher-

ished father of eight loving children, 34 grandchildren, and 25 great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife Wilma. He was a faithful member of the Church of God, baptized in 1976. He was a pillar in the congregation and family, and will be missed by all who knew him. Mr. Shane Kruse conducted his funeral service.

Mrs. Janice Theresa White, 50, of the Morgantown, West Virginia congregation, died at her home with family by her side on January 30. Mrs. White was a 1989 graduate of Ambassador College. She was devoted to God and her family, finding great joy in homeschooling her children and tending to the needs of her household. She reveled in the beauty of God's word and creation, and focused her family around healthful living, positive relationships, and spiritual growth. Her selfless dedication to the well-being of her loved ones, her indomitable strength in the face of adversity, and her steadfast trust in God's love will be a continuous inspiration to all who knew her, and now greatly miss her. Besides her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Garrett, Mrs. White is survived by Donald, her husband of almost 25 years, one son Thomas, and four daughters: Casey Pulis and her husband David, Sarah, Rachel, and Grace, as well as one grandson, four brothers, and many nieces, nephews, other relatives, and friends. Area Pastor Phil Sena and Pastor Jonathan McNair officiated at her funeral.

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LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing" (Jeremiah 10:23–24).

Pray for a tender heart that you might learn the less painful way, knowing that God loves you and that any correction He gives will only be for your ultimate good. As Paul instructs, "For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:31–32).

Consider the similarities between sin and leaven as you put it out of your home. Tackle the areas of the home where it is most likely to be found, such as the kitchen and dining rooms. You will never get every crumb out, nor should you be so focused on the physical that you have no time for the spiritual. Teach Johnny and Mary to clean their own rooms. Dad, do your part. Don't

leave it to your wife to do it all. Avoid extremes, such as going through the cuffs and pockets of all your clothes. Could a crumb be in one? Possibly, but is that the approach God is truly asking of us?

At the beginning of this article, I mentioned that four types of people will read this. The first are those who do little deleavening and who will take this message to mean that they are doing too much. That is what they want to hear, because they want to be justified in doing less. The second category is those who go overboard and sweep the *whole* house if the unlikely mouse runs across the kitchen floor and out the patio door.

The third category is those who think some drastic change in doctrine is taking place and this article is evidence. Frankly, brethren, these points have been explained in one way or another since I began attending in 1964. Some individuals tend to go more toward one ditch, while others lean the other way.

Then, finally, there are those who demonstrate good balance. We are all trying to do it as Christ did it when He lived as a physical human being. I think we all know that He put the leaven out, but He did not follow the oppressive traditions of the Pharisees and scribes (Matthew 15:1–20).

This last category is composed of those who read with a humble spirit, seeking the mind of Christ. They follow God's command to put physical leaven out of their homes. Some will no doubt do a better job than others with this physical task. Older adults and younger children may not be able to do as well as those in the middle, but God looks on the heart and they learn from this task. They also carefully seek out the spiritual leaven in their lives, and when they discover it, they determine to change. They go on to perfection. They grow in grace and knowledge. I pray that we all fall into this fourth category, just as in the Parable of the Sower. (LN)

COMMENTARY

The Ultimate Loss

Profound sadness is the deep emotion one feels when we learn of the death of a child of tender years. It is an emotion that once gripped me strongly, when I learned of the death of two children, ages nine and twelve, a little boy and a girl having fun in the snow, sledding and doing what kids do until—they fell through the ice in a pond and drowned. One was pronounced dead at the scene and the other died a little later in the hospital, as efforts to resuscitate failed.

The ultimate loss, young lives cut off in a moment, leaving so much undone, leaves such a hole in the lives of the parents, grandparents and loved ones.

Then, while processing the enormity of this tragedy for that family, another tragic, untimely death occurred closer to home, in my own community. A five-year-old child was mauled and killed by two pit bull dogs in a horrible incident. The emotion, the loss, and the litigation for that family will go on for years.

Similar scenes of loss and grief are probably playing out where you live. It seems to be a part of the human condition.

Why? How could a just God allow these things to happen? The true answer is the only genuine comfort available to those who suffer such losses.

When sin entered the world, the curse that it brings came with it, including death, beginning with righteous Abel, slain by his brother Cain. The Bible is filled with accounts of suffering down through the ages, as mankind rejected God's ways, and that rejection in turn cut them off from Him.

King Solomon understood this when he wrote, "But time and chance happen to them all... so the sons of men are

snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them" (Ecclesiastes 9:11–12). And, in the book of Hebrews, Paul explained that "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

In the book of Revelation, chapter 20, the Apostle John describes the resurrection of the just, the resurrection of the "rest of the dead," and the resurrection to judgment. The first resurrection he describes (vv. 4–5) occurs at Christ's return and is for the saints of God who have died in the faith (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).

The second group John describes (Revelation 20:5) are those who live again after the thousand years are ended. They are raised up to physical life to have a chance to live out their lives without the evil influence of Satan and with an understanding of the Creator's plan for mankind. This is the resurrection that infants and children who are cut off in this life by untimely death will enjoy. This resurrection will include all those who never had an opportunity to understand God's plan of salvation in this life.

The final resurrection (vv. 14–15) will be for the judgment of those incorrigibly wicked people who knowingly reject God's plan and way of life. You can read about them in Revelation 21:8. They will be burned up in the lake of fire, which is the second death. This is the ultimate loss, from which there is no return.

So, while we grieve and mourn the loss of loved ones, especially young children, we can take comfort that God, in His mercy, has provided a way for them to have their opportunity to live out their physical lives in peace and safety, and to accept or reject His Way of life. As Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:18: "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

—J. Davy Crockett III

The above is adapted from one of the many commentaries discussing vital topics facing our world, available at the lcg.org and TomorrowsWorld.org websites.