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Are You an Armstrongite?

Dear Brethren and Friends,

The various Sabbath-keeping Church of God groups owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Herbert W. Armstrong. Standing virtually alone at first—enduring persecution and physical and financial hardships for many years—they worked together as a team to restore many truths to the Church and to revive the Work of God. A real awareness of the true Creator God, of the importance of the Ten Commandments and an entire obedient *way of life*, and of the Sabbath and Holy Days as they picture the great **plan** God is working out among men—*all* of these truths and many more were shared with millions of people all over the globe.

Mr. Armstrong was used mightily by God as a modern "Apostle of faith." And for those who were willing to repent and to grow, he energized and inspired tens of thousands in the Body of Christ to make a real effort to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the whole world. Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent getting out Christ's message to millions of people of every race, religion and background.

In the early days, most brethren called Mr. Armstrong "Brother Armstrong," or they would address Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong as "Herbert and Loma." A closeness and friendship prevailed that partly faded out later on. As the Work grew, a sense of adulation crept into people's attitudes toward Mr. Armstrong. Over time, in the eyes of many, Mr. Armstrong and his son Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong became "superstars." Slowly, great pride began to build among the membership that since we had the Truth of God—and especially the "sign" of the Sabbath—we were God's "special people." Many older men told me, in effect: "Mr. Meredith, since I keep the Sabbath and follow Mr. Armstrong I know I will be in the Kingdom!"

Yet, instead of being thankful and being humble about being called to the Truth, some of these people were smoking, drinking heavily, slapping their wives around and were generally arrogant and even somewhat worldly in a number of ways. Certainly, with *this* kind of hardheaded arrogance, their "Sabbath-keeping" was not going to save them!

Also, the "setting of dates" began to creep in. Mr. Armstrong and a few of the older ministers began to set specific dates for the end of the Work, for Christ's coming and for a series of punishments to begin on our nations. Of course, that was unwise, as we learned when those dates

turned out to be **wrong!** Certainly, that weakness is understandable since even the Apostle Paul apparently expected Christ to come in his lifetime as you read in 1 Thessalonians 4 and elsewhere. Even so, many of us in the Church began to think of ourselves too much as God's "pet" people, took liberties we should not have done in setting dates, and *looked down* in a wrong way on "worldly" people. We did not retain the sense of deep *humility* and *forgiveness* we had experienced at baptism! Again, the idea that the Armstrongs were "superstars" even in God's sight caused a sense of arrogance among many in the membership. Sensing this, Mr. Armstrong's elder son, Mr. Richard David Armstrong, wrote a powerful article that was published in the *Good News* magazine in August 1958. Even today, this article should be helpful to many of our older members—and instructive to newer members who never knew Mr. Armstrong or Dick personally. Here are the beginning paragraphs of that most helpful article:

"Do you know what Church you belong to? When your friends ask you, 'What is your church? What denomination do you belong to?'—what is your answer? Do you tell them you are an 'Armstrongite?'—or a member of the 'Armstrong Movement'—the man that preaches over the radio on the *World Tomorrow* program?

Just what do you tell them?

First, let's look at the meaning of the word 'church.'

As it was originally used, the word 'church' meant a group of people, no more, no less. It did not mean a holy group or a Christian group—merely a group of people. That is the meaning of the original Greek word, *ekklesia*.

If you call yourself solely 'a follower of Herbert W. Armstrong' or any other man, then you are not a follower of Christ—hence not a Christian! The word Christian implies one who is a follower of Jesus Christ, who patterns his life after the life Christ led, who believes His teachings and follows His precepts.

As popularly applied, the word 'church' is taken to mean a group of people bound together by a common creed or religious belief. There are many different churches of this world, each with its own name, each with the name of the particular person, creed or custom it follows. What, then, is our creed and whom do we follow? Whose group are we and, to whom do we belong?...

Notice 1 Corinthians 1:12–13 where Paul says, 'Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.'

Is Christ divided? Was Herbert W. Armstrong crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Armstrong?

We are not to follow man, but we must follow Christ even as He followed the Father.

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“Testing” Your Conversion

Editorial

By Roderick C. Meredith

What is the one key area of Christian life which shows whether a person is *deeply converted* or not? Sabbath keeping? Showing love? Being zealous for the Work?

While all of those fruits are important, by themselves they may be misunderstood or misguided. For instance, many Orthodox Jews keep the Sabbath even more strictly—at least according to their understanding—than we do. And even some Buddhists and people of other religions around the world may—*on the surface at least*—seem to have more kindness and love than even many true Christians. Also, some people I have known were *very zealous* for the Work of God because of *their personal involvement* in it—because it made them feel more important to see “their” activity growing in power and prestige.

So what is the key area of Christian behavior that deeply denotes one’s deep conversion? After being in God’s true Church for 52 years and being very well acquainted with all of the leading ministers, it has become increasingly clear to me that *one key element* denotes real conversion in a person—probably more than any others.

What is that key character trait?

To find the answer, let us consider carefully a number of fundamental teachings in God’s inspired Word. Notice Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” God says it is the

“fools” who despise wisdom and instruction. In other words they *will not take correction*. In verses 25–26, we read: “Because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my **reproof**, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes.” Even when professing Christians will not take God’s *reproof* and *correction*, He says that He will “laugh” at their calamity!

In the foundational teaching that Jesus Christ gave in the Sermon on the Mount, He tells us: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:4–5).

Many biblical scholars acknowledge that a primary meaning of “mourn”—as used in this passage—is a profound *repentance* and deep *sorrow* for one’s sins. The word “meek” indicates a *humility* and *teachableness* before God. Taken together, these verses certainly show that a true follower of Jesus Christ will be humbly sensitive to God’s will *and quickly willing to repent when sin or self-will is pointed out*.

Are you like this?

It would be wrong to do so, but I could name dozens of leading ministers, administrators and teachers in God’s Work in years past who were very definitely **not** willing to take correction—**not** willing to humble themselves and submit to God’s will or to take correction based on His Word. When I tried to explain to one leading minister why his son—a known fornicator—should not be appointed to an important position, he *yelled* at me: “You don’t understand the relationships of fathers and sons!”

Later, this man had to take a lesser position and a smaller office for a while. He exclaimed: “*I can’t take this anymore!*” A very few years later, he surreptitiously joined in an effort to overthrow Mr. Herbert Armstrong and cause a split in the very Work of God.

Another leading minister, who always tried to keep others away from Mr. Armstrong so he could *control* him, told me later on: “You’ve got to learn how to *manage* Mr. Armstrong!” Of course, I did not follow that advice as I prayed that God would “manage” Mr. Armstrong—and that I would continue to give him straightforward advice even though it might not always have been popular in every case.

Through much experience, I found that if people like this—even ordained ministers—would *not take correction* or heed instruction—then it usually turns out that they would leave God’s Church within a few years and also *leave much of the Truth* that they had taught and preached themselves!

God reveals to us in Isaiah 57:15 the kind of attitude He wants: “For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him *who has a contrite and humble spirit*, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’” The word “contrite” has to do with deep, heartfelt repentance—a willingness to acknowledge wrong and to *take correction!* This basic attitude of *total surrender* to God,

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The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Vital lessons for our time

By Douglas S. Winnail

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus spoke the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1–13). For many, it is a nice little Bible story about lamps, oil and getting ready for a wedding; yet the parable is actually a *warning* about conditions that will exist at the *end of the age*. The target audience is the generation that will see the return of Jesus Christ! The parable is linked with prophecies about the *last days* that are coming to pass today (see Matthew 24; 25).

But just how does the parable relate to us? It is often assumed that Christ spoke in parables to *clarify* the meaning of His teachings, yet Scripture reveals *just the opposite* (see Matthew 13:10–17). The Bible indicates that God has hidden the true understanding of Scripture from the world, but He reveals that vital information through His Spirit to those He is calling (1 Corinthians 2:7–16). Those willing to be led by the Spirit of God will search out and understand the real meaning of Scripture. What can we learn from the parable of the ten virgins? What vital lessons, *relevant to us today*, can we draw from this parable?

The Ten Virgins

We first need to consider: *who* are the ten virgins? The parable pictures ten virgins who go out to meet the bridegroom (Jesus Christ). The ten virgins have been described as “the expectant Christian community” (see *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*). Many who call themselves Christian today expect the Messiah to return, but the parable—like numerous other scriptures—indicates that *many* professing Christians who are looking for Christ’s return *will not receive* the reward they are anticipating (Matthew 7:21–23), because they have not learned vital lessons contained in this parable. They will be shocked and surprised, but that is what the Bible clearly states.

We are told that five of the virgins were *wise* and five were *foolish*. Just what does it mean to be wise, or foolish? How does the Bible define these terms? Into which category do you fall? Jesus explains that the wise are those who not only listen to His teachings, but *actually follow* those teachings (Matthew 7:24–29). Jesus defines a foolish person as one who hears but *does not follow* the word

of God! Fools concoct reasons and excuses why the commandments and instructions of Scripture no longer apply to us today.

The book of Proverbs provides additional definitions. A wise person fears to disobey God’s word and *seeks* knowledge, wisdom and understanding (Proverbs 4:4–9; 9:10), but “fools *despise* wisdom and instruction” (1:7)—they are not willing to put forth the effort required to obtain these important needs. A wise person will seek advice and listen to correction (Proverbs 10:8), but fools *ignore* advice and resent correction (Proverbs 11:14). A fool reacts to situations with immediate anger, yet a wise person ignores insults and exercises self-control (Proverbs 12:16). Fools are always right in their own eyes and are fully convinced about their own opinions, yet a wise person is willing to listen to counsel (Proverbs 12:15; 28:26). A wise person looks ahead and anticipates where decisions and actions will lead, and strives to avoid making mistakes, but fools do not anticipate the consequences of their actions and thus repeatedly wind up in trouble (Proverbs 22:3). Our choice of friends also influences what we become, as “he who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20).

The lesson from this part of the parable is to be alert to the category in which our actions place us! Are we seeking to be led by God’s Spirit and to follow His revealed instructions, or are we continually seeking a way around Scripture so we can do our own thing? The parable indicates that upwards of 50 percent of those who consider themselves members of God’s Church could be making foolish decisions! That should be a warning to us as we approach the end of the age.

Oil or No Oil?

The parable indicates that the foolish virgins took no oil for their lamps, but that the wise took an extra supply as they waited for the bridegroom to come. Commentaries offer various ideas about what the oil symbolizes (e.g. grace or good deeds), yet the Bible indicates that oil is symbolic of God’s Spirit. When Saul and David were chosen as kings of Israel, Samuel *anointed*

them with oil and “the Spirit of the LORD” came upon them (1 Samuel 10:1–6; 16:13). The Bible states clearly that if we want to be in the kingdom of God, we must *bring forth fruits* (Matthew 3:8; John 15:1–8). Galatians 5:22–26 lists the fruits of the Spirit, which God wants us to display. These include love [an outgoing concern for others], joy, peace, patience, faithfulness and self-control. God’s Spirit is reasonable and easily entreated (James 3:17). Other prominent fruits of God’s Spirit include strength of conviction and a sound, *discerning* mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Those who lack these fruits become impatient, will not listen to input, will focus on themselves, will let go of their faith, will compromise

ing. Down through the ages, many have tried to predict when Christ would return. The disciples initially thought that He would return in their time (Luke 19:11), however, the Bible indicates that there would be a *long* delay (Matthew 24:48; 25:5, 14, 19). What we do during that delay reveals much about our conviction and depth of conversion. Most people are flushed with enthusiasm when they first learn the truth, yet that often fades. Jesus warned that some would begin to ignore, and break, the commandments, and would slip back into self-indulgent worldly ways (Matthew 24:45–51). He also warned that some would stumble and give up the faith as a result of trials and persecution, and that

God gives His Spirit to those who *obey* Him (Acts 5:32). Without God’s Spirit, we are not really Christians (Romans 8:9). If we let our oil supply run low, the fruits of God’s Spirit will not be evident in our lives and we will not be ready to meet Christ when He returns. We will have foolishly wasted our opportunity to be in the first resurrection as firstfruits!

their convictions and will fail to discern truth from error. They allow their supply of oil [God’s Spirit] to run low and become exhausted.

God’s Spirit is a *dynamic quality*—it ebbs and flows in our lives—depending on how we take care of it and use it. This is why Paul admonished Timothy to “*stir up* the gift of God” (2 Timothy 1:6). We are also warned: “*Do not quench* the Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:19). We stir up God’s Spirit through regular prayer, Bible study, fasting and striving to exercise the fruits of that Spirit—acting in a loving and patient manner, even when our normal tendency would be to fly off the handle! This is what it means to be “led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:14). If we are led by the Holy Spirit, we are children of God and heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:14–17). God gives His Spirit to those who *obey* Him (Acts 5:32). Without God’s Spirit, we are not really Christians (Romans 8:9). If we let our oil supply run low, the fruits of God’s Spirit will not be evident in our lives and we will not be ready to meet Christ when He returns. We will have foolishly wasted our opportunity to be in the first resurrection as firstfruits! This is another vital lesson we can learn from the parable of the ten virgins. When was the last time you checked *your* oil?

A Revealing Delay

One of the most crucial aspects of the parable is what happened when the bridegroom *delayed* his com-

others would veer off course in the pursuit of wealth and temporary worldly pleasures (Matthew 13:18–23). It is sobering to notice, in the parable of the ten virgins, that they *all* went to sleep while they waited for Christ’s return!

The recent history of the Church of God is also instructive. Church writings and teachings caused many to conclude that Christ might return in the 1970s. When this did not happen, some began to branch out into their own religious endeavors. Mr. Armstrong felt that Christ might come in his lifetime. When he died and Christ had not returned, some began to question whether Mr. Armstrong might have been wrong on many other issues. The ensuing doctrinal discussions and changes led to splits and more fragmentation. Today, many have rejected clear commandments and instructions of the Bible, and now believe that all that is necessary is to “love the Lord and believe in Jesus.” Much of this has happened because Jesus Christ did not return when many expected He would. Our challenge, and another lesson of the parable, is to hold on to the truth and to our convictions—and to continue doing the work that Jesus commanded—*until* He returns! The Bible states that once we have made a commitment, if we begin to look back and think about what might have been, or what we have missed, we are not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62). Are we awake and focused on the goal of the kingdom? Or have we gone to sleep? Are

we wallowing in nostalgia for what we gave up? This parable should be a wake-up call!

The Midnight Cry

The parable implies that the *slumbering* virgins were *all* taken by surprise, encountering the bridegroom in the middle of the night. How does this relate to you and your situation? Do you recognize the *significance* of the times in which we are living? Are you aware of specific prophecies being fulfilled, almost daily, right in front of your eyes? Or have you been lulled to sleep by those who are saying that all prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus, and that Old Testament prophecies are not relevant to the beliefs of New Testament Christians?

Do you recognize *where* the work of God is being done today? Who is *really* teaching according to Scripture (Isaiah 8:20), and who is watering down the truth and changing doctrines? Who is preaching the *true* gospel that Jesus and the Apostles preached (Mark 1:14–15), and who is preaching a *different* gospel (Galatians 1:6–9)? Who is warning the world of the prophetic significance of today's news events as Christ did (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), and who is preaching in Christ's name (Matthew 24:5) about *another* Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:1–4)? Can you identify those who are wolves out to divide and devour the flock of God? Can you discern those infected with a Laodicean attitude? We need to be able to recognize the “midnight cry” when we hear it, because God's servants will be actively involved in delivering this warning (see Isaiah 58:1; Ezekiel 2; 3; 33). However, Satan will also have false and deceived ministers active at the end of the age—and they will *deceive many* who have begun to slumber, just like the ten virgins! We cannot afford to go to sleep at this crucial time in history (see 1 Thessalonians 5:1–6)!

The Lamps

The lamps of the ten virgins illustrate another important lesson. The lamps of the wise virgins who brought oil were burning brightly. Filled with oil, these lamps were able to be a light to the world, fulfilling Christ's expectations for his chosen disciples (Matthew 5:13–16). If we are nourishing God's Spirit, others will see in our lives the fruits of love, obedience, faith and good works. Regrettably, the lamps of the foolish virgins were going out because they were running out of oil. If we begin to compromise the truth of God, and begin to ignore or disobey His laws and instructions, we begin to lose the Spirit of God. The fruits of God's Spirit will begin to disappear, and will be replaced by self-centered thoughts and actions

that are often vain and ugly (Galatians 5:19–21). Sexual sins, arguments, heresies and divisions will thrive, and unity will evaporate in churches and families (1 Corinthians 1:10–17). Individuals who let their lamps get into this condition will not attend the wedding banquet, and will not fulfill their calling to become firstfruits in God's kingdom. This is a serious warning! What is the condition of your lamp? Is it burning brightly, or is it going out? If you are not sure, ask others what they see. Ask God to show you the condition of your lamp, and be ready to listen for His answer.

Cannot Borrow—Must Buy!

A particularly sobering lesson of the parable is that whatever amount of faith, courage, character, conviction, preparedness, good works or degree of conversion you have achieved, it *cannot* be loaned, shared, given to or borrowed by someone else! These are very personal qualities that are part of the spiritual house that we are each building in cooperation with God (1 Corinthians 3:5–17). However, Scripture also reveals that whatever we build will be *thoroughly tested*. If it stands the test, we will be rewarded, but if it fails the test we will lose the reward. So how we build—and the materials with which we build—are very important. We must build *carefully* and choose our beliefs *wisely*!

In this regard, we each need to ask some very personal questions. Have I found the Truth, and has my mind been opened to understand that truth? This is a special opportunity that *few* are being given today (Matthew 13:10–17; John 6:44, 65). Have you invested heavily—in your heart, mind and energies—in this “pearl of great price” that you have been offered (Matthew 13:44–46), or do you have “itching ears” that would rather listen to “new truths” and fables (2 Timothy 4:3–4)? Have you *carefully proven* what you believe, or do you *follow your feelings* and listen to the latest doctrine or self-appointed prophet or teacher who comes along (1 Thessalonians 5:21)? Are you seeking first the kingdom, or do you make other priorities more important in your life (Matthew 6:33)? Are you striving to grow close to God while He can be found, or are you putting off the most important decisions in life until later (Isaiah 55:6–9)? Are you eagerly anticipating and actively preparing for Christ's return, or are you hoping for more time to enjoy the transient pleasures of this world? Jesus said that our treasure—our investment of money, time and energy—will be where our heart is (Matthew 6:19–21). We may fool others, but we

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God Protects His People!

Has God promised to protect His people? If so, does He ever withdraw that protection?

By Raymond F. McNair

How can God's people learn to cope with the threat of terrorism—which many in America and around the world are beginning to experience, now that international terrorist organizations have openly vowed to terrorize major nations of the civilized world? Does the Great God promise to *protect* His people during the awful mind-numbing *terrors* soon to be visited upon this earth's inhabitants?

“Perilous Times” Have Come!

Two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul predicted: “But know this, that in the last days *perilous times* shall come. For men will be... unholy, unloving, unforgiving... *brutal*, despisers of good...” (2 Timothy 3:1–3). Because of our egregious national sins, are our peoples now beginning to experience great “terror,” as one of the “sevenfold” *curses* foretold by Moses 3,400 years ago?

With international terrorism now threatening the very *foundations* of modern civilization (including our American way of life), many now wonder whether the prophecies of Leviticus 26 are beginning to be fulfilled. Did God's Word foretell the coming of such *terrorism* thousands of years ago? God solemnly warned Israel: “But if you do *not* obey Me, and... all these *commandments*... I will even appoint *terror* over you, wasting *disease* and *fever* which shall consume the eyes and cause *sorrow of heart*” (vv. 14–16). Are deadly fevers, disease epidemics and terrorism destined to increase alarmingly among our people, until we cry out to Almighty God in desperation (2 Chronicles 7:14)?

Even though many prophecies describe unspeakable horrors at the close of this age—affecting the whole world (Leviticus 26, Matthew 24:21–22; Revelation 3:10; chap. 8 & 16)—can God's people be assured of His protection during that time of unprecedented *plagues* and *distress*? In recent years, some have foolishly assumed that the LORD has *not* promised to *protect* his people in a “place of safety” during the terrible time of the “Great Tribulation” and “day of the LORD” (Matthew 24:21–22)!

Some even think it *wrong* for Christians to expect God to provide a secure refuge during the horrific days ahead. According to this reasoning, God's people should *not* expect to be “*hid* in the day of the LORD's wrath,” as predicted by Zephaniah (Zephaniah 2:3, KJV). Those who faithfully exhort God's people to “watch and pray” that they might be worthy of God's protection during the Great Tribulation and Day of the LORD are sometimes accused of preaching a “save-your-own-skin” gospel. Some point to Christ's words which, if taken *out of context*, might imply that it is wrong to want to be saved from the *prophesied horrors* by being taken to a “place of safety,” where God's people will remain for 3 1/2 years (see Revelation 12:12–17).

Jesus' Command to His People

Notice Jesus' command to His disciples: “*Watch* therefore, and *pray* always that you may be counted *worthy to escape all these things* that will come to pass...” (Luke 21:36). Christ's words clearly refer to the ter-

rifying events leading up to and *including* the Great Tribulation and Day of the LORD (Matthew 24:21–22; Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7). The prophet Zephaniah also foretells God's protection: “Seek ye the LORD... all ye meek of the earth.... It may be that you will be *hidden* in the day of the LORD's anger” (Zephaniah 2:3)!

But some have *misinterpreted* Christ's words to mean that we should *not* pray “to save our own skins” during the traumatic times of distress yet ahead: “For whoever desires to *save* his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.... (Mark 8:35–37; Matthew 16:26–27; cf. 10:39). Christ said that *worldwide evils* preceding His Second Coming would be similar to rampant wickedness that existed in the time of Noah (Luke 17:26–27). God sent Noah to warn the pre-Flood peoples of a *universal destruction* that would soon come upon the earth, *if* they continued their *violence* and *perversions*. But they rejected Noah's warning. What did God then do? He told Noah and his family to take shelter in the ark before He destroyed the unrepentant people of the earth (Genesis 6:13–18; 7:1–7). God mercifully granted Noah, his wife, their three sons and spouses a way to *escape* the horrors of that worldwide flood.

Jesus also predicted that widespread wickedness at the close of this age would closely parallel the wicked deeds that occurred in Sodom (Luke 17:28–32). As his nephew Lot and his family lived in Sodom, Abraham questioned the LORD about His intent to *destroy* everyone in that city: “Would You also destroy the *righteous* with the *wicked*? Suppose there were fifty

righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?” (Genesis 18:23–24). “And the LORD said, ‘If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes’” (v. 26). Abraham then asked God if He would spare the city if only 45, or 40, or 30, or just 20 righteous people were in Sodom. God assured Abraham that He would (vv. 27–31). Abraham then said: “Suppose *ten* [righteous] should be found there?’ And He said, ‘I will not destroy it for the sake of *ten*’” (v. 32). But there were not even *five* righteous souls living in Sodom! Consequently, God’s angels urged Lot and his family to quickly escape from Sodom, else they would be consumed in the iniquity of the city (19:15–22).

Christ said that “on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.... Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:29–32). She “looked back” and perished (Genesis 19:24–26). God had mercifully offered Lot, his wife, and two daughters a way to “escape” the imminent holocaust soon to engulf the doomed Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19).

Will God Provide a Way of Escape?

In ancient times God warned His servants so they could *escape* impending calamities, but will He fail to provide a refuge for His people in our time? God solemnly declares: “*I do not change*” (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). As we have seen, the LORD delivered Noah’s family at the time of the Flood, and Lot’s family just prior to Sodom’s destruction. Jesus also warns His people to “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32)—who was reluctant to forsake her family ties in the perverted city of Sodom! It was in that context that

Christ added: “Whoever seeks to *save* his life will lose it, and whoever *loses* his life will preserve it” (v. 33). Furthermore, the Bible tells us that, as Lot delayed, the angels of God warned him to quickly *flee* from that city (Genesis 19:1–22). “And while he *lingered*... the men urged Lot to hurry, saying, ‘Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city.’ And while he lingered [an angel] said, ‘*Escape for your life! Do not look behind*....’” (vv. 15–17).

Jesus warned His disciples: “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies [Roman legions surrounded Jerusalem in 66–70AD].... Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains....” (Luke 21:20–21). The Jerusalem Christians heeded Christ’s command to *escape* to the mountains before the full fury of the Roman legions butchered hundreds of thousands of Jews, demolished their Temple, and totally devastated Jerusalem (Matthew 24:2; Luke 19:41–44). Historian Edward Gibbon wrote: “The Jewish converts, or, as they were afterwards called, the Nazarenes [Acts 24:5]... retired from the ruins of Jerusalem to the little town of Pella beyond the Jordan, where that ancient church languished above sixty years in solitude and obscurity” (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1, chap. 15).

Early Christians fleeing from Jerusalem were to serve as a *fore-type* of Christians fleeing to a God-appointed refuge at the end of this age, when some of God’s people will *escape* to a *place of safety*—where they will be protected for 3 1/2 years from the wrath of the Devil and his armies, just before Christ returns: “But the *woman* [church] was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a *time* and *times* and *half a time*, from the presence of the serpent” (Revelation 12:14).

However, verse 17 reveals that some of the saints, including the “two witnesses” (Revelation 11:1–12), will *not* be in a *place of safety* during this 3 1/2 year period of Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.

Thousands Die as the Twin Towers Collapse

Many ask: Why would God allow thousands to die by the hands of cold-blooded terrorists? God could have *prevented* this, if He had so desired—for “*with God all things are possible*” (Matthew 19:26). America, the mightiest nation on earth, was *unable* to *prevent* the deaths of more than 3,000 innocent victims (at the Pentagon and Twin Towers)—in spite of the efforts of many thousands of government employees: CIA and FBI agents, national guardsmen, airport security guards and state and city police. However, Christ stated: “The things which are *impossible* with men are *possible* with God” (Luke 18:27). Since God *could* have prevented the wanton destruction of more than 3,000 lives on September 11, but did not do so, He must have had a *purpose* for *nonintervention*—a reason only fully known to Him! We must never usurp God’s prerogative of judging those who die in such calamities (Matthew 7:1; James 2:12–13).

Let us consider the collapse of Jerusalem’s ancient Tower of Siloam. After being informed of Herod’s slaughter of the Jews, Jesus asked them: “Do you suppose that these Galileans were *worse sinners* than all *other Galileans*, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no.... Or *those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell* and killed them, do you think that they were *worse sinners* than *all other men* who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you *repent* you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:2–5). Christ explained that *they* were no more sinful than “other men... in

Jerusalem.” Surely Jesus would say to us today: “Do you suppose the unfortunate victims who died in the Twin Towers were *worse sinners* than the other people who were in New York City? I tell you, no!” God’s Word says: “There is *none righteous*, no, not one” (Romans 3:10)—“For *all have sinned* and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23; Isaiah 53:6).

Notice Dummelow’s excellent commentary on the fall of the Tower of Siloam: “It is plausibly conjectured that this tower was part of the waterworks and aqueduct which Pilate built with the sacred money of the Temple treasury (*Korbanas*), to the great scandal of pious Jews.... The idea was very common among the Jews that *great calamities* are a proof of *great sin*. This was the view of Job’s friends, who were convinced that his great misfortunes argued him a great sinner (Job 4:7; 8:2–14, 20; 22:5). Our Lord on several occasions strongly opposed this view (see John 9:2–3). *Sometimes, no doubt, suffering is a direct punishment for sin, but not always, perhaps not generally*. In the case of the *righteous* it often arises from the *sin of others*, or is permitted as a *trial of faith*, or as a means of *refining* and purifying the character. A righteous man’s sufferings may even be directly due to his righteousness, as in the case of our Lord [and] the apostles [who suffered martyrdom]...” (A *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, edited by Dummelow, 1915).

God’s Promises to Believers

Has Almighty God promised *protection* for His people? If we expect God to *protect* and *deliver* us, is it vital that we *obey* His Word, and *please* Him? “And whatsoever we ask we receive from Him, because we *keep His commandments*, and do those things that are *pleasing* in His sight” (1 John 3:22). “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His

will, He hears us” (5:14). “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, and the people whom He has chosen as His own inheritance.... Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him... to *deliver their soul from death*.... He is our help and our *shield*” (Psalm 33:12, 18–20).

Does God’s Word say that He provides *angelic protection* for His people? “The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and *delivers* them.... Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:7, 19; cf. Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:15). Five examples of angelic deliverance are: Lot’s family (Genesis 19); Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3); Daniel in the lions’ den (Daniel 6); Peter from Herod’s prison (Acts 12) and Paul from death in a shipwreck (Acts 27).

The wonderful 91st Psalm has much to say about God *protecting* His people: “I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my *refuge* and my *fortress*; My God, in Him I will trust. Surely He shall deliver you from the *snare* of the fowler and from the perilous *pestilence* [e.g. anthrax and smallpox].... You shall not be afraid of the *terror* by night, nor of the *arrow* [bullet] that flies by day, nor of the *pestilence*... in darkness, nor of the *destruction* [such as the Twin Towers tragedy] that lays waste at noonday. A *thousand* may fall at your side, and *ten thousand* at your right hand; But it shall not come near you.... Because you have made the LORD... your habitation, no *evil* shall befall you, nor shall any *plague* come near thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra [cf. Mark 16:18].... Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will *deliver* him....” (Psalm 91:2–14). What wonderful promises!

How many times have God’s people been *unaware* of God having sent His angels to protect them from

threats against their lives, terrible *accidents* or other calamities? “Bless the LORD... and forget not all His *benefits*... who *redeems your life from destruction*...” (Psalm 103:2–4). How thankful we ought to be for His many *blessings* and *deliverances*!

Our Great God solemnly promises: “I will *never leave you* nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is *my helper*; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5–6). God is *omnipotent*, *omniscient* and *omnipresent* (Revelation 4:8; 19:6; Jeremiah 23:23–24; Psalm 147:4–5). Christ tells us that “not one [sparrow] falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered...” (Matthew 10:29–30). God dearly loves His people: “*Precious* in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15). Furthermore, the Almighty says: “The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself *strong* on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9)!

You may ask: “Since God is all-powerful, and since He has charged His angels to protect His people, how could He have *allowed* the Old Testament prophets and saints to be killed (Hebrews 11:32–40)—as well as allowing Jesus, the Apostles and New Testament saints to suffer martyrdom?” God will protect His faithful servants from serious *injury* or *death*—*unless* He knows that through their *death*, He will be glorified, and the faith of many others will be strengthened thereby! Only He can know when He will withdraw His protection from a servant of His—for an ultimately good purpose—even as He *forsook Christ* before His death (Matthew 27:46), in order to work out His great purpose (Hebrews 5:8). God will richly reward all who sacrifice their lives in His behalf (Hebrews 11:36–40).

The prophet Isaiah said there are times when: “The *righteous perishes*,

and no man takes it to heart... while no one considers that the *righteous* is taken away from evil..." (Isaiah 57:1). God allowed Satan to afflict Job—up to a point (Job 1:7–12; 2:3–8). He *allowed* Stephen to be the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:54–60). Christians must always bear in mind that each of us is “a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1); and each must be willing to lay down his life, *if God so wills*, in order to accomplish some *transcendent good*—just as Christ gave His life for mankind—that all might have a chance to be saved (John 3:16; Isaiah 53:3–12). That is what all of the Old Testament and New Testament martyrs did.

Our goal must always be that “Christ will be magnified in [our] body, whether by *life* or by *death*” (Philippians 1:20), always remembering that “our Lord Jesus Christ... died for us” (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10). We are told that “Christ in you [is] the hope of *glory*” (Colossians 1:27). All true Christians have *unshakeable faith* in their God that neither “tribulation... distress... persecution... famine... nakedness... peril... sword... nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to *separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus...*” (Romans 8:35–36, 38–39)!

Our loving Father *has* promised us protection and deliverance from *all our trials* (Psalm 34:19). His angels will always be near us, preventing anything happening to us that is contrary to God's express will (v. 7)! He keeps us under His protective “wings”—secure behind His almighty “shield” (91:4; cf. Genesis 15:1). Let us *love* God, *obey* Him, and *serve* Him with all our heart (Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:5)—never casting aside our “shield of faith” (Ephesians 6:16). Then we can be certain that “The eternal God is [our] *refuge*, and underneath are [His] *everlasting arms*” (Deuteronomy 33:27)! ☞

Biblical Examples of Divine Punishment

Is it true that there are many examples in the Bible in which humans suffered horribly as a consequence of sin? Adam and Eve and their firstborn son suffered because of their sins (Genesis 2; 3). God used the “great Flood” to wipe all humanity off the face of the earth—because of their “violence” and “corruption” (Genesis 6; 7; 8). Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their great wickedness (Genesis 18; 19; Ezekiel 16:49–50). The book of Exodus (chapters 7–14) shows that Pharaoh, his people and his army all suffered because of Egypt's sins (Exodus 7:4–5; 12:12). Two of Aaron's sons died because they offered “strange fire” before the LORD” (Leviticus 10:1–7). Some of Israel's chief leaders died a horrible death because of their sin (Numbers 12–16). The wicked Queen Jezebel died an awful death for her many evils (2 Kings 9:30–37). And wicked Haman was hanged after plotting to kill tens of thousands of Jews (Esther, chapters 3–9). Hundreds of scriptures reveal that the peoples of Israel and Judah were both punished severely for their sins against God!

In New Testament times, Christ predicted *God's awful judgment* (hundreds of thousands died in Jerusalem in 70AD) upon those who rejected Him (Luke 13:34–35). And *Judas Iscariot* died a horrible death as a result of his covetousness, and his betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 27:3–10; Acts 1:15–20). Annanias and Sapphira also died because of lying to God's Spirit (Acts 5:1–11). The Bible mentions many other examples of sin bringing horrible consequences (see Romans 5:14–21; 6:23; Galatians 6:7–8; Ezekiel 18:4, 20).

Even so, Christians must always be very careful *not to judge* matters that are beyond their knowledge of the facts. Humans often lack sufficient facts to enable them to rightly judge specific acts: “The *secret things* belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children... “ (Deuteronomy 29:29; cf. Ecclesiastes 8:16; John 7:24).

On one occasion when Christ's disciples saw a man “who was blind from birth,” they asked Jesus: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Christ answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned [to cause blindness], but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:1–3). Jesus then miraculously gave the man eyesight. It is very human for us to think those who have terrible things happen to them, their families, or their property, are being punished by God. But Jesus Christ said: “Do not judge according to the *appearance*, but judge with *righteous judgment*” (John 7:24). He also said: “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1). And the Apostle James tells us that “judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful” (James 2:12–13).

“The LORD is *gracious* and full of *compassion*, slow to anger and great in *mercy*. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.... The LORD is *righteous* in all His ways, *gracious* in all His works.... He will *fulfill the desire* of those who fear him; He also will hear their cry and *save them...*” (Psalm 145:8–9, 17–19)!

Report from Finance and Planning

By D. Jerry Ruddlesden

Let us give thanks to God for His many blessings! Here at Headquarters, we pray for His guidance every day to use the resources He has provided to do His work—to go through open doors to preach the Gospel and to feed the flock. And we thank you all for your prayers and support, which have blessed the Work with income growth this year. The following table illustrates the income growth from January to November of 2001, compared to 2000 actual income and the 2001 budget:

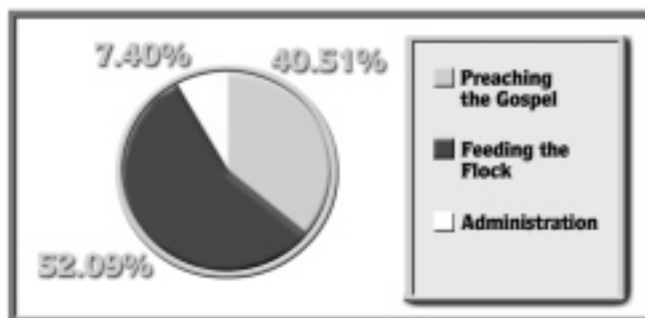
Income Type	% Increase in 2001 over 2000	% Above 2001 Budget
Donation Income	11.1	6.7
Holy Day Offerings	6.5	4.8
Total Income	10.1	6.3

Another interesting trend to note is that since September, donation income has increased by 19.44 percent, and that in the last year more than 1,770 non-members have donated to the Work—more than half of whom are considered “co-workers,” having made large or multiple donations.

But how are we doing with expenses compared to the budget? Through November 30, expenses are just .01 percent above budget. How have expenses remained so close to the budget? We are constantly evaluating how we support and accomplish the Church’s mission (as found in Matthew 28:18–20 and Mark 16:15). For example, looking at the price of postage and constantly changing postal regulations, we can take advantage of more discounts as we mail out more items, if we follow all those regulations very carefully. Private mailers also change their prices as their business changes, and as a result we were recently able to save the Canadian Work more than 20 cents per magazine in mailing costs, without compromising delivery time. A 20-cent savings may not seem like a lot, but this quickly adds up when the number of magazines going to Canada is 12,000-plus—and growing!

A percentage breakdown of 2001 expenses through November 30 shows that more than 40 percent of expenses go toward preaching the Gospel (television, print media, radio and the Internet), 52 percent to feeding the flock (local congregation, youth programs, ministerial expenses, assistance to the needy and Feast expenses), and less than 8 percent to all administrative costs (e.g. accounting, finance and legal expenses).

As we plan our expenses, we base our cash-flow projections from fall to fall (e.g. Feast to Feast). History has shown us that the low point for cash-flow typically occurs a week or so before the Feast of Tabernacles, because of prepaid expenses related to the Feast. By keeping this low point in mind as income increases, we



can project the degree to which we can safely increase expenses. With this year’s increased income, and on-budget expenses, we have been able to increase our outreach this year. You may have noted Dr. Meredith’s announcing new television stations, and the increased number of telecast responses and growing *Tomorrow’s World* magazine circulation. We have also been able to assist the international areas, as conditions continue to deteriorate in many countries around the world.

We are also deeply grateful for a recent estate gift by a longtime Church member. Proceeds from this generous gift should allow us to double the funds we have set aside for future growth, for funding some special one-time projects, and to provide for growth in television and the Internet.

From time to time we receive inquires from individuals who wish to make a gift to the Church through a will or another legal instrument. As a result, we hope to put together a “planned giving” package in the near future, but at the moment you may direct your questions to the Church’s Legal Liaison by phone at (858) 673-7470, x227, or by e-mail at legal@cogl.org.

In closing, a special thank you is in order for Lisa Parman, who for the last two years helped with Purchasing and Fleet operations. She has moved back to Seattle, Washington, to be close to family. With her departure, we now welcome Lehman Lyons as our new Buyer and Fleet Manager. Mr. Lyons is from South Carolina, so his family will add some southern charm to our diverse office. Of course Mr. Apartian still says “Vivé la France!” but we are working on him! ☺



International Corner...

European Report

—By Douglas Winnail

The year 2001 was a year of breakthroughs for the Work in Europe. Living Church of God is now formally registered in the UK, Ireland, Holland and France, and is beginning to operate in Germany under the auspices of the Dutch organization. I was appointed the Regional Director for Europe and relocated to Ireland in May. I received travel clearance for the UK in December, and began making regional visits in the UK before the end of the year. In June, we began holding monthly combined services for the congregations in Ireland. In October, Living Church of God held a Feast of Tabernacles in Ireland and one in France. Czech, Dutch and German websites became operational, and advertising programs are continuing in the UK, Ireland, France and Germany. The *Tomorrow's World* program is broadcast over Radio Star in Northern Ireland.

Prospects look interesting for the year 2002. We are again planning two European Feast sites. The site in Ireland will again be Arklow, a quaint coastal town nestled against the Wicklow Hills, about an hour south of Dublin. The continental site will be in eastern France, close to the German border near Strasburg. The closest international airport to the French feast site is Frankfurt. Paris and Brussels are a bit further away.

Europe continues its march towards an ever-closer union. The long-awaited common currency, the euro, became a reality on January 1, 2002. Plans continue for the creation of a European military force (a

European army), which is to become operational in the next several years. Work has also begun to formulate a European constitution. On a recent trip to the continent, I shared a train compartment with an older German couple. When I asked the gentleman (a retired executive) what he thought of the emerging European Union, he responded: "We need it to survive economically, and hopefully we have fought our last war—but I am not so sure!" He clearly understood the rivalry and jockeying for power that is going on behind the scenes, in the attempt to pull Europe together and make it once again a power to be reckoned with on the world stage. It is sobering to see events coming to pass that we have been predicting on the basis of Bible prophecy for more than half a century!

South African Report

—By Syd Hull

We held a very successful *Tomorrow's World* Lecture in Bloemfontein on Sunday, 28 October 2001, where 33 new people attended. Two of the attendees, a couple from Prieska, traveled 400 kilometers (250 miles) to attend without the help of a transport vehicle. They had to hitchhike most of the way, and walked for 12 kilometers. Their faith and endurance resulted in a double baptism just before the lecture.

During the Feast of Tabernacles 2001 a man from Pretoria, attending the Feast for the first time, was also baptized.

We also started a pilot project of distributing the *Tomorrow's World* magazine in various Post Office boxes at a reduced rate of 29 cents per copy, compared to a postal cost of 360 cents per copy. The responses

to these are very encouraging.

A very successful advertising campaign was conducted in KwaZulu Natal, of which the Pietermaritzburg congregation forms an integral

part. We placed two advertisements in two newspapers circulated in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg areas, which have yielded a very good response to date and are still coming in. These advertisements were directed more to our English-speaking population.

The unity in the Church here in South Africa is very apparent, and we are delighted to hear that this is true around the globe.

Mexico City Report

—By Jorge Schauback

An interesting characteristic of the Mexico City congregation is that it is formed both by people who have been in the Church of God for a long time and by people who just recently heard the true gospel preached through the Spanish broadcast—which has been



on the air for approximately two years. Eight brethren who came in contact with the Truth through the radio broadcast have been baptized, and 25 more who heard the radio broadcast also became interested this way, and are attending Sabbath services. One of the oldest, if not the oldest, member of the Mexico City congregation is Miss Laura Montenegro, who is 97 years old and lost her eyesight when she was a teenager.

It is worth mentioning the great labor the Cortes family does for the Work of God in Mexico. They answer from their home all the calls to the radio broadcast, they reply to all the letters and requests for broadcast tapes, and they are also in charge of printing and distributing the Spanish booklets and the *Bible Study Course* lessons.

Caribbean Report

—By Jonathan McNair

The Work in the Caribbean has continued to move forward. Our television programs have produced excellent responses, with the highest count in Trinidad. Just recently, we aired a program offering a booklet that had been offered three times in the past six months yet, when all the responses were tabulated, we still had more than 120 responses!

In order to help serve the brethren better in Trinidad, Mr. Fitzroy Greeman, Associate Pastor for our congregation in Georgetown, Guyana, is assuming the duties of Associate Pastor for Trinidad. His leadership will be greatly appreciated by the members. He will lighten the workload for many of our members involved in the work in Trinidad, particularly Mr. Ramsumair Sookram, who has served in his role of deacon and video host for many years.

Similarly, Mr. Hugh Wilson, Associate Pastor for Jamaica, will

take up the duty of Associate Pastor for the church in Barbados. He will fill a much-needed role there.

We have received a number of requests for literature and pastoral visits from individuals in Grenada; as a result we are planning a visit to Grenada in January.

Philippines Report

—By Rod McNair

The Work in the Philippines continues to grow. Pastor Gorgonio de Guia recently visited 21 attendees in our new northern Luzon group in Isabela, where our recently returned “balikbayans” (Filipinos returning home), Mr. and Mrs. Val Martin, are living. The Martins recently relocated to the Philippines after living in Alaska for several years. Pastor Felipe Casing reported 19 in attendance for his November 24 visit to the relatively new video group in Malungon, Sarangani Province, in Mindanao. One member in Malungon recently gave birth. Since the family could not afford the services of a midwife, the mother delivered the baby alone! We are grateful to God that the baby arrived safe and sound, and both mother and baby are fine. Mr. Casing also reported on the possibility of playing the *Tomorrow’s World* telecast on television through a local access channel in General Santos City. We now have nine cable television outlets and three commercial radio outlets for the program. Pastor Tex Benitez reports a new family attending as a result of the Visayan *Tomorrow’s World* program coming out of Ozamiz City, in Northwestern Mindanao. Pastor Eleno Cabahit has received visit requests as a result of our *Tomorrow’s World* radio program broadcast from a new station in Cebu City, in the central Visayas region.

On the political scene, interesting developments are occurring between the U.S. and the Philippines in the context of the new “war on terrorism.” During her recent visit with U.S. President Bush, Philippines President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo broached the subject of greater cooperation between the U.S. and the Philippines in anti-terrorist operations. Military advisers from the U.S. have already visited Zamboanga City to offer advice and equipment to the Philippines Armed Forces in their effort to flush out Abu Sayyaf bandits. We are also seeing news reports of the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) proposals, which might allow the U.S. to maintain semi-permanent bases in the Philippines.

Brussels Report

—By Ray Clore

On December 1, the Living Church of God in Brussels received brethren from France, other parts of Belgium and the Netherlands for services. Thirty-four happy brethren heard a sermonette on love as a fruit of God’s Spirit, and split sermons on why Christmas is not an acceptable substitute for God’s Holy Days, and how the Bible shows that we all can and should encourage and comfort one another on our walk towards the Kingdom of God. Exciting Brazilian-beat special music was provided by the Brussels choir. A question and answer Bible Study and buffet meal followed services.

To continue building fraternity and brotherly love, the Paris congregation invited the Brussels congregation, along with brethren from all over Europe, to attend a combined services/social evening on January 5, to enjoy a potluck meal, comedy skits, board games and a dance after services. ☐

Trials and Tests—

SEVEN LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF JOB

By John H. Ogwyn

Where were you when you heard the tragic news on September 11? I was on my way to Abilene, Texas and shortly after leaving home had caught the first inklings of the news on my car radio. As the hours passed during my long trip, I kept the radio in my car on and heard the unfolding horror. Driving along and looking at the empty skies over the West Texas landscape, the thought hit me that we were certainly in that time that Jesus Christ referred to in Matthew 24 as the “beginning of sorrows.”

In the months and years between now and the return of Jesus Christ, we will undoubtedly hear about, and maybe personally witness, many horrible things. The problems that affect our nation and the entire world will not only involve other people and other places. Each of us will be affected in a variety of ways. There is coming upon this nation and upon the whole world the greatest time of trouble and pressure that there has ever been. In addition to the major difficulties that are prophesied, we all face various problems and trials in our own lives. It may involve family difficulties, job or financial troubles, or health problems—but we all know the pressure and stress that can result. Trials and tests are not something that any of us eagerly anticipate, but they are things that we all encounter.

Years ago, I was visiting a woman in the hospital who had been in a serious automobile accident. She had suffered multiple fractures and was lying in bed in traction. It

seemed to me that pulleys and ropes were running every which way. As I stood at her bedside and sought to offer comfort, I commented that none of us get to choose our trials. “No,” she agreed, “but we do get to choose how we respond to those trials. They can make us bitter or they can make us better. I want mine to make me better.” When I left that hospital room, it was with the feeling that I had learned far more than I had taught that day!

Why does God allow trials and tests to come upon His people? Is there a particular purpose in the trials and tests that we encounter? Is there a right and wrong way to approach trials?

The Greek terms rendered “temptation,” “trial,” or “test” in the New Testament are all closely related. They are derived from *peirazo*, which means “to test,” “try,” or “put to the proof,” and from *peira*, meaning “to attempt” or “to know by experience.” Another word, *dokime*, meaning “to test the genuineness of something,” is also used. This latter term is found in 1 Peter 1:7 where the testing of our faith is compared to assaying the quality and purity of gold.

The book of James tells us that tests (*peirasmos*, 1:2) have a purpose. They are the process by which the genuineness of our faith is determined (*dokime*, v. 3). Throughout this process, the quality of steadfast character is developed!

We are not only told that we must undergo many tests through-

out this life, as indeed all humans must, but we are also given a pattern to follow in handling them. It is hard enough to maintain a decent attitude when you are going through troubles that you brought on yourself. But what about things that are patently unfair? Humanly, we all bristle at the idea of unfairness. We want to retaliate and “even the score.”

Notice what the Apostle Peter tells us: “For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth;’ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:19–23). The English word “example” in verse 21 is from *upogrammos* meaning “a writing copy.” It was a term used for a child’s copybook. The child, in copying every stroke of every letter, learned to reproduce the writing of the teacher. Christ is to be our pattern. We are to seek to reproduce His approach to life’s difficulties as closely as possible.

Besides Christ’s personal example, James 5:9–10 cites the prophets as worthy of consideration when it

comes to handling trials. Most of the prophets of God suffered for their faithfulness. In addition to them, the Patriarch Job is pointed out in verse 11 as an outstanding example of steadfast faith in the way he handled severe trials. The book of Job is the story of a normal human being who

often beset us at such times. “No one understands what I’m going through,” we think. But Jesus Christ does! We have a faithful High Priest who was tested in all ways like us and is therefore able to empathize and give us the needed help (Hebrews 4:15–16).

always keep in mind that there may have been a similar “behind-the-scenes” conversation regarding us. God has established the limits of our trial, but we just do not know what those limits are!

What we as Christians experience is not generally time and

When we are struck with personal tragedy or persecuted for obedience, we can be sure that God knows. This is vitally important to keep in mind to counteract the sense of isolation and loneliness that will often beset us at such times.

is beset by misfortune and suffering. This article will present seven specific lessons we can learn about responding to trials as revealed in the book of Job.

Lesson 1—God Knows

One of the most overwhelming aspects of a severe trial can be a sense of isolation. We want to make sure that God knows, because when He finds out, surely He will do something about it! In Job 1 we are given a behind-the-scenes look at events of which Job was completely unaware.

God, however, was very much aware of Job and of the wholehearted obedience he sought to render. In fact, God Himself called Satan’s attention to Job. Christ reminded His disciples in Luke 12:6–7 that God, who even takes detailed note of the sparrows, is much more deeply interested in the affairs of His own children. The Father is aware of everything about us down to the smallest detail. Even the hairs of our head are numbered!

When we are struck with personal tragedy or persecuted for obedience, we can be sure that God knows. This is vitally important to keep in mind to counteract the sense of isolation and loneliness that will

Though Job could not begin to understand why all of these things were happening to him, he knew God was aware of it. He did not react, as Satan had predicted, by cursing God. Rather, Job told his wife: “Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (Job 2:10).

Lesson 2—God Limits the Trial

The story recounted in chapters 1 and 2 makes us privy to actual conversations between God and Satan! When we begin reading the book of Job we learn that, while God allowed Satan to afflict Job, He set limits beyond which the devil could not pass. From the start we know there are limits to Job’s trial, and we know what those limits are. Initially, God restricted Satan from harming Job’s health. Later, He allowed Job to be personally stricken, but insisted that his life be spared. In all of this we have an advantage over Job. At the time he was going through adversity, Job knew nothing of the conversation between God and Satan. He knew nothing of any limits God had pre-imposed upon this trial.

When we find ourselves in the midst of great adversity, we must

chance. The devil does not “sneak up” while God’s back is turned. God is involved in every test that we undergo and He has established pre-set limits beyond which Satan cannot go. Neither the duration nor the intensity of the trial is completely open-ended. Ultimately, God is in charge!

Lesson 3—Seek Growth, Not Vindication

This is perhaps one of the hardest lessons to keep in mind. Job wanted God to vindicate him in the eyes of his friends. People ridiculed him (30:1, 9) and that can be hard to take. When Elihu began to answer Job on behalf of God in chapters 32 through 37, he pointed out that Job had been wrongly focused during much of his trial. In Job 33:12–22, Elihu explains that God instructs and chastens in various ways. God has His reasons for how He deals with us, and sometimes they are beyond our understanding.

Job was so certain of his innocence and of the injustice of his afflictions that for a long time he was unable to see beyond that. He tried to defend himself from the false conclusions of his friends, and in so

doing was unable to see areas of needed growth in his own life.

Again, God has reasons for allowing whatever happens—though we are often at a loss to fathom what they are. In our trials and tests, James encourages us to ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). If we do so in faith, He will surely give it. Whatever the trial or test, there is always growth that can be achieved. Even Jesus Christ Himself learned by the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). God wants us to grow. Therefore, we must undergo periodic pruning to stimulate our growth (John 15:2).

Lesson 4—The “Why” Often Proves Elusive

Humanly, we like everything to be neatly pigeonholed. We want the world and the events in it to make sense. But in trying to give an explanation for everything, we sometimes miss the point. This is the way it was for Job’s friends.

The first of Job’s friends to speak was Eliphaz. He declared: “Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same” (Job 4:7–8). Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, Job’s three friends, were all sure that Job must have had some dirty secret at the root of his newfound troubles. They “knew” that there had to be a *reason*. So, they badgered poor Job to confess his suspected secret sin.

Job knew there was no great hidden scandal in his life engendering his trials. He was defensive in the face of his accusers, but he also wondered—“Why?” One of the difficult things for us to accept is that many of the sufferings we go through simply cannot be neatly categorized. The *why* often is elusive. Bad things do not only happen to bad people.

Job recognized that many times the wicked live to reach old age and even appear to prosper (21:7–13).

There are many “whys” that we will never know in this life. Acceptance that the “why” may prove elusive sets the stage for a fifth vital lesson from the book of Job.

Lesson 5—Trust in the Face of Anguish

Job was in despair. His whole life had been turned upside down. He had lost his wealth and his loved ones in a series of sudden calamities. Now his health was gone too. Why? Job was deeply frustrated because he could not make sense out of his trials. Yet in the depths of perplexity and despair he made one of the most profound declarations of faith recorded in the Bible: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (13:15).

In Job 19 we read the words of anguish that poured from Job’s lips. “Know that God has overthrown and put me in the wrong, and has closed His net about me.... He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and He has set darkness upon my paths.... My kinsfolk have failed me, and my familiar friends have forgotten me.... I am repulsive to my wife, and loathsome to the children of my own mother” (vv. 6, 8, 14, 17, *Amplified Bible*). Yet even at this low point of anguish and bewilderment, Job declares his heartfelt trust in God. “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth.... I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself” (vv. 25–27).

Job understood the truth of the resurrection. “If a man die, shall he live again?” Job asked. He went on to record the divinely inspired answer. “All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come” (14:14, KJV). Job knew that God would call and that he would answer

and come forth from the grave, because God would have a desire to the work of His own hands (v. 15).

It is relatively easy to trust God when things are going the way we like them. When the world around us makes sense, it is fairly easy to believe that God is in charge. But what about when things turn upside down and inside out? It is in the midst of such perplexity and anguish that faith in God is most needed.

One of the things Satan never understood about Job was his motive. Satan thought Job only served God because it was to his advantage here and now. He was convinced that if God removed blessings and protection, Job would curse and revile Him. But that was not true. Job loved God and served Him out of sincere devotion. He trusted God even when he was feeling abandoned. This lesson of steadfast trust is one of the most important aspects of character we can gain from any trial.

Lesson 6—God Will Ultimately Reward Both Good and Evil

Life can often seem unfair. There are those who make no pretense of serving God and yet they seem to be doing well. There are others who are genuinely trying, but they are experiencing many difficulties and setbacks. What we have to keep in mind is that this life is temporary.

Job noticed that there were wicked men whose “houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull breeds without failure; their cow calves without miscarriage” (21:9–10). Yet he realized that was not the end of the story. In verse 30 of the same chapter, Job said: “For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; they shall be brought out on the day of wrath.” Even though it may seem

that life is not fair, God is a God of justice.

Ultimately, it is in the resurrection that God will reward the righteous and punish the willfully wicked. However, there are many times when—even in this life—events can make a sudden shift. The conclusion of the book of Job reveals: “Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning” (42:12). In the long run, there are blessings for obedience—entrance into the Kingdom of God is the greatest of all blessings—and curses for disobedience.

Lesson 7—We Emerge From Our Trial When We Learn What God Is Teaching

Many public schools in the United States promote and graduate students regardless of what they

have actually learned. God does not operate that way! He is the great Teacher who is preparing us for a role in the Kingdom and He insists that we learn our lessons properly. It was only when Job began coming to grips with the lessons that God wanted Him to learn that he began emerging from his period of great trial.

God focuses on the bottom line. He wants us to become like Him! Job was an exemplary man, but he had a flaw. The Scriptures say Job’s problem was that “he was righteous in his own eyes” and that “he justified himself rather than God” (32:1–2). Ultimately Job emerged from his trial with a far deeper understanding of the Almighty as well as a deeper understanding of himself and his own human nature. “Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,” Job told God (42:6).

A vital lesson that all of us must learn in order to please God and to pass through a trial, is that of mercy and forgiveness. Job’s friends were miserable comforters. Regardless of their motives, they were a great part of Job’s trial. Yet notice the turning point when Job began to emerge from his great adversity. “And the LORD restored Job’s losses **when he prayed for his friends**” (v. 10).

Job came to really know God deeply, not simply know about Him. He became a far more humble and compassionate man as a result of what he went through. Learning these lessons was the key to his emerging out of the dark shadows of life and into the sunlight once again.

Our trials can make us bitter or they can make us better! Which will yours do for you? ☐

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

(continued from page 6)

do not fool God. The parable of the ten virgins makes it clear that we cannot make it into God’s kingdom on another Christian’s effort. We must make the investment and effort ourselves!

Ready or Not?

The final lesson of the parable has to do with our state of readiness when Jesus returns. Those who are ready will be invited to take part in the wedding. Those who are not ready will *miss out*, even though they *hoped* to be included in the activities! How do we prepare for Christ’s return? Scripture states that the bride, preparing for the wedding supper, “made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7–9). She grew in her understanding of the truth, learned to live by every word of God, built strong and solid Christian character, overcame trials, remained faithful and endured to the end. She was ready when the bridegroom came. Those who follow this example will be invited into the wedding banquet, and then the *door will be shut*.

Others who look forward to the return of Christ, and desire to attend the wedding—but are caught unprepared—are *not necessarily evil people*. They may simply be doing what *they think* is right, including “good works”

(Matthew 7:21–23), but *not* doing what Jesus Christ *instructed* them to do! God commands us, for example, to “remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Jesus and the Apostles kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2), and it will be kept in the kingdom (Isaiah 66:23). However, people today are being told that God will accept our keeping any day as a worship day—but that is *not* what God tells us in His word, and it is *not* the example Jesus set for us! To those who insist on doing things their own way, Jesus said “I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matthew 7:23). They will not be invited to attend the wedding banquet, because they will not be ready when the bridegroom arrives. The door to the banquet will be shut, and they will be left standing outside, pleading to be let in! The question we each need to ask is: *where will we be* when the door is shut? Will we be seated inside with Jesus Christ, or will we be outside—*disillusioned* and *disappointed* (Matthew 24:51)?

The parable of the ten virgins contains *vital lessons* that are extremely relevant for, and specifically targeted to, those living at the end of the age. God inspired these warnings for our benefit, because He loves us and wants us to be among His firstfruits in the coming kingdom of God. We need to *heed* the warnings and *learn* the lessons of this important parable, so we do not miss out on an incredible reward! ☐

“Testing” Your Conversion

(continued from page 3)

of being willing to *admit it* and to *repent* when one is wrong—this is the key attitude of which I am speaking. Although keeping God’s commandments and showing love to fellow man is the *way of life* that must be followed—this “key” attitude of self-abnegation and a *willingness to take correction* is something which “separates the men from the boys,” so to speak, when it comes to truly discerning the depth of a person’s conversion.

Notice Isaiah 66:1–2: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,’ says the LORD. ‘But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a **contrite** spirit, and who **trembles** at My word.’” Again, Scripture points out this attitude of properly *fearing*—giving *deep respect* to—the great God, and shows us that He wants us to be “contrite” and constantly subjecting ourselves to *correction*, to *instruction* and to His *chastening* when necessary.

The Apostle Paul was inspired to show us that this same attitude must be involved in our study of God’s Word: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). If a person will not take “reproof” from God’s Word, then—even though he may presently be a Sabbath keeper—he will probably “go off” sooner or later because of his lack of humility and willingness to take correction. Then, as I have found in most cases, he will often *drop* the Sabbath keeping, the whole understanding of keeping God’s

commandments and many of the other truths he may have learned.

In Psalm 51, we read of David’s repentance after his sin with Bathsheba. Notice the totality of David’s confession and repentance! *No excuses here!* For David said: “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge” (Psalm 51:2–4).

Though David was a man of great drive and great passion, he *acknowledged it* when he was wrong! He made *no excuses!* And so, because of this and because of his wholehearted love and obedience toward God in the vast majority of cases, David was “a man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22).


Yet David’s predecessor as king of Israel, King Saul, became proud, stubborn and would **not** take correction! This was a very important thing to God, for our Creator tells us in His Word: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king” (1 Samuel 15:23). Soon after this inspired statement, Samuel said to Saul: “The Eternal has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours who is better than you!” (v. 28). God would **not** put up with Saul’s stubbornness and unwillingness to take correction! But, again, He kept David in office even in spite of his sins *because he was willing to acknowledge his sin and take correction!*

Ask yourself: “When I am corrected, do I usually argue, justify myself, and try to explain it away, or do I show myself willing to *repent* and to *change*? Do I constantly challenge the one who gives me the correction,

and perhaps get my feelings hurt? Or do I sincerely seek to be sensitive to God’s will, to God’s speaking through this other person who may be trying to help me, and try to *be willing to take correction even when it hurts?*”

Speaking to many who had been in God’s Church from the beginning in the area of Palestine—including some of the “old timers”—Paul warned them: “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” (Hebrews 12:5–7). Then, in verse 11, Paul summarized: “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

This entire attitude—of *total surrender* to God, and of being willing to *take correction* and even submit to “chastening” from God—is one of the most vital issues of Christian development imaginable! For God is now “testing” His people (James 1:2–3). He tells us in 1 Peter 4:17: “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” God wants to *know* and *know that He knows* that we will always submit to Him “even when it hurts!” So He is working with us, fashioning and molding us, and seeing if we will wholeheartedly respond to Him through His direct teaching and through correction from His true ministers and servants who are teaching the Truth.

How well do *you* take correction? How well do *you* measure up in this key area, which so fearfully points out the attitude of *total conversion*? 

Are You an Armstrongite?

(continued from page 2)

The true and correct name for the church (group of people) that is God's, that belongs to him—keeps his commands—is 'The Church of God.' Its members pattern their lives after His Son who lived perfectly. It is God's group, or God's Church! This name implies that we have given ourselves to God—recognize Him as the supreme authority on this earth at the present time and have come to be able to be chastised by him, to accept correction and reproof where we are wrong and follow God's true way!"

As Dick Armstrong realized when he wrote the above words, most people have a difficult time believing in an "invisible" God. They want to follow a man whom they can see or an idol that they can see—something physical. That is why in the churches of this world there are so many idols of various so-called "saints" and luminaries and even so-called "pictures" of God and Christ—which are frankly *forbidden* by the Second Commandment. The natural tendency is for people to follow a *man* whom they can see—not Christ. So Dick Armstrong warned them about this—as I warn you about this even now. I do not want you "following Rod Meredith" or "following Herbert Armstrong" or following *any* man as such. You can and *should follow us* as we follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). But each true Christian must be careful *not* to adulate or worship a man.

As Dick Armstrong began his article in 1 Corinthians 1, I will refer to that passage. Notice that Paul was writing "to the Church of God' which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (v. 2). As most of you brethren know, the official name for the true Church is definitely the "Church of God." It is mentioned **12 times** in the New Testament!

Paul writes: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (v. 10). Notice that Paul indicates that there should be *no divisions* among true Christians. Ideally, we should all be in *one* "corporate body"—as was the case in the New Testament Church. And we should have the "same mind" in respect to **all** major doctrines and practices.

Paul continues: "Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,'

or 'I am of Christ' (v. 12). Each one of us, dear brethren, must have a deep and growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Master. We cannot—we **dare not**—just think that because we have the "Truth" or "keep the Sabbath" that we will be automatically saved. We must constantly and humbly recognize, rather, that we will in **no way** enter the Kingdom of God *unless we have Christ living within us!*

We must constantly remind ourselves of Jesus' powerful question: "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). And we should also apply this to following Mr. Armstrong, or me, or any true leader in the Church. For you are not truly "following" Mr. Armstrong in the right way by "adulating him." And you are certainly not following him, or me, if you do **not** follow what we teach from God's Word! Many brethren—and even certain Church of God fellowships—*claim* to follow Mr. Armstrong, yet follow an unbiblically *different* form of government and *reject* a number of important teachings which he promulgated throughout his lifetime! For the important thing was not the "man," but his *message*. And, except for several mistakes regarding "date-setting" and a few other minor points, the *message* Mr. Armstrong preached was overwhelmingly correct!

Yet, as I have indicated, even though we should follow the true message, we should not adulate or worship the man in doing so. Many instances remind me that Mr. Armstrong did not want this kind of adulation. One of them was the 25th anniversary celebration of the *World Tomorrow* radio program, which was held in the beautiful Rosewood Room of Ambassador Hall on the Pasadena campus of Ambassador College in 1959. I was there. Actually, Mr. Armstrong did not plan this occasion. It was planned by others in his honor and was in fact a "surprise" banquet.

After a number of flowery comments from some of our leaders, our station representative and even civic officials, Mr. Armstrong began to lower his head and clear his throat. Having known him well for years, *I knew what was coming!* He then got up and, at first, graciously thanked those who were trying to honor him. But then he said powerfully: "Though I am grateful for your kind remarks, I want all of you to realize that *Herbert W. Armstrong has built nothing!* Christ has had to *beat me down* and **chasten** me again and again! He has only used me as a weak, human servant whom He has had to work with patiently and correct many times. So **don't** say that Herbert Armstrong has done all these things!"

The audience became very quiet and contemplative. But most, who were in the Church, realized that Mr. Armstrong really meant it! He did not want people look-

ing on him too highly, as though he had done all these things as a “superstar!” This and other instances helped me realize that although Mr. Armstrong was human—and at times did entertain praise and encouragement too much—in his heart he knew that he was the bondslave of Jesus Christ just like the Apostle Paul! He knew that he could do nothing apart from Christ! And that was a good example for all of us.

Again, Mr. Armstrong taught—as do those of us in the Living Church of God who carry on in the same tradition—an *entire way of life* based on all ten of the Ten Commandments! The Sabbath is certainly the “sign” of the true Creator God, but the commandments against murder, adultery and dishonoring your parents and others are all still binding and still *very important* as the basic way of life for all Christians. Remember what the Apostle James was inspired to write in James 2:10–12: “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. *So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.*”

Dear brethren, we must always remember that as Christians, we are to *reflect Jesus Christ* in everything we think, say and do! Frankly, one of our chief “mottos” ought to be Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (KJV). Christ will live within us—*through the Holy Spirit*—the same kind of loving, serving and obedient life He did live more than 1,900 years ago while in the human flesh (Hebrews 13:8). Please study the “fruit of the Holy Spirit” described in Galatians 5:22–23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no

law.” These are the fruits of *Christ’s spirit—of Jesus Christ living His life within us!*

Do you, personally, reflect *love and joy and peace* in your daily interaction with others? Are you constantly aware that you are to *reflect Jesus Christ* every day that you live? Are you *studying* the Bible and “feeding” on Christ (John 6:57) so that you can reflect Him more and more? Are you *crying out* to God in fervent prayer for the *faith* and the *self-control* you need to truly be an “overcomer?”

Again, just “following” Mr. Armstrong, or me, or anybody else will **never** get you into God’s Kingdom unless Christ is living within you! That is the “key.” I **cannot** emphasize that too much!

Also, in addition to believing the full Truth, keeping the Ten Commandments and honoring God’s true Sabbath, there is yet another “sign” which **all** true Christians should exemplify. On that last night before He laid down His life for all of us, Christ enunciated this special sign when He said: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35).

This command was “new” in the sense that *in His own life* Christ exemplified **how** to carry out God’s instructions to love our neighbors. Jesus’ total out-flowing concern for others—His constant spirit of *service, mercy and compassion* and His wonderful example—shows us how to be genuine Christians more than could any one “command.” That is *why* we must constantly study God’s Word and “feed” on Christ. That is *why*—in constant communion with Christ and the Father—we must “walk with Christ.”

And *all* of the above shows that we must go *far beyond* being a kind of “letter of the law” Armstrongite, or Meredithite. We must genuinely have Christ **living** within us and so reflect *His* character, *His* obedience and *His* love.



November 2001 Council of Elders Meeting: *Harmony, Unity and Maturity*

Expressing a continuing zeal to see the true gospel proclaimed through every open door, the Council of Elders held its third meeting of 2001 from Monday, November 5 through Thursday, November 8. Council members unanimously commented that there was a spirit of complete harmony and unity in the Council, during discussions on topics large and small.

The Council of Elders was established to advise and counsel the Presiding Evangelist regarding doctrinal issues, major plans and programs of the Church. Our Church government is hierarchical, not congregational, so there are decisions that the Presiding Evangelist must make for the whole body and, once his decisions are rendered, it is the duty of the ministry and membership to implement them as effectively as possible. Such decisions are made for the whole Church to keep us walking together harmoniously. The Presiding Evangelist, advised by the Council of Elders, makes decisions for the whole body, and it is the duty of the Church to support these decisions in faith that God has guided the leadership (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1-13).

Dr. Meredith presided at the meetings, introducing each agenda item and soliciting comments and input from Council members. Where there was a difference of opinion, it was fully explored, and if it was not resolved the decision was deferred pending further information. Dr. Meredith and the Council members recognize the value of these meetings as defined in Proverbs: "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

Under Dr. Meredith's leadership, the Council was able to discuss a wide range of topics in depth, including: divine healing, Sabbath observance, jury duty, Bible prophecy and methods of promoting and preaching the gospel. One area discussed—increased television presence—has already begun to be implemented, with television stations recently added in Los Angeles, California, and western Texas.

Evangelist Richard F. Ames characterized the conference as "a free-flowing discussion characterized by mutual respect and an obvious sense of God's inspiration." He further observed: "The atmosphere reminded me of Psalm 133:1, 'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!' We experienced the

same Feast 2001 attitude of harmony, peace, and unity, and we felt that God expanded our understanding and knowledge throughout this conference." The special degree of warmth and unity was noticed by both the long-experienced and those relatively new to the Council. Said Evangelist Dibar Apartian: "To my recollection, I have never missed a Council of Elders meetings from its start under Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's direction. This was one of the most harmonious, led and conducted in harmony and unity."

Pastor Mario Hernandez observed: "As the newest member in the Council of Elders, it has been a great blessing and profound learning experience to sit among men of authentic wisdom and practical experience in the Work of God. The peace and the joy that reigned in these meetings were obvious proofs that the Spirit of God was guiding every session."

"I was impressed with the growth in wisdom and spiritual maturity God is now giving to the Council of Elders," said Evangelist Charles Bryce who, since the conference, has returned to the United States to pastor congregations in the Kansas City area. It was announced at the meeting that Mr. Bryce would, effective March 1, begin training Mr. Sheldon Munson, of Tulsa, Oklahoma, for future service in the field ministry. Mr. Bryce's successor as head of the Canadian Work, Pastor Gerald Weston, also expressed appreciation for the tenor of the meetings. Said Mr. Weston: "The camaraderie, respect and sincere harmony of spirit makes it an absolute joy to sit in this body. Each member brings a different perspective. It appears that God has brought together 12 unique members and melded them into one harmonious body. There is genuine love for one another and a desire to spend time together."

The reflections of Evangelist John Ogwyn serve well as a summary: "The Council meetings were highlighted not only by the work accomplished but by the pleasure of being together again. The deep love and camaraderie shared by the men on the Council is very evident and deeply appreciated," said Mr. Ogwyn.

Truly, the November 2001 Council of Elders meeting set a tone of harmony, unity and maturity for which the entire Church can be thankful.

—Compiled from reports by Richard F. Ames and Carl E. McNair



Ordinations

Mr. Joseph Brown, of the Tallahassee, Florida congregation, was ordained as an elder by Mr. Randy Kobernat on the Feast of Trumpets, September 18, 2001.

Mr. Louis Cooper, of the Nashville, Tennessee congregation, was ordained as an elder by Mr. Bob League on the Feast of Trumpets, September 18, 2001.

Mr. Marvin Maney, of the Asheville, North Carolina congregation, was ordained as an elder by Mr. Martin Fannin on the Sabbath of September 22, 2001.

Mr. Curtis Lambright, of the Alexandria, Louisiana congregation, was ordained as an elder by Mr. Carl E. McNair and Mr. Jonathan McNair, on the Sabbath of December 22, 2001.

In the last year, one elder and two deacons were ordained in South Africa. *Mr. Christoffel Botha*, of the Johannesburg congregation, was ordained as an elder. *Mr. Nico Brummer*, who attends in Pietermaritzburg, and *Mr. Patrick Wallace*, who attends in Virginia, were ordained as deacons.

In Loving Memory

Mrs. Dorothy Sue Brown, of Clarksville, Arkansas, died on December 14, 2001. She was 72 years old. Born in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1929, she was a graduate of Stephen F. Austin College, and taught school in Cleveland, Texas for many years. She is survived by brother and sister-in-law Billy B. and Bobbie Wilson of Cleveland, Texas, and by sister-in-law Betsy Coody of Huntsville, Texas. A faithful Church member since the early 1960s, she attended services regularly even in declining health, and lived by the advice she gave others: "Take time to smell the roses." A memorial service, led by Mr. Davy Crockett, was held in the Church hall in Russellville, Arkansas, on December 18, 2001.

Mrs. Frances Burquist, a member of the Pensacola congregation of the Living Church of God, died Tuesday, December 4, 2001. She was 75. Mrs. Burquist had been married for 55 wonderful years to

her husband, John, an elder in the Church. She will always be remembered for her many kindnesses, encouragement, and positive attitude. Indeed, Mrs. Burquist exemplified the life of a true Christian—radiating the hope that awaits all of God's people! She is survived by her husband John, two sons, Rudy (Phyllis) and Carl (Janie) Burquist; two daughters, Erica (Gurupreet) Singh and Monica (Paul) Kieffer; 11 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren; one brother, Samuel O. Wooley, Jr.; and one sister, Anne Wooley Imholte. Cards and letters of condolence may be sent to Mr. John Burquist, 3555 Wooley Road, Mobile, AL 36693.

Mr. George P. Newton, of Klamath Falls, Oregon, died on November 28, 2001. He had been suffering for several years with Alzheimer's disease. Mr. Don Haney performed the funeral service on December 3, 2001.

Brethren Enjoy a “Louisiana Family Weekend”

Nearly 150 campers gathered for a “Louisiana Family Weekend” from December 21–24. Getting away from television, faxes, computers and other distractions of the workday world, campers visited Chicot Lake State Park, 20 miles south of Alexandria, Louisiana, for a long weekend of peace, harmony, home-style meals, Bible study and recreational activities.

On the Sabbath, brethren came from nearby Alexandria to join the campers for services, and heard Mr. Carl McNair deliver a sermon on servant leadership. Campers began their Sunday and Monday activities with “Morning Motivation” sessions given by Mr. Jonathan McNair and Mr. Davy Crockett. “Evening Reflections” sessions by Mr. Carl McNair and Mr. Jonathan McNair, brought those days’ activities to a thoughtful and peaceful close.

On Sunday and Monday, after-lunch Bible study sessions were held for seniors, parents, young adults and teens. Mr. Davy Crockett, Mr. Charles Haughee, Mr. Carl McNair, Mr. Jonathan McNair and Mr. Donald Wood presented material tailored specifically for each age group.

A hearty menu of physical food complemented the ample spiritual

food available. On the Sabbath, campers were treated to a brunch served by the ministry. On Sunday and Monday, Mr. and Mrs. John Pearce and a crew of helpful volunteers prepared breakfast for the campers.

Dinners were a special treat, with campers enjoying a chili dinner



prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Harold Forrestier and crew, a jambalaya dinner prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Ray Joffrion and crew, hot dogs and hamburgers prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas McGaha and crew and a gumbo dinner prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Wendell Vice and crew.

Campers were divided into four teams for recreational activities, including orienteering, Frisbee “golf,” a challenge course and song composition. For the song composition activity, each team was given the same song title—“My Dog Blue”—and had to write music and lyrics,

and perform the song, which was captured on camcorder.

On Monday, after a choice of morning activities including jewelry making, calligraphy, bingo and a two-mile hike, Sunday’s teams regrouped for a “Winter Olympics” activity, reprising the orienteering, Frisbee “golf” and challenge course activities from Sunday, along with a water balloon launch and catch.

Monday night brought the Family Fun Night and dance. Campers watched the videos of all four teams’ songs from the day before. One team sang: “My dog Blue, from Timbuktu, ate an old shoe. Boo, hoo, hoo!” Another team decided that Blue was from the bayou, and had a girlfriend named Lou. Although a winner was declared on the basis of audience applause, all the entries were enjoyed and appreciated.

Mr. Jonathan McNair summed up the feelings of many when he said: “It was such a heartwarming sight to see everyone having fun together. Pre-teens, teens and adults all got involved in every activity. More than one member told me: ‘We had so much fun, we ought to do this every month.’ Maybe that would be a bit much, but we sure will plan for next year!”

Upcoming **Tomorrow’s World** Telecasts

Every Sunday, 6:00 AM E.T., on WGN

WGN AIR DATE	BROADCAST TITLE
February 3	How You Have Been Deceived?
February 10	Unlocking the Book of Revelation
February 17	Who Will Invade the Middle East?
February 24	How Can You Become a True Christian?

Commentary

Why Do You Go to Church?

By Jonathan McNair

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, many churches in the United States have had more visitors than pastors and priests have seen in a long time. An article in the *Boston Herald* reported: “Boston area clergy say they have seen a dramatic increase in attendance at religious services since the bombings... Several special services held throughout the Bay State drew standing only crowds...With less than two hours notice, more than 5,000 people attended services at the Memorial Church at Harvard Yard, the evening of September 11” (“Sanctuary,” *Boston Herald*, September 24, 2001).

If we look back to Biblical times, we see that “church-going” was the custom. In Leviticus 23:3, for example, God commanded His people: “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation.” Part of the Sabbath day should be dedicated to a “convocation”—an assembly or gathering.

But what are we supposed to “do there”? What is the Biblical example? Look in the book of Hebrews. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 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 10:23–25).

This is not just talking about having social activities together—meeting at Little League baseball games or at the exercise club. This means assembling together *as a congregation* on God’s Sabbath. We all need people. And we need to gather together with people who are of like mind—of the same values and beliefs. When we do, we encourage each other. We need a time and a place where we can be “spiritually at home”—at ease—not having to be so much on guard. It is good to be a light to the world around us, but we need to be recharged as well. When we

gather together with other people who are committed and dedicated to living God’s way of life, we are comforted and encouraged. And this is what God had in mind when he instructs us to have a “holy convocation”—a “Church service.”

Just “fellowshipping” is not enough. We need to be *learning* what God has to say to us through His Word at the Church service. We do not go to hear the ideas or opinions of the speaker. We should not go to be entertained by the speaker. Church is not MTV or *I Love Lucy*! This is a time when the focus should be on the Word of God, the wisdom of God and the way of God.

In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul called the Church the pillar and ground of “truth”—not of interesting opinions of men, and not of the ideas of men, but the guardian of the truth. The Church service is the place where that truth is reviewed, rehearsed and refreshed in our minds. Paul told Timothy: “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14–17).

When the message at the Church service is inspired by God, and is drawn from His Word, it provides us with the tools to help us live our lives as Christians. If we do not show up to “collect our tools,” we are defenseless against the negative influences that can drag us down. If we only show up once in a while, we are poorly equipped, and poorly trained. But if we are dedicated to learning more about God’s way of life, He has provided us with the opportunity.

The above is a condensation of a commentary that can be found in its unabridged form on the Church Web page, www.livingcog.org, in the Commentary Library, along with many other commentaries on key topics facing our world.