

Living Church News

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Inside

**The Power
Of Example** 3

**Vital Keys
For Staying
Focused** 6

**International
Corner...** 10

**Why Did
Jesus Christ
Come?** 12

**Should Christians
Celebrate Birthdays?** 16

**Samaritans:
Old and New** 19

**Local
Church News** 22

Commentary 24

Go Forward in Faith

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Dr. Meredith asked me to write this issue's "Dear Brethren" letter and Editorial for him while he and Mrs. Meredith were traveling in Australasia. By the time you read this, he will have returned home from his 20,000-mile trip and shared with you details of his extensive travel and meetings with brethren and ministry.

We thank God for blessing His Work through weak and limited human beings who have been called into the body of Christ. *Every member* of His body *can* contribute to the effective working and accomplishment of the Great Commission. The Apostle Paul wrote: "But, speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the *effective working* by which *every part* does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15–16).

Notice that "every part does its share" and "every joint supplies" what is necessary for us to be joined and knit together—particularly by God's love working through us. Every member's heartfelt prayers, acts of service in the local congregation and in spreading the gospel, words of encouragement, and financial support of the Work, all combine to move the Work of God forward. When each of us is filled with God's Spirit, the body will mature and "grow up" in "Him who is the head—Christ."

In what direction should we walk? As human beings, we will always have "setbacks." Even God's Work faces setbacks from time to time. When the Work was hindered, Mr. Herbert Armstrong used to compare this to the cocking of a gun. The gun's hammer, though pulled *back* a short distance, was being prepared to strike the bullet and propel it *forward* at a faster pace. And so God propels His Work forward at a faster pace *when* He determines to do so. But we must always be ready to move forward when our Red Sea opens for us. When the Israelites were stymied at the Red Sea, God opened the sea and told Moses: "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to *go forward*" (Exodus 14:15).

Anchored in the "faith which was once for all delivered" (Jude 1:3), our spiritual and mental outlook must be on the future and the goal God has set before us. Most of us know Matthew 6:33 by heart. Here Jesus instructed us to *seek first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Are you looking *forward* in your spiritual outlook? Certainly, we must learn the lessons of the past—we have the whole Bible and our own life experiences to teach us last-

ing lessons. The Apostle Paul, who had experienced great success as a Pharisee, nevertheless wrote: "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). Paul counted his past achievements as "rubbish" in comparison to his goal. He experienced persecution and pain as a servant of Christ, so he earnestly anticipated the resurrection. Paul desired "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (vv. 10-11).

How earnestly are *you* seeking the Kingdom of God and the resurrection? Many of God's long-time faithful servants are growing very old and are dying in the faith. They will be in the first resurrection when Jesus returns! We also must be wholehearted in our commitment and our vision of the future. The Apostle Paul continued: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and *reaching forward* to those things which are ahead, I *press toward the goal* for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (vv. 12-14).

Hard-hearted Israelites never crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land. They had heard the Gospel, but they did not act on it in faith (Hebrews 4:2). Today, *spiritual* Israel is striving to live by faith (Hebrews 10:38) and to finish the Work with the same commitment and attitude Jesus had (John 4:34). God's Work has always been a work of faith (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11)! Be sure to read "How to Live by Faith" by Mr. John Ogwyn in the March-April 2002 *Living Church News*. As the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:7: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." The key is to "keep on keeping on" because we trust our Leader, Jesus Christ! He is the one who opens doors. "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens': I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Revelation 3:7-8).

Do we trust Christ to continue opening doors as He has done in the past? He has the power to do so, as when Paul reported in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13: "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel... a door was opened to me by the Lord..." We all should be very thankful for the doors Christ is now opening to us. Mr. Wayne Pyle, Television Production Coordinator, gives us this report:

"During the first three months of this year we received 21,716 responses from the *Tomorrow's World* telecast. This is

continues on page 21

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The Power of Example

Editorial

By Richard F. Ames

Jesus said: “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). He said that we should shine as lights in this world so that others “may see [our] good works and glorify [our] Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). God has called us to *live the way of life* of genuine Christianity. Our charity and our obedience to God’s commandments are a witness of our practicing Apostolic Christianity, the way of life lived by Jesus and the Apostles.

Are you setting a genuinely *Christian example*? Whether we realize it or not, our conduct, actions, attitudes and beliefs communicate an example to others. There is an old axiom in the field of communications: “You cannot *not* communicate.” In other words, we communicate whether we want to or not. If we try to maintain a “poker face,” our body language tells others that we might be hiding something. However, if we are the light of the world, our countenance will radiate God’s love, joy and peace!

In 1962, I met a longtime faithful member of the Pasadena, California congregation. His wife had been a non-member, but his faithful *example* as a husband influenced his wife—and after *eleven* years of his *Christian example*, his wife was converted. The Apostle Paul writes that a mate’s influence might even “save” him or her. “But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not

believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will *save* your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will *save* your wife?” (1 Corinthians 7:12–16).

Your faithful Christian character can be instrumental in the conversion of another person. God does the calling (John 6:44), but the godly love, patience, kindness and service of a genuine Christian can make a big difference! Later on, in the 1970s, I met a woman who was a longtime faithful member in the Big Sandy, Texas area. Her longtime example of serving her husband, as a loving wife, led to his conversion. She had been baptized for about 12 years before her husband finally became converted.

Our Mission

Has *your example* been an influence on others? For good? Or for evil? Has God ever used *you* to “turn” anyone “to righteousness” (see Daniel 12:3)? Has God ever used *you* to “save” anyone? The

power of *personal example* is one of the greatest Christian tools for influencing others. In fact, we have a *mission* to *influence* others: by our *conduct*, our example of service, our words and our attitude!

Our Savior gave us another metaphor for our identity: “You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). Salt is a preservative—it adds taste and spice to life. Jesus said in Mark 9:50: “Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.” As we saw earlier, He told us to let our light shine as well! “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14–16).

Christ has given us a mission to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world! Our character and personality should influence others toward righteousness—or at least be a witness to the world. As Proverbs 16:21 states: “The wise in heart will be called understanding, and sweetness of speech increases *persuasiveness*” (NASB). The *Moffatt* translation puts it this way: “A wise man is esteemed for being pleasant: his friendly words add to his *influence*.”

The Christian life radiates light and positive influence. In his book, *The Message of the Sermon On The Mount*, John R. W. Stott writes: “A Christian’s character as described in the beatitudes and a Christian’s

influence as defined in the salt and light metaphors are organically related to one another. Our influence depends on our character. But the beatitudes set an extremely high and exacting standard” (p. 68). Yes, God gave us high standards for genuine Christianity, but He also gave us the power to fulfill those standards (2 Timothy 1:7; Philippians 4:13)

How committed are we to fulfill the *whole way of life* taught by our Savior? In his article “Our Mission as a Church” (*Living Church News*, May–June 2001, p. 20) our Presiding Evangelist, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, has outlined the “seven-fold commission” of the Church. Notice the fourth of the seven items: “Be **EXAMPLES** to the Church at large and to the world of Christ’s way of life”

Christ has commissioned us to *exemplify a way of life*! As most of us know very well, Christianity is a *whole way of life*, not just a one-day-a-week or surface religion! The disciples were first called “Christians” in Antioch. But notice what the true religion was called. Before Saul’s conversion, he persecuted the disciples. He “asked letters from him [the high priest] to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of *the Way*, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:22). Yes, we are to set an *example* to the world, of God’s total *way of life*! That means we strive to live by “every word of God” (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4).

God explained another major aspect of our mission through the prophet Daniel. In the first two verses of chapter 12, Daniel prophesied the “time of trouble” and the resurrection that follows. Who will be glorified in that resurrection? “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteous-

ness like the stars forever and ever” (v. 3). Our preaching the Gospel, *and our example*, have been turning many to righteousness, and will continue to turn many to righteousness. Later in this article, we will see more principles for witnessing to and positively influencing others.

Following the Right Examples

Who is your hero? Whose example do you follow? Many look to sports figures such as Michael Jordan, Lance Armstrong, Venus Williams, Tiger Woods or Barry Bonds. Others look to high achievers among musicians, movie stars, businessmen, politicians, military leaders and statesmen. While some may exemplify success principles in physical ways, whom should we follow in spiritual ways?

Jesus instructed us to follow *Him*! He told His disciples: “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” They immediately left their nets and followed Him” (Matthew 4:19–20). Our commitment to follow Him requires self-denial and dedication. “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it’” (Matthew 16:24–25). Our willingness to be a living sacrifice and to follow our Savior must be active *every day*! Are you following His example daily? Jesus said: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Our spiritual example to others must reflect that attitude every day!

As the great spiritual Shepherd, Jesus knows those who follow Him, and His sheep—His followers—know Him: “My sheep hear My

voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27–28). Jesus promises eternal life to those who faithfully follow Him! He set the example of service and sacrifice in both life and death. He was willing to give His life for the sins of the world: “And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:27–28).

Are we willing to give our lives in service to the Master? Are we willing to help others with their most basic needs? In the classic movie “Ben Hur,” Roman captives passed through the village of Nazareth. One captive in chains, Ben Hur, was whipped—Jesus gave him water to drink. Near the end of the movie, the beaten and scarred Jesus carries the cross. On the way to Golgotha, Jesus falls. Ben Hur struggles through the crowd and gives Jesus water! This portrayal, although not historically accurate, was touching to me. We must be willing to sacrifice in service to others following Jesus’ example: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example*, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Those of us who have had the privilege of participating in the New Testament Passover have been taught the lesson of humility and service. Jesus again set the example. When he had washed His disciples’ feet He said: “You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have *given you an example*, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master;

nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed [“happy” KJV] are you if you do them” (John 13:13–17).

God the Father sent His Son to be the greatest example of *love* and *life* the world has ever seen. And He has called us to follow that example with our whole heart! Jesus, the Head of the Body, has also trained and chosen leaders to guide us spiritually. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:1–2). We must be willing to follow the Christian leadership of God’s servants. The NIV states it this way: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

Hebrews 11—the “faith chapter”—gives us many more illustrations of God’s faithful servants. In our modern era, we know of many others who have died in the faith (Hebrews 11:13), including Mr. and Mrs. Herbert W. Armstrong, whose positive example of faith we follow. Notice this exhortation: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and *imitate their faith*” (Hebrews 13:7, NRSV).

We should also take warning from *negative examples* in the Bible. The Israelites lacked faith, and practiced “unbelief.” Listen to this exhortation: “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:12–13). We need to set a positive example: “Let us therefore *be diligent* to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according

to the same *example of disobedience*” (Hebrews 4:11).

The Apostle Jude (like Peter in 2 Peter 2:6) strongly warns us with the horrendous example of Sodom and Gomorrah: “Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7). May all of us, brethren, heed these warnings and strive to follow *positive examples*.

Our Personal Example

What kind of an example do you and I set for others? Jesus tells us to let our light shine. *How* can we set the right example? Here is what Dr. Meredith wrote in this publication last May:

“In all of this we must try to help everyone we can—both within and without the true Church—to at least grasp the concept that true Christians are to “live by EVERY Word of God”—and that Christ is to literally LIVE His life within us through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20). A vital part of this mission is that we are to be “examples” and “lights” to the world (Matthew 5:14–16). As the “Church of the living God, the pillar and ground [or “bulwark”] of the Truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), we, dear brethren, should set the EXAMPLE to the world—and to all professing Christians—of the WAY of life that Jesus taught!

“In our personal lives, in our zealous work and productivity, in being closely bonded to our wives and families—and in a constant spirit of GIVING, serving and helping others—we should set a sterling example of what Christ really stands for! This is an AWESOME responsi-

bility for each one of us and is, in fact, part of our commission.

“By our own examples, we should set the standard of self-control, wisdom and judgment, of faith and courage and—most of all—of genuine LOVE and outflowing concern. We should show others by our conduct that we do LOVE God and put Him and His commandments above all else in everything we think, say and do” (“Our Mission as a Church,” *Living Church News*, May–June 2001, p. 19).

We need to apply the principles outlined in Dr. Meredith’s comments above. Whether we realize it or not, others observe our conduct, words and way of life. Think of the ways you have helped others. Living the *whole* way of life exemplified by Christ is essential! What are other keys to setting the right example? Here are several additional practical steps:

1. **Pray for brethren in need.** Pray for their healing (James 5:16). Pray for national leaders and neighbors (1 Timothy 2:1–4). Pray for your enemies (Matthew 5:44). Trust God that while people may not “see” you pray, God rewards those who serve in secret (Matthew 6:4). Your “light” will shine through your outgoing attitude.
2. **Exhort and encourage one another.** Hebrews 10:24–25 tells us: “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 [or “encouraging” NASB] one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

_____ continues on page 15

Vital Keys FOR STAYING FOCUSED

By Douglas S. Winnail

One of the biggest challenges facing Christians today is to stay focused and to maintain a right course in a world filled with trials, temptations, distractions and deceptions. Especially if we live and work around sincere and well-meaning people, it can be easy to forget that the god of this world deliberately sets dangerous traps to deceive and destroy the unwary (2 Corinthians 2:11; 4:4; Ephesians 6:11–13; 1 Peter 5:8–9). Yet the Bible is filled with *warnings* about the consequences of losing our focus, and gives *instructions* for staying on course—if we have eyes to see and ears to hear!

Warnings and Advice

There is an old saying that those who do not learn the lessons of history will repeat the mistakes of history. The Bible records numerous examples of this fundamental truth. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because their focus was diverted away from God's instructions. They listened to Satan and his subtly twisted half-truths and their own human reasoning (Genesis 3). The ancient nation of Israel went into captivity because it followed misguided leaders and focused on pagan ways of worship instead of following God's commandments (1 Kings 12:25–33; 14:15–16). David got into trouble, and Solomon's heir lost the ten-tribed House of Israel, because they began to focus on the physical creation (the opposite sex), instead of obeying their Creator and His instructions (2 Samuel 11; 12; 1 Kings 11:1–11). These examples are recorded for the admonition of Christians who live at the end of the age (1 Corinthians 10:11).

One of the major ways that Satan pulls us off course is by appealing to our intellect and our own reasoning abilities. When our focus drifts away from the Word of God, we gravitate toward ideas that seem reasonable to us, and that justify what we want to do. Yet the Bible warns repeatedly that “there is a way that *seems* right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Unless we stay focused on God's instructions, and heed His warnings that human reasoning can lead us astray (Jeremiah 17:9), we will deceive ourselves and reap serious consequences. However, we are told that when

the eye is *single* [focused in one direction on one main goal], the whole body is full of light (Matthew 6:22–23, KJV). Staying focused in the *right direction* (see “Go Forward in Faith” on page 1 of this issue) and on the *right goals* can help us avoid making big mistakes!

The parable of the sower is particularly applicable to the subject of staying focused (Matthew 13:18–23). In the parable, Jesus describes four categories of people. The first hear the Truth and are immediately *distracted* by Satan, never gaining the right focus. The second accept the Truth with enthusiasm, yet because they do not take time to carefully prove what they believe, they are *blown off course* and stumble “when tribulation or persecution arises *because of the word*” (13:21). Such trials could include doctrinal controversies, church splits, ridicule, the appeal of popular misguided leaders or novel ideas—and fables. The third become preoccupied with worldly concerns (self, family, job and health), the pursuit of money and material possessions and the attraction of worldly pleasures (acceptance, prestige, hobbies, entertainment—having fun) that divert their focus from the Truth of God. Only one of the four groups remains focused on the right goal; the rest lose their focus and drift off in other directions. In light of these strong warnings, we need to consider seven vital keys that will help us maintain a right focus.

The Word of God

Our modern, fast-paced world of today is riddled with confusion about God, the Bible, truth, the true Church and the purpose of life. The pagan ruler Pilate ridiculed the idea of truth (John 18:38). We hear the same skeptical comments today. Yet Jesus said that knowledge of the truth can set us free from the confusion of this world (John 8:32). The Bible asserts that God's word, His laws and His commandments *are truth* (Psalm 119:142, 151, 160). Scripture contains the absolute truth (John 17:17). That is why it is important to *study* the Bible so that we *know* what God has revealed in His word (2 Timothy 2:15). We must carefully evaluate ideas before accepting them, prove what is right and hold onto what we prove, or we will lose our focus and our direction (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Only from the Bible do we learn the truth about God and His plan of salvation, the right way to worship God, the right doctrines to teach and believe, the true purpose of life, the right way to live, the right goals to focus on and what to avoid in this world that will only lead us into trouble. This is why it is so important to *know* what the Bible really says. The Bible provides a standard against which everything else can be measured. Sadly, today, human opinions (our own or somebody else's) often carry more weight than the truth God has revealed in the Bible. We cannot afford to be ignorant of the real source of truth, or let other interests interfere with *regular study* of the Word of God. If we do, we will lose our focus and wander off course.

True God and Real Jesus

The God of the Bible is a God of mercy and of justice (Psalm 101:1), who created human beings for the purpose of learning to choose between the right way God has revealed and the wrong and deceitful ways that Satan pro-

3:21; 2 Timothy 3:5). If we want to stay focused in a mixed up world, we must *remember* what the Bible reveals about the *true* God.

The real Jesus warned that *many* would come in His name (claiming to be Christians) and *deceive many* (Matthew 24:5). Paul warned of teachers preaching about “another Jesus” who bears *no resemblance* to the biblical Savior (2 Corinthians 11:3–4). The longhaired and effeminate image of Christ, worshiped today by millions, contrasts sharply with the Bible's clear admonition for men not to wear long hair (1 Corinthians 11:14). The image of a “soft and effeminate Jesus” does not fit the young carpenter who overturned tables, sent animals and money changers scurrying out of the temple, told priests and misguided believers that they were hypocrites and “sons of the devil” because they were teaching and acting *contrary* to the laws of God (Matthew 21:12–13; 23:13–17; John 8:42–44). The biblical Jesus observed the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and the Holy Days (John 7), as did the Apostles He trained (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 21; 1 Corinthians 5:8). He taught plainly: “But if you want to

Only from the Bible do we learn the truth about God and His plan of salvation, the right way to worship God, the right doctrines to teach and believe, the true purpose of life, the right way to live, the right goals to focus on.... This is why it is so important to *know* what the Bible really says.

motes (Deuteronomy 30:11–20). The God of Scripture revealed *wondrous things* in His law to His chosen people, so that they could be examples to the world and a blessing to mankind (see Deuteronomy 4:1–14; Psalm 119:18; Hosea 8:12). The real God promises blessings for obedience to His laws, and punishments for disobedience (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). He specifically warns us not to add to or delete from His Word (referring to religious ideas or practices—see Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18–19) and not to borrow ideas from pagan religions (Deuteronomy 12:29–32). The God of the Bible does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8)—yet this God is actually *rejected* today by many who claim to believe in Him. In place of the biblical God, many have created a god with whom they are more comfortable—a less threatening, much less demanding, permissive parent who has no required rules to follow and practices no specific form of government. This man-made and imaginary god is happy with people who worship him in any manner they choose, even if their worship includes practices taken from paganism. Like the ancient Israelites, many who today call themselves Christian have *forgotten* the true God, and have adopted perverted ways (Jeremiah

enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17). For the Christ of the Bible, the laws of God were *not* burdens or outdated relics of an old covenant! Scripture states that Jesus Christ does not change (Hebrews 13:8). Like His Father, He is also concerned with mercy (Titus 3:4–5) and justice (Isaiah 9:6–7). He is coming back to this earth to establish His kingdom, reward the saints and destroy those who have corrupted the earth (Revelation 11:17–18). The return of the *real* Jesus will shock the world! The *biblical* Jesus is a striking contrast to the Jesus worshiped in most churches today! Sincere Christians cannot afford to lose their focus by accepting the “different” Jesus that has been pawned off on an unsuspecting world for centuries!

The True Gospel

The *true* gospel message proclaimed by Jesus Christ will surprise many professing Christians who have lost their focus. The world generally assumes that Jesus came with a pleasant message about love, grace and salvation for all who give their heart to the Lord and believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Yet the Bible reveals that *even*

demons believe these things (see Mark 5:1–8; James 2:19). But Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the *true* gospel, emphasizing the reality of the coming kingdom of God (Matthew 9:35; 10:6–7). This was the gospel Christ preached before His crucifixion. Jesus emphasized that to be in God’s kingdom, one must repent of sin and keep the commandments of God (Mark 1:15; John 14:15).

After His resurrection, Jesus added an *additional* dimension to the gospel message. He told the disciples that they were to be witnesses to the world that His suffering, death and resurrection were necessary for the forgiveness of sin (Luke 24:44–49). Yet Jesus continued to focus on the kingdom of God, as did the disciples (Acts 1:3, 6). The Apostolic Church understood and taught about *both* the coming kingdom of God *and* the things concerning Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31). Sadly, the “mainstream Christian” world has lost track of the gospel of the kingdom, and has mistakenly focused only on the life and person of Jesus Christ. Many churches have *missed* half of the gospel message because they have fol-

today who have lost their focus, seeking acceptance by mainstream Christianity is a major goal—even though many mainstream beliefs originated in pagan religious practices *condemned* in Scripture (Deuteronomy 12:29–32; Matthew 15:8–9).

The true Church founded by Jesus Christ and the Apostles *can be recognized* if we focus on what the Bible reveals. The Church has a biblical name—a dozen times, the New Testament refers to the “Church of God” or “Churches of God.” The true Church is not characterized by “doctrinal diversity” but is composed of members “joined together in the *same mind* and in the *same judgment*” (1 Corinthians 1:10). The biblical Church of God has a hierarchical structure, through which leaders are appointed based on qualifications and the fruits of conversion in their lives; they are not elected by appeal to voters (Ephesians 4:11; Titus 1:5). The Church Jesus established kept the Sabbath and Holy Days, following His example (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 44). However, just as Jeroboam changed the days of worship in ancient Israel

Today there are many different ideas about the mission of the Church. This is not surprising. A different gospel leads to a different mission. The *true* gospel provides the Church of God with a *powerful* vision and sense of mission.

lowed misguided leaders who have lost their focus. Today, many professing Christians do not realize that they have been sold a “different gospel” about which Paul repeatedly warned in his epistles (2 Corinthians 11:1–4; Galatians 1:6–9). This becomes obvious when we read the Gospels and notice the true gospel that Jesus preached (Mark 1:14–15; Luke 4:43; 8:1).

The True Church

Many today think of the church as a building. For others, the church is vaguely considered as a collection of people who believe in God and Jesus. Supposedly, millions of people belong to this “mystical body” of Christ. Yet when we focus on what the Bible reveals about the Church, we find just the opposite. Jesus said that the Church He established would continue to exist—as a *real entity* (Matthew 16:18). He said it would be a small, scattered and persecuted group of people (Luke 12:32; John 15:20; 16:32). Jesus said that true Christians are “not of the world” (John 17:16), but are commanded to *come out* of the world and *be separate* (2 Corinthians 6:17). Christ also said “woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Jesus was cautioning against seeking acceptance and praise from the religious establishment. Yet for many

and led the nation astray, theologians have rejected God’s Sabbaths (Leviticus 23) and adopted Sunday worship and Christmas and Easter celebrations originating in pagan antiquity (Ezekiel 20:28–32). As a result, God’s chosen people have lost their focus and their national identity (see Deuteronomy 32:16; Isaiah 62:2). The Bible reveals that God’s rebellious people will also lose His protection and their freedom because they have lost their focus. This will be a costly lesson.

The Church’s Mission

Today there are many different ideas about the mission of the Church. This is not surprising. **A different gospel leads to a different mission.** The *true* gospel provides the Church of God with a *powerful* vision and sense of mission. Many sincere people assume that the mission of the Church is to meet in little groups and talk about Jesus. It might also include spreading the good news that “God loves you... Jesus died for you... just love Jesus and you will go to heaven.” Yet Jesus commissioned His disciples to go “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” and to all the world preaching the gospel of the coming kingdom of God, healing, raising the dead and casting out demons (Matthew 10:1–8; Mark 16:14–20). They were to *warn* Israelite nations and the world to *repent* of their sins


before the coming of the Great Tribulation that will precede the return of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The disciples literally “turned the world upside down” with their message, in spite of being persecuted by the religious establishment in both pagan and Jewish communities (Acts 17:6). They were not just preaching about a baby Jesus who loved everybody. They did not portray the Church as a mere spiritual hospital for lost souls. They were preaching about a *real* coming kingdom and the return of a *powerful* Christ who will shake the nations and restore the government of God to this earth (Revelation 11:15–19). Historian Edward Gibbon records that this attention-getting message of the coming kingdom of God was the “reigning sentiment of the orthodox believers” during the early centuries of the Church, but that it was gradually relegated to the realm of heresy (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. 15). As members of the early Church lost their focus on the true gospel, they lost their true sense of mission, and the majority of professing Christians drifted away from both the Christian mission and Christian truth! Regrettably, this is occurring today to those who listen to misguided leaders. Is this happening to you?

Our Personal Goal

Many sincere professing Christians believe that their personal role is merely to love God, love their neighbor and utter pleasant-sounding phrases like “praise the Lord.” However, if we focus on what the Bible reveals, we find very interesting advice. Jesus said: “Seek you first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). We are told to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), and to develop the very mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5–11). This means learning to live by the commandments of God—in the spirit and the letter—as Christ did (John 14:15). We are told that God gives His Spirit to those who *obey* Him (Acts 5:32), and that God wants us to *bear fruits* of that Spirit (John 15:1–8; Galatians 5:22–26). Individuals who *overcome* the pulls of human nature and grow spiritually will be given the opportunity to *rule* with Christ on Earth, and *teach* mankind the way to true peace, joy and happiness (Revelation 5:10; Isaiah 30:20–21)—which will involve learning to live by the laws of God (Isaiah 2:2–4). The true purpose of human life is to *prepare* to be in the kingdom of God, where today’s true Christians will work with Jesus Christ to change the course of history. The idea of going to heaven, sitting on a cloud and playing a harp is pure speculation by those who have lost their focus. If we lose our focus, we will lose our reward (Revelation 3:10–13)!

The Plan of God

Many assume that God is earnestly trying to save everyone now. This idea persists because the “mainstream Christian” world has lost sight of the plan of God. The *real* plan of God is pictured in the biblical Holy Days (Leviticus 23). The Passover reminds us that Jesus suffered and died so that our sins can be forgiven. The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that we must eliminate sinful thoughts and actions and begin to think and act like Jesus Christ. Pentecost reveals that God gives His Spirit to those who repent and obey His instructions, empowered by His Spirit to overcome sin (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:38; 5:32). The Bible explains that only those whom God calls will have an opportunity to understand the truth at this time (John 6:44–45)—and that this number will be small (1 Corinthians 1:26–27). The truth of God is a *mystery* to those who are not called (Matthew 13:10–17; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16). However, such individuals—most of humanity—are not lost! The fall Holy Days reveal that Christ will return (the Feast of Trumpets), put Satan out of commission (the Day of Atonement—Revelation 20:1–2), establish the kingdom of God on this earth (with the resurrected saints—Revelation 20:4–6) and begin to reeducate those alive at that time (the Feast of Tabernacles). Those who died down through the ages without hearing or understanding the Truth of God will come up in a second resurrection and have their opportunity for salvation (The Last Great Day—Revelation 20:5, 11–12). This is an encouraging message. Yet most professing Christians, and followers of other religions, have never heard this good news, because religious leaders of this world have lost their focus and have no knowledge of the plan of God (Romans 1:18–25).

The challenge facing real Christians today is to stay focused on the right priorities: the true God, the real Jesus, the Word of God and the true Gospel. Real Christians must develop the knowledge and character that God can use, to accomplish the mission of His Church and bring to fruition His great plan. Scripture reveals that only a *few* of those called now will be chosen to receive a reward (Matthew 20:16). They will be chosen because they *remain faithful* to the truth they are given to understand (Revelation 17:14), and they will grow and produce the fruits that God is seeking in their lives (John 15:1–8). They also *endure* through trials and persecution (Matthew 24:13) and they *finish* the race (2 Timothy 4:1–8). The incredible rewards that God promises to those whom He calls to become saints will only go to those who *stay focused*! Will that include you? 



International Corner...

Indonesian Update

by Rajan Moses

I recently completed a profitable and informative trip to the Island of Surabaya, Indonesia, in response to a request from a group of brethren who have been studying literature from the Church of God under Mr. Armstrong, and now Dr. Meredith.

Arius Nasuntara met me at the airport. The next morning, Sabbath, we journeyed to Malang City, where 20 to 25 percent of its population (of approximately 600,000) profess to be Christian, to join 15 guests for a Bible study. After the study and a question and answer session, I held baptismal counseling for six people. Cut off as they have been from the rest of the Church, they are at varying levels of understanding, but even though some of them are facing severe Sabbath-keeping trials regarding their teaching jobs (in a community that normally requires teachers to work on the Sabbath), I am encouraged that a great work may be done in Indonesia in the future. I brought back some of the translated books and booklets to read, as the language is somewhat similar to the Bahasa Melayu used in Malaysia, and I look forward to visiting them again, with Mr. Bruce Tyler, in the near future.

There is an interesting history behind this group of Indonesian brethren. Mr. Nasuntara's mother, the late Vera Muller Segiarto, was the first in her family to come into contact with the Work of God in the early 1980s. She was of Sudanese and German ancestry, and in addition to the Indonesian language spoke Dutch

(Malang City was under Dutch rule for nearly 350 years). After reading the Dutch *Plain Truth*, she had a desire to translate Mr. Armstrong's books and articles into the Indonesian language. Gradually, friends began to gather with her to learn from the material she was translating—eventually more than 50 of Mr. Armstrong's articles, books and booklets. Her son Arius read *Mystery of the Ages*, and felt it was one of the best books he had ever read. He requested a visit from the Church before Mr. Armstrong's death, but no one came to visit. After Mr. Armstrong's death, he and his mother recognized errors creeping into the booklets and magazines she was receiving, so she ceased to receive and translate them.

After the Global Church of God began, Arius discovered it via the Internet. He requested Global literature, and helped his mother translate it—and also Living Church of God literature—into the Indonesian language until she died in March 2002.

Caribbean Update

by Jonathan McNair

The work continues to move forward in the Caribbean. This report will highlight the church in Jamaica.

The Church in Kingston, Jamaica is served by an Associate Pastor, Mr. Hugh Wilson. The majority of the brethren are able to make it to services on the Sabbath, although transportation is always a challenge. Some of the brethren have to wait for a bus or minivan to travel from their home to another location. At that point, they then wait for another bus to transport them to the next location. If

the traffic is heavy, or the weather is bad, the trip to services can become an arduous journey. Despite the difficulty of traveling in the Kingston area, close to 50 people gather every week for services.

Thanks to the interest generated from our telecast, Mr. Wilson has begun a monthly Bible Study in the Montego Bay area, a four-hour journey by car to the northern coast of Jamaica. Twelve to 15 people have begun to attend the monthly study. We may begin a new study in the countryside town of Mandeville in the near future.

The biggest difficulties for the Jamaican brethren are the same ones that face our brethren around the world. The chief challenge is getting and keeping a job. The Jamaican economy has been struggling for a number of years, and this has taken a toll on people everywhere you look. The tourism industry—Jamaica's main source of foreign currency—was hard hit. Local violence, mostly in Kingston, has begun to discourage tourists. The Ministry of Tourism spent US\$5 million running an advertising campaign to try to offset the negative impression created by the increase in crime, then the September 11 attack in New York proved another setback to the tourism industry. In a tight job market like Jamaica's, keeping the Sabbath is a real test of faith for our brethren.

Under difficult social conditions, when politicians seem not to have any answers, people are forced to look to God. Jamaica is said to have more churches per square mile than any other country in the world, yet not all the people are satisfied by what their pastors and teachers are feeding them. Response to the *Tomorrow's World* telecast has reflected this. The program

airs on Sunday morning, and generates 75 to 85 responses each week. Blondelle Chang, who works part-time in the church office, is very busy keeping up with the literature demand. Responding to continued interest in the program, we planned a public lecture for the month of April, titled “What Was the Gospel that Christ Preached?” Because of limited space in the meeting room, fewer than 500 letters of invitation were sent, but there was an excellent turnout, as 31 new people came to the lecture. Some had to walk more than a mile to the lecture, because bus schedules were disrupted for a “carnival” celebration.

Feast plans are well under way for the Negril site. The hotel and meeting locations will be the same as last year, where we had 105 people in attendance for the Feast. For more information on attending the site in Jamaica, visit <http://www.cogl.org/fot2002/jamaica.htm>.

European Update

by Douglas Winnail

The Spring Holy Days were an encouraging and profitable period for brethren in Europe. Services were held for Passover and Unleavened Bread in a number of countries; I was able to meet with members in London for Passover and the Night to be Much Observed. On the first Day of Unleavened Bread, we held services in St. Albans, with brethren and visitors in attendance from as far away as Wales and France. While in St. Albans, I was able to visit the former Ambassador College campus at Bricket Wood. The campus’ academic buildings are now used as a training center by a foreign-based bank; its athletic facilities now serve the town of Bricket Wood as a recreation center.

For the Sabbath between the Holy Days, I flew to Scotland to hold services with brethren in Glasgow.

This was the first time I have been able to travel to Scotland. After services, we all met for dinner and fellowship at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Colin McIntyre. On the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, we held combined services for the Irish brethren in Drogheda, just north of Dublin.

The advertisements we have recently placed in the UK are generating very good response. To date, we have received nearly 6,000 requests for the literature that has been offered. Advertising in Ireland also continues to generate interest. We are continuing to explore advertising possibilities in Europe. Adrian Kaefer reports that for the first quarter of 2002, the number of visitors to the German Web site, and requests for German literature, are running well ahead of last year, which is an encouraging sign. We continue to receive calls from members of God’s Church who have taken some time to sort through the doctrinal and organizational confusion that has been generated in recent years, and have decided they want to begin attending with us.

East African Update

by Douglas Winnail

A number of encouraging developments are occurring in both East and West Africa. Mr. Ernest Owino reports that he has started several new video groups in Kenya, and baptized a number of people. We have also been contacted by people—both members of God’s Church and individuals with no previous Church affiliation—who want to affiliate with the Living Church of God. Many of these individuals learned about the Living Church of God through the Church’s Web site.

We have secured a festival site in Kenya in the coastal city of Mombasa. The Feast will be held at the Indiana Beach Hotel, P.O. Box


10313, Mombasa, Kenya (phone 254-11-485896 or 485977; fax: 254-2-485861; e-mail: indiana@africaonline.co.ke). Self-catering apartments will be available at a charge of US\$10.70 per person per day. Luxury suites will be available at US\$33.50 per person per day with halfboard (bed, breakfast and dinner).

South African Update

by Syd Hull

Just before Passover, my wife and I traveled to George to observe the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread there with the brethren from George, Knysna and Port Elizabeth. All went very well and, while we were there, we confirmed the meeting hall for the Feast of Tabernacles, as well as accommodation for some brethren from the Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Pietermaritzburg areas. For the Sabbath during Unleavened Bread, we traveled to Cape Town where I gave the sermon. We also met a new couple who have come to the Living Church of God from our former association. There is a possibility of a few more members from our former association coming with us from the Cape Town area.

From Cape Town, we returned to George for the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, then after the Holy Day we traveled to Port Elizabeth where, on Friday April 5, I had an interview with Pastor Oswald of Radio Kingfisher. We had a long and fruitful discussion.

We are now in the process of posting 5,000 booklets and reprint articles to our subscribers. We are receiving a good response from English-speakers in Natal, which is very encouraging. We have also had five personal visits, and there is definite movement from our mailing list. More are beginning to support the Work, and our co-worker list is steadily growing. 

Why Did Jesus Christ Come?

By John H. Ogwyn

In the early 90s AD, the aged Apostle John wrote his personal account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. He wrote between two and three decades after the other gospel accounts were written. When he wrote, he chose to begin the story in quite a different manner than the three earlier writers. While Mark began with Jesus' ministry and Matthew and Luke started with the events surrounding His birth, John started at a different point entirely. He began by quoting what are perhaps the best-known words in the Bible: "In the beginning..." John made this opening to the book of Genesis the opening to His gospel account.

The point that he wished to make was that when the beginning occurred, the Word was already there! He was with God the Father and He was also God. In fact, John asserts, He was the very instrument of creation and nothing was made without His involvement. After John stressed the origin of Jesus Christ, he then proceeded to point out that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (v. 14). It was John's desire that his readers clearly understand who Jesus of Nazareth really was. He was not simply a prophet or a good man; rather, He was the very Son of God, the eternal Word made flesh. In the beginning He was already present, along with the Father, and shared incredible power and glory.

However—and here is the crucial point—the Word gave up all of that power and glory and came to earth to live as a human being. Known as Jesus of Nazareth, He was born as a helpless human infant, grew and developed into manhood, then began His ministry. The Apostle Paul emphasized that Christ *emptied* Himself of that great glory and power that He shared with the Father and came to earth in the form of a servant (Philippians 2:6–8). Voluntarily taking upon Himself the limitations of human flesh, He lived life among men for thirty-three and a half years, then suffered one of the most horrible deaths ever devised by man.

Why? Why did He give up so much to become human? What was the real purpose of His first coming? To help us more fully understand why it was necessary for Jesus Christ to do what He did, this article will examine seven distinct purposes for which He came to Earth.

Christ Came to Condemn Sin in the Flesh

One of the doctrines of Antichrist, as Dr. Meredith has clearly explained, is the idea that Jesus Christ was not

really in the flesh as you and I are in the flesh. However, Scripture makes quite clear that "in all things He had to be made like His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17). In verse 16, Paul explains that Christ did not take upon Himself the nature of angels, but rather that of the seed of Abraham (cf., KJV). As *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains regarding this verse: "He did not descend to the level of angels and become one of them. He descended to the level of mankind and became a Jew" (vol. 12, p. 29). "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same" (v. 14). He also suffered, being tempted (v. 18). In fact, He was tempted in all points that we are, yet He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Why did Christ go through a human life, subject to frailty and temptation?

Paul explained in Romans 8:3 what Christ accomplished by coming in the likeness of sinful flesh: "He condemned sin in the flesh." Jesus Christ did not come just playing a part! He *suffered*, being tempted! He was flesh and blood, just like you and I are flesh and blood. However—and here is the difference—as a flesh and blood human being, Jesus Christ *totally relied on the power of the Father* to obey God completely and to accomplish His will. He said that of Himself He could do nothing (John 5:30), that the Father dwelling in Him accomplished the works (John 14:10). It is only when we rely on the Father's power that we can overcome, and can triumph over sin.

Jesus Christ came to set us a perfect example of life that we are to follow (1 Peter 2:21). He lived life as a flesh and blood human being, subject to all our temptations and tests, and triumphed over sin every time. He condemned sin in the flesh, showing that obedience to God really is possible to the extent that one relies on the Father's power to achieve that obedience. Jesus showed by His personal example that a yielded, obedient life *really* is possible.

Christ Came as the Lamb of God

John the Baptist bore witness of Jesus Christ following His baptism by pointing Him out as "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)! The people of that day were very familiar with lambs. Every Passover season, families selected a young lamb on the tenth day of the first month and kept it until the fourteenth, to slaughter and eat as part of the Passover meal. Every

morning and every evening in the temple, a lamb was slain and offered upon the altar for the morning and evening sacrifice. All of those millions of lambs, which had been offered in nearly 15 centuries since Moses, pointed to something. Or, more precisely, they pointed toward *someone*.

Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 5:7 that Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us. Additionally, he pointed out in Hebrews that the blood of animals cannot really take away sin, but rather serves as a reminder. Jesus Christ offers us redemption, not through the blood of animals, but rather through His own blood, which He poured out for us. From the very beginning, the Creator had explained to our first parents that the penalty for sin is death. That penalty must be paid, for God's justice demands it. However, while God's justice demanded payment, His great love caused Him to offer to pay it Himself on our behalf.

Christ came not only to set us a perfect example; He also came to *pay the price* for all our sins. Going back to the incident in the Garden of Eden when God covered our first parents by slaughtering animals to make them clothing, He told them of the Seed of Woman who would ultimately crush the head of the serpent. Thus, He began revealing His plan of salvation. Providing a ram for Abraham to take the place of his beloved son Isaac, God taught him about the need for a *substitutionary* sacrifice. He revealed it anew in the context of the first Passover in Egypt, when angels of destruction (Psalm 78:49) passed over those homes that were under the blood of the lamb. Jesus Christ, the One who had eternally pre-existed as the Word, became flesh so that He might die and be our Savior. He came as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the whole world!

Christ Came as the Second Adam

When God placed the first man in the Garden, He gave Him dominion, or rulership. Adam was to exercise the government of God on this earth. However, Adam very quickly failed in this endeavor. He unwisely submitted to his wife, who had yielded to Satan, rather than faithfully upholding God's instructions. Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 15:45–47: "And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven." Jesus Christ came as the second Adam, to do what the first Adam had failed to do: qualify to replace Satan as the ruler of this earth.

The Apostle John explained in 1 John 2:16–17: "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it;

but he who does the will of God abides forever." The basis of this whole worldly system is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These are the very things to which Satan appealed when he seduced Eve, and Adam through her. From Genesis 3, we learn that when Satan called Eve's attention to the forbidden fruit, she saw that it was "good for food" (lust of the flesh), "pleasant to the eyes" (lust of the eyes), and "desirable to make one wise" (pride of life). It was on this basis that Adam and Eve succumbed to sin and these criteria have provided the basis of building this world's civilization.

Immediately following Christ's baptism by John, before launching His public ministry, He went away into the wilderness to confront Satan (Mark 1:9–13). He prepared for this confrontation by fasting for 40 days. How did Satan try to seduce Him? By using exactly the same appeals he had made to our first parents! He appealed to the lust of the flesh by trying to persuade Jesus to turn stones into bread. He appealed to the lust of the eyes by taking Christ up on a high mountain and showing Him all the kingdoms of this world and their glory, offering to give them all to Christ if only He would worship Satan. Satan also set Christ on the pinnacle of the temple, and challenged Him to jump off and let the angels catch Him. "If you are the Son of God," Satan challenged, then go ahead and jump off. This was an appeal to the pride of life. Most of us "get our hackles up" if someone challenges that we are not who we say we are (Matthew 4:1–6).

Jesus Christ rejected all of the temptations that Satan threw at Him. He mastered Satan and did what the first Adam failed to do—He obeyed God! Jesus Christ came as the second Adam and qualified to replace Satan as the ruler of this earth.

Christ Came to Reveal the Father

Many Jews in Jesus' day claimed to be religious. Yet Jesus made plain that for all of the talk that the religious leaders made about God, they did not really *know* Him. John recorded in John 1:18: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." Luke recorded Jesus' statement in Luke 10:22, explaining that no one really knows the Father but the Son and those to whom the Son reveals Him. Jesus Christ came into a spiritually darkened world to make the Father knowable.

How did He do such a thing? First, Christ told His listeners that He did not come to seek and pursue His own will. Rather, He completely sought the Father's will (cf. John 6:38). Nor did Christ come even to speak His own words or to pursue His own interests and endeavors. He

spoke the Father's words, and did the works that the Father had given Him to do.

Jesus Christ was in every way just like the Father, and those who came to know Him could, through Him, come to know the Father as well. On the night before His crucifixion, He explained to Philip that those who truly knew Him knew the Father as well (cf., John 14:7). The invisible God revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. His character, attitude and approach are knowable to us because He has chosen to make them so.

Christ Came as the Messenger of the Covenant

The last of the Old Testament prophets, Malachi, looked centuries beyond his own time and foresaw the coming of the Messiah. "Behold, I send My messenger,

Christ Came to Build His Church

Christ came not only to reveal the Father and to deliver His message to mankind; He also came to establish His Church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus Christ declared to Peter and the rest of the Apostles that He would build His Church, and that the grave would never swallow it up. The Rock upon which the Church was built was, of course, Jesus Christ Himself. He is the chief cornerstone of God's spiritual temple, as Paul explained in Ephesians 2:20. The Greek word for "church" (*ekklesia*) refers to a group or an assembly, though the word itself literally means "called from" or "called out." From the beginning, God has called individuals out of this world to enter into a special relationship with Him (cf. Genesis 12:1).

How did Jesus Christ prepare to build His Church? First, He called disciples and chose 12 to ordain as Apostles.

This message reveals how we can truly come to know God, to have our sins completely removed, and to have God's very nature put within us, by His Holy Spirit writing His law in our hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10–12).

and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:1). One of the purposes for which the Messiah would come was to deliver a message directly from God Himself!

Mark began his gospel account by directly quoting from this section of Scripture. Mark 1:1–2 reads: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: 'Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.'" We are told that John came preaching a message of repentance, and pointing to One, mightier than he, who would come afterward. In verse 14, Mark explained: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." John the Baptist was the messenger to prepare the way for the Lord. When the way was prepared, Jesus made His appearance as the Messenger of the Covenant.

Jesus Christ came to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God—the message of the New Covenant. This message reveals how we can truly come to know God, to have our sins completely removed, and to have God's very nature put within us, by His Holy Spirit writing His law in our hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10–12). This gospel explains what the Kingdom of God truly is, and how we might *inherit* that Kingdom. Jesus came to Earth to deliver a message directly from the Father—the good news about God's coming Kingdom, into which you and I can actually enter as children and heirs!

He trained them for three-and-a-half years, then sent them forth to proclaim the same message that He Himself proclaimed, to baptize those who responded to that message with faith and repentance and to teach all of the things that He Himself had taught (Matthew 28:19–20).

The Church that Jesus built would continue to the end of the age as the body through which He would work. The Church is the bride that He will marry at His return, whose members will rule and reign with Him in tomorrow's world. We, as God's people, today represent the latter-day continuation of the Church that Jesus built.

Christ Came to Lead Captivity Captive

Ephesians 4:8 describes a seventh reason for which Jesus Christ came to Earth: "Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.'" The same Jesus Christ who descended into the grave came out of that grave three days and three nights later. Forty days after His resurrection, He ascended to again be with the Father. Why? Ephesians 4:10 explains: "He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might *fill all things*." When Jesus walked the earth as a human being, He could only be in one place at one time. Now, through the Holy Spirit, He can dwell in, help and guide all converted Christians at the same time.

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that it was to their advantage that He go away.

Only in this way could He send the Helper—the Holy Spirit—to guide and strengthen them (John 16:7). It is through the power of the Spirit that Christ is able to fill all things (Ephesians 4:10).

Death is the ultimate captivity, the prison from which no one, by his own power, can escape. Death is the direct consequence of sin; in fact, it was only through sin that death entered into the world (Romans 5:12). As Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15:56–57: “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” On the night before His death, Jesus told His disciples

that “the ruler of this world is coming and he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30). Death and the grave had no claim or hold on Christ. When He ascended on high it was to lead captivity captive. Because of His triumph, all who are in the grave shall ultimately hear His voice and come forth (John 5:28–29).

Jesus Christ triumphed over death, and now makes available to us all manner of spiritual gifts, thereby enabling us to overcome sin and death. We should never take our Savior for granted, but rather should be deeply thankful for all He did, does and will do for you and for me. LCN

The Power of Example

(continued from page 5)

The common Bible bookstore pocket card: “Children Learn What They Live,” gives us this perspective: “If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.... If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.” Encouragement goes a long way in giving others positive influence.

3. **Go the extra mile.** We often accomplish only what is required. But Jesus said: “And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:41). Strive to go above and beyond in your work, in your service to the needy and in your obligations to your family and friends.
4. **Strive to be a peacemaker.** Jesus said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). Tell someone you are sorry. Ask for forgiveness and extend forgiveness. When “setting the record straight” in a conflict, give a soft answer (Proverbs 15:1).
5. **Speak the truth in love.** The Apostle Paul wrote: “But speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in all things into Him

who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). Pray to communicate honestly, discreetly and kindly. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

6. **Share your faith.** Jesus warned those who would be ashamed of Him and His words (Mark 8:38). Paul said he was not ashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16). Be ready to give an answer for your faith (1 Peter 3:15). Be ready to let others know the time and station for viewing the *Tomorrow’s World* television program in your local area. Be ready to share a *Tomorrow’s World* magazine free subscription card or *Bible Study Course* free subscription card. Sow seeds to the Kingdom (Galatians 6:7–10).
7. **Radiate the fruits of the Spirit.** When others meet you, do you project love, joy, peace and patience? The very first characteristics of charity are patience and kindness: “Love suffers long and is kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4). Maintain a positive and joyful outlook. “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4).

As we have seen, the *power of personal example* is one of the greatest Christian tools for influencing

others. Each of us influences others, whether we want to or not! Christ commissioned us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He wants us to turn many to righteousness, to help others to reach their human potential and to use their God-given gifts, and to help others into God’s Kingdom. Your example may turn others to righteousness. Your example may lead another person to salvation! “For how do you know, O wife, whether you will *save* your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will *save* your wife?” (1 Corinthians 7:16).

Never underestimate your effect on others. *Our example* is an influence that is always active. Our words, habits and deeds, in secret and in public—perhaps a hug, a thank you note or a word of encouragement—may turn someone to the truth and to righteousness. We should strive to fulfill the mission Dr. Meredith stated: “Be EXAMPLES to the Church at large and to the world of Christ’s way of life.”

We are commissioned to exemplify a way of life. We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Pray that *you* can turn many to righteousness. Let Jesus Christ use *you*, your influence, your personality, your Christian example. Let God’s Spirit flow out from you in love—and let God use you and the power of your personal example! LCN

Should Christians Celebrate Birthdays?

By Rod Reynolds

Job, we are told, “was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). Job had seven sons, and “each one on his day” made a feast (Job 1:4, *Darby*). Many Bible commentators regard “his day” (*yowm*) as most likely a reference to his *birthday*, as also in Job 3:1.

Each time these celebrations had run their course, Job felt obliged to offer burnt offerings for his sons, with the thought that: “‘It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ Thus Job did regularly” (Job 1:5). Why would Job have been concerned that, in celebrating their birthdays, his sons may have been sinning?

There is a vast difference between simply acknowledging one’s advancing age, and participating in the elaborate birthday celebrations that many have come to expect in honor of that fact. Surprising as it may be to some, the custom of celebrating birthdays is not only ancient, but is firmly rooted in religion. Notice, for example, the following comment from the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*: “The custom of commemorating the day of birth is connected, in its form, with the *reckoning of time* and, in its content, with certain *religious principles*” (“Birthdays,” p. 663, emphasis added).

The Western world observes the Gregorian calendar, named after Pope Gregory, who reformed the previous “Julian” calendar in the 16th century. Several of the months in this calendar are named after pagan gods. For example, January after Janus, February after an ancient pagan festival and March after Mars. This illustrates the close connection religion has had historically with the keeping of time.

The Hindus also have their own calendar, based on the signs of the zodiac. Most Muslim countries use the Islamic calendar. Jews use the Hebrew calendar. If you were to observe your birthday, you would first have to ask: by which calendar? Should you use a pagan Roman calendar, or the calendar that God, who created time, inspired His own people to use?

Originally, birthday celebrations were observed only for gods and rulers. Birthdays of gods were important to people because they believed that the god on whose birth-

day a person was born had a special influence over him. Rulers’ birthdays were important because people believed that not only his personal fate but the fate of nations hinged on the time of the ruler’s birth. Such beliefs are the stock in trade of astrology, as we will see.

Early in history, the birthdays of important gods and rulers (often the same) came to be important festivals. “The festivals of gods are frequently their birthdays” (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 666). The birthday of the ancient sun-god, worshiped in all the world under various names, was, as it is today, a major festival. “The Egyptians even represented the new-born sun by the image of an infant which on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth and exhibited to his worshipers. No doubt the Virgin who thus conceived and bore a son on the twenty-fifth of December was the great Oriental goddess whom the Semites called the Heavenly Virgin or simply the Heavenly Goddess; in Semitic lands she was a form of Astarte” (*The Golden Bough*, part IV, “Adonis, Attis, Osiris,” vol. I, p. 303).

Do you realize that customs such as birthday greetings, giving of birthday gifts, birthday cakes and candles were conceived in superstition and idolatry? “Originally the idea [of birthday greetings and wishes for happiness] was rooted in magic. The working of spells for good and evil is the chief usage of witchcraft. One is especially susceptible to such spells on his birthday, as one’s personal spirits are about at that time. Dreams dreamed on the birthday eve should be remembered, for they are predictions of the future brought by the guardian spirits which hover over one’s bed on the birthday eve. Birthday greetings have power for good or ill because one is closer to the spirit world on this day. Good wishes bring good fortune, but the reverse is also true, so one should avoid enemies on one’s birthday and be surrounded only by well-wishers. ‘Happy birthday’ and ‘Many happy returns of the day’ are the traditional greetings” (*The Lore of Birthdays*, Linton, p. 20). “Birthdays are the times when good and evil spirits have the opportunity to attack the celebrants who at these times are in peril.” What is done to counter these malevolent spirits? “The presence of friends and the expression of

good wishes help to protect the celebrant against the unknown pervasive peril” (*Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, p. 144).

The giving of birthday gifts is a custom associated with the offering of sacrifices to pagan gods on their birthdays. Certainly the custom was linked with the same superstitions that formed the background for birthday greetings. “The exchange of presents... is associated with the importance of ingratiating good and evil fairies... on their or our birthdays” (*ibid.*).

The traditional birthday cake and candles also have their origin in ancient pagan idol worship. The ancients believed that the fire of candles had magical properties. They offered prayers and made wishes to be carried to the gods on the flames of the candles. Thus we still have the widely practiced birthday custom of making a wish, then blowing out the candles. The Greeks celebrated the birthday of their moon goddess, Artemis, with cakes adorned

each month and day is sacred; and found out *from the day of a man’s birth*, what he will meet with in the course of his life, and how he will end his days, and what sort of man he will be” (Herodotus, *Persian Wars*, Book II, ch. 82).

Since it was believed that the positions of the stars at the time of birth influenced a child’s future, astrological horoscopes came into being, purporting to foretell the future, based on the time of birth. “Birthdays are intimately linked with the stars, since without the calendar, no one could tell when to celebrate his birthday. They are also indebted to the stars in another way, for in early days the chief importance of birthday records was to enable the astrologers to chart horoscopes” (*The Lore of Birthdays*, p. 53). Rawlinson’s translation of Herodotus includes the following footnote: “Horoscopes were of very early use in Egypt... and Cicero speaks of the Egyptians and Chaldees predicting... a man’s destiny at his birth, by their obser-

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with lighted candles (*The Lore of Birthdays*, p. 18). The “mother-goddess” was (and is today) worshiped under many different names. Artemis, or Diana, was usually thought of as a virgin, but at other times as a mother goddess (cf. *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art*, “Artemis,” pp. 71–73; *The Golden Bough*, MacMillan abridged edition, p. 163). She was one of several Greek goddesses identified in various ways with Ishtar, or Ashtaroth (*Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, “Astarte,” vol. 2, p. 376). Ishtar (also known as Astarte) was the name often used for the “mother-goddess” in the Middle East. The Phoenicians worshipped her as Ashtaroth, as the Israelites and Jews often did (Judges 2:13; 10:6; 2 Kings 23:13). In Egypt, even after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, Jews were still observing the festival of this pagan “queen of heaven” by baking cakes (Jeremiah 7:18; 44:19). Birthday celebrations are only one of many ways in which such pagan customs continue to this day.

The observance of birthdays is closely linked with astrology. Astrology is based on the idea that human destiny is controlled by the locations and movements of the sun, moon and stars. It is, in effect, the worship of those bodies, substituting them for the Creator God, who created both man and the heavens, and who is the true arbiter of man’s destiny. Such beliefs were common in ancient Egypt. “The Egyptians... discovered to which of the gods

variations of the stars” (Book II, ch. 82, fn.). An illustration from more recent times is the following comment on the use of horoscopes in Mexico: “Horoscopes were prepared from these [astrological] signs for the day and hour of birth. Every Mexican bore through life, as a species of personal name, the sign of his birthday” (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. II, “Birthdays,” p. 664).

Astrology was a powerful influence during the Middle Ages in nominally Christian Europe, its claims being almost universally accepted. (The Vatican possesses the world’s largest astrological library). Politics, as well as religion, was heavily influenced by astrology. Few kings would venture to make war without first consulting their court astrologers. And much of what passed for both medicine and science during the period was based on astrology.

Astrology continues to have a wide following the world over, even if many people do not take it seriously. Among the Hindus, even the poorest families manage to scrape up a few rupees to pay an astrologer to draw up a horoscope for their offspring. It is very difficult for a Hindu to marry if he or she cannot produce a detailed horoscope. The stars must agree before any betrothal can take place. Few Hindus make major decisions without first consulting their horoscopes. Farmers in India rely on astrologers to tell them when and where to plant and when to harvest. “Virtually all top ministers of the

Indian government have personal staff astrologers to advise them on political matters” (*St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, January 6, 1983, p. 2A). India provides just one of many examples of how astrology influences daily life even in the modern world. Astrological columns are among the most popular features of virtually every major daily newspaper. Of course the advice found in such columns, read by millions, varies according to the person’s *birthday*.

Today, as for thousands of years, nations and cultures around the world maintain beliefs associating the destiny of a person with the time of his birth. For example, Sir James G. Frazer wrote that in Madagascar it was believed that “every man’s fortune is determined by the day or hour of his birth” (*The Golden Bough*, part I, vol. 1, p. 173). From the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* comes the following remark concerning such superstitions in various societies: “As the circumstances attending the moment of birth are auspicious or inauspicious, so are those attending the day. Any object or circumstance distinguishing it may affect the destiny of the child” (vol. II, “Birthdays,” p. 663). Until very recent times, in several tribal societies, children born on days deemed “unlucky” were put to death.

Is celebrating birthdays an acceptable Christian custom? Does God approve? Did Jesus or the Apostles, or the Church they founded, celebrate birthdays?

When the New Testament was written, the celebrating of birthdays was a common practice, especially in Gentile nations. Josephus mentions the birthday celebrations of several rulers, often accompanied by threats or actual violence. For example, after he destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70AD, the Roman general Titus journeyed to Caesarea Philippi and there solemnized the birthday of his brother by slaughtering more than 2,500 Jewish captives. A short time later, having journeyed to Berytus in Phoenicia, he celebrated his father’s birthday with the slaughter of “a great multitude” of remaining captives (*Wars of the Jews*, 4.3.1). Similar examples of slaughter and mayhem on the birthdays of important personages are common in history.

Observant Jews, however, did not celebrate birthdays (Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.26), and generally considered the day of one’s death to be of more significance than the day of one’s birth (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:1). We are given no command or example that Christians were to celebrate either Christ’s birthday or our own. The precise time of Jesus’ birthday is left deliberately vague. Even two or more centuries after the time of Christ, Christians commonly “considered birthday festivities to be survivals of heretical practice. The Greek and Roman birthday feasts were looked upon as pagan orgies” (*The Lore of Birthdays*,


p. 42). Among early Christians birthday celebrations were considered “immoral as well as frivolous.”

When we examine the principles of God’s law closely, as they relate to birthday celebrations, we can understand why neither Christ, nor His Apostles, nor their true followers, observed their birthdays. As noted earlier, the practice has its origin in idolatry and the worship of the sun, moon and stars. God does not intend that we think of the incidental time of our birth as having any bearing on our welfare and happiness. He wants us to understand that our happiness rests in serving Him and obeying His Law. God says to His people: “Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain” (Jeremiah 10:2–3, *KJV*). When we learn the truth, God expects us to forsake the idolatrous customs founded on the worship of the creation instead of the Creator.

Some may argue that in celebrating birthdays they do not intend to honor pagan gods, and have no astrological concepts in mind. Perhaps Job’s sons did not, either, but their apparent adoption of a vain custom—clearly rooted in idolatry—led Job to be concerned that they may “have sinned and cursed God in their hearts” (Job 1:5). It is very clear that God does not want us adopting such customs, and that the Apostolic Church rejected the birthday custom.

Some may view birthday customs as purely secular, lacking any religious significance. Yet we need to be aware of the broader perspective of their origins, and the religious significance they have had—and still have—for vast multitudes of people.

Remember, too, that Pharaoh observed birthdays (Genesis 40:20), as did King Herod (Matthew 14:6)—and their celebrations not only dishonored God, but also featured the executions of other human beings! As Christians, we are admonished to “flee from idolatry” in all its forms (1 Corinthians 10:14). Our conduct in this regard, and our obedience to His prohibitions against the adoption of idolatrous customs, necessarily affects our relationship with God.

We ought to be circumspect in how we deal with birthday customs within our families and among our associates. Families can certainly “note” or acknowledge a child’s growth and development on a birth date, or honor an elderly person in a Christian manner, avoiding the spirit of the carnal celebrations described in this article. And we should take care not to “harangue” others, especially those without God’s Spirit, about this matter. But we should not be eager to receive such recognition for ourselves. As Christians, we should not be entangled in the birthday custom. 

SAMARITANS: OLD AND NEW

By Robert J. Thiel

Both the Old and New Testaments mention the Samaritans. While the world in general likes to focus on the parable concerning “the good Samaritan,” it usually fails to focus on what the Samaritans (and even those Israelites who shared their wrong values) represented. Do the Samaritans represent goodness, or faithfulness to God? Or do they represent something else? The Bible—the basis for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16)—gives us the answer.

Old Testament Samaritans

Samaria was an area north of Jerusalem. The first mention of Samaria in the Bible is in 1 Kings, discussing a pronouncement from “a man of God” (1 Kings 13:31): “For the saying which he cried out by the word of the LORD against the altar in Bethel, and against all the shrines on the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, will surely come to pass” (v. 32). This was God’s warning against false worship in Samaria.

Even before the Assyrian captivity, God had expressed displeasure with the Israelites living in Samaria. More than 25 years before Israel was taken into captivity, the prophet Hosea wrote: “Then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered, and the wickedness of Samaria. For they have committed fraud” (Hosea 7:1). And: “Your calf is rejected, O Samaria! My anger is aroused against them—how long until they attain to innocence? For from Israel is even this: a workman made it, and it is not God; but the calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces” (8:5–6). The prophet Hosea also said: “Samaria is

held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God. They shall fall by the sword, their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child ripped open” (13:16). It should be noted that in Exodus, when the children of Israel worshiped the golden calf, they claimed that they were actually worshiping the true God (Exodus 32:8). Yet God was not pleased with their claim or their worship (v. 9).

After Israel lost a major war and went into Assyrian captivity, Samaria became inhabited primarily by non-Israelites. “Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel” (2 Kings 17:24). At first, these new residents of Samaria did not fear the LORD, and when they were besieged by lions, they asked the king of Assyria for help, because they realized that they did not “know the rituals of the God of the land” (2 Kings 17:26). In response, the king of Assyria sent to Samaria one of the Israelite priests who had been taken into captivity, to teach the Samaritans the true worship of the God of Israel (v. 27).

But how did the Samaritans respond? Did they accept the true worship of the God of Israel? No! They persisted in idolatry, according to 2 Kings 17:29: “However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt.”

There was something unusual about this group of people. “They feared the LORD, yet served *their own*

gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel, with whom the LORD had made a covenant and charged them, saying, ‘You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down to them... but the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, Him you shall worship, and to Him you shall offer sacrifice. And the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall be careful to observe forever; you shall not fear other gods. And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods. But the LORD your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies.’ However they *did not obey*, but they followed their former rituals. So these nations feared the LORD, yet served *their* carved images; also their children and their children’s children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day” (2 Kings 17:33–41).

Thus the Samaritans in the Old Testament are clearly described as a group of people who did not truly worship the true God, who did not keep His commandments and who included pagan rituals in their worship. Some Samaritans did make pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Jeremiah 41:5), but even the Samaritan temple worship came to be

paganized, as seen in their establishment of a separate temple at Mount Gerizim in the fourth century BC, where Samaritan worship continued even after John Hyrcanus destroyed that temple in 129–128BC (cf. *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, p. 907)

New Testament Samaritans

Smith's Bible Dictionary states that: "Certain other Jewish renegades had from time to time taken refuge with the Samaritans; hence by degrees the Samaritans claimed to partake of Jewish blood, especially if doing so was in their interest." Not only did the Jews not consider Samaritans to be true Jews, the New

and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:22–24). Jesus judged the Samaritans for not knowing what they worshiped. True worship does not involve physical pagan rituals, but involves worshipping in truth! Jesus did not consider the Samaritans' form of worship to be acceptable. He also quoted to the Pharisees a passage from Isaiah that could have fit the Samaritans: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from

them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21–23). If they practice lawlessness, even if some have miraculous signs or have apparently done good works, Jesus says that He never knew them. It is interesting that Jesus also said: "Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you" (Revelation 3:9). Here, false Christians are essentially referred to as false Jews—just as the Samaritans elsewhere were considered false Jews!

Many today claim to worship Christ, yet say that God accepts their

Many today claim to worship Christ, yet say that God accepts their using non-biblical practices to worship Him. They claim that God accepts their man-made holidays—even when taken from the worship of other gods—as a valid alternative to the Holy Days listed in Leviticus 23.

Testament reports that "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9). Notice that "Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: 'Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'" (Matthew 10:5–6). Thus, Jesus apparently considered the Samaritans to be like the Gentiles. Later, of course, after Christ's resurrection, He specifically told His followers to take the gospel to Samaria (Acts 1:8), and the Church there was multiplied (Acts 9:31).


Jesus was quite clear in expressing what He thought of the Samaritans and their false worship. When speaking to a Samaritan woman (John 4:7) who suggested that her people knew about worship (v. 20), Jesus declared: "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming,

Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8–9).

It is possible to be a Samaritan and do something good (Luke 10:33, 37). But does that mean that the Samaritan religion is acceptable to God? As shown in many other scriptures, the answer is clearly: "No"!

Modern Samaritans

Are there any religious people like the Samaritans today, who practice "good deeds" in spite of practicing false religion? Did Jesus predict that there would be false Christians? He said: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to

using non-biblical practices to worship Him. They claim that God accepts their man-made holidays—even when taken from the worship of other gods—as a valid alternative to the Holy Days listed in Leviticus 23. Such worshipers claim that they need not keep the commandments of God in order to be Christians. Apparently they have not understood Revelation 12:17: "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." This shows plainly that those who have the testimony of Jesus Christ keep the commandments of God. Like the Samaritans of old, modern Samaritans do not know what they worship. Sadly, they do not wish to worship God in truth. Seen in this way, many who today practice false Christianity are, in effect, like modern-day Samaritans. 

Go Forward in Faith*(continued from page 2)*

42 percent above the 15,276 we received during the same period last year.

"The addition of new TV stations has really helped to boost the response. Since the end of March last year, we have added 46 new TV stations airing the *Tomorrow's World* television program. Presently, we have 140 TV stations around the globe, including 120 TV stations in the United States and 20 in other countries. The US stations include 18 commercial TV stations and 102 public- and leased-access TV stations."

WGN and Canada's Vision network produce the greatest response. But the recently acquired KDOC in the Los Angeles area and KCWE in Kansas City also produce excellent response as the third- and fourth-most productive stations. Notice also the growing number of *new* television and radio stations listed in each issue of your *Tomorrow's World* magazine.

We all have our part in preaching the gospel effectively, but it is God to whom the glory belongs. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "I planted, Apollos watered, but *God gave the increase*. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but *God who gives the increase*. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:6-9).

There are many "fellow workers" in the body of Christ. Everyone's effort helps! Many of you have helped acquire public access television stations, volunteered for the cardholder program and waiting room program, or served in your local congregation providing transportation, sending greeting cards and helping with hall setup and takedown. Everyone's *example* and light (Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:15-16) contributes to spreading the Gospel through "doors of faith." (See "The Power of Example" on page 3 of this issue). God rejoices in our serving attitudes and labors of love: "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Hebrews 6:10).

Every little act of service, every heartfelt prayer, every encouraging word you give, energizes the body. God multiplies our efforts. As Proverbs 14:23 tells us: "In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty." The key is to ensure that God is working *through* us. "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my

absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God *who works in you* both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). When Christ lives in us, our labor produces good results. In this end-time Work, we need to encourage one another and contribute to the body of Christ. As Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing."

As fellow workers and good neighbors, we must strive to help one another and *all* who are neighbors in need. In our walk toward the Kingdom, we must not tire of charity and serving. "And *let us not grow weary* while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, *let us do good to all*, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:9-10).

Some of us are very old and weak. Yet, through Christ in us, we *can* "do good" to others and persevere to the end. Attending my first Feast of Tabernacles, in Big Sandy, Texas in 1961, I met an elderly gentleman who said that he was too weak to walk. But he told me: "I just move one foot in front of the other, and God gives me the strength to walk." All of us need to walk spiritually with spiritual power and faith. One meaningful hymn gives us that encouragement: "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war; with the word of Jesus, going on before."

We understand that our calling is to complete the mission Christ has given us. We will face spiritual enemies but we cannot allow them to halt our march toward the Kingdom. Men and women of faith (cf. Hebrews 11) have led the way for us. In the Living Church of God, we are grateful for Dr. Meredith's continuing example and leadership; he has led God's people through difficult times, and has consistently exhorted us to look forward in living faith (see his article "Living Faith," in the September-October 2001 *Living Church News*), carrying out the Great Commission given by our Savior.

Given the examples of so many men and women of faith, what does Scripture exhort us to do? Hebrews 12:1-2: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and *let us run with endurance* the race that is set before us, *looking unto Jesus*, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Brethren, let us move ahead, looking unto the "Captain" of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10, KJV). Set your eyes on the goal while running, marching and walking in faith. May we all "Go forward"!

Richard F. Ames

Local Church News

Births

Mark and Erin Benton of Lufkin, Texas, announce the birth of their son *Jackson “Jax” Hunter Benton*. He was born on April 15, weighing 8 pounds, 14 ounces, and was 21 inches long. Parents and grandparents are happy and are doing fine.

Jonathan Jaimez, son of Betty and Salvador Jaimez of the San Diego, California congregation, was born on March 24. Baby Jonathan measured 21 inches long, and weighed 10 pounds, 2 ounces. His parents are happy and grateful for their new son.

Noah Joseph Sanchez, son of Joe and Janine Sanchez of the Los Angeles, California congregation, was born on March 11. He measured 19 inches long, and weighed 5 pounds, 9 ounces. He is very healthy—and his parents are very sleepy!

Donations/Gifts

Some have requested information on how to make a future gift to the Living Church of God by way of a will, a trust or other charitable means, or to make a current gift. Those wishing to receive such information should send their requests to Legal Affairs. Please write to:

Living Church of God
Attn: Legal Affairs
PO Box 503077
San Diego, CA 92150-3077

You may also inquire via e-mail to: legal@cogl.org. Most of the information will apply only to the United States, as the laws of different countries vary. Even so, Legal Affairs will furnish as much information as possible to help those with questions. Please note that this is not a substitute for consultation with your own financial and legal advisors, which is encouraged.

Upcoming *Tomorrow's World* Telecasts

WGN: Sunday, 6:00 AM ET

VISION (Canada): Sunday, 3:30 AM & 5:30 PM ET

Air Date	Broadcast Title
June 2	Is Human Nature Good?
June 9	Must You Obey God to Be Saved?
June 16	America's Last Days?
June 23	False Conversion
June 30	Unlocking the Book of Revelation

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

Ordination

Mr. Basilio B. Osillos was ordained as an elder on January 19. He serves the Quezon City congregation, in the Philippines.

In Loving Memory

Ida Clack, of the Johannesburg, South Africa, congregation, died on April 1, age 65, having led a long and full life. In the weeks before her death, her condition improved remarkably, enough that she was able to attend services, often without her oxygen generator.

Ruth MacKay Kennedy, of Canada's Halifax, Nova Scotia congregation, died on April 4 after a year-long battle with throat cancer. She was 76 years old. Known in both the Church and the community for her very generous and giving nature, she was well-loved by Church members and many long-time local acquaintances. She attended Sabbath services regularly, coming faithfully regardless of the sometimes-harsh Canadian winters. Her funeral service was conducted by Mr. Jim Arnaldo, who pastors the congregations in Atlantic Canada.

Carl Lind, of the Austin, Texas congregation, died on March 18, after a long battle with liver cancer. He was 58 years old, and is survived by his wife Joan.

Lola Mena, of Tijuana, Mexico, died on March 25, after experiencing severe heart, liver and lung problems. She was 70 years old. Faithful to the end, she was a very positive, perseverant and happy person, much loved by family and friends. She is survived by eight daughters, two sons, and many grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Wallace "Pat" Patterson, of the Houston, Texas congregation, died on April 1, after 81 fruitful years of life. He came into the truth and was baptized in 1971. Since then, he served as an example of faith, joy and love to all that knew him. He was incredibly thoughtful, and used every opportunity available to

give to those around him. He served as an unwavering example of strength and dedication to God's way of life. Until the last few weeks of his painful struggle with cancer, he attended services regularly, always smiling and never complaining. The Houston congregation will not forget his quick grin, and the ever-present twinkle in his eye. He is survived by Ruby Patterson, his devoted wife of nearly 40 years, by his stepdaughter Linda Moers, and by three grandchildren.

Ramona F. Sarello, age 66, of the Living Church of God congregation in Sonora, California, died on April 13. Mrs. Sarello had been suffering from a number of health problems for many months, including recurring mini-strokes in the weeks prior to her death. She was a long-time, faithful member of the Church for more than 25 years, and an outstanding example of determination and commitment, even in the face of her debilitating illness. She will be sorely missed. Mrs. Sarello is survived by her two daughters and stepson, three brothers, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Graveside services were held on April 18, at Lakewood Memorial Park, near Modesto, California.

Donald Turk, age 77, an elder serving in the Palm Springs, California area, died on April 9 after a lingering illness. A WWII veteran of the United States Navy, Mr. Turk was baptized in 1968 and ordained as an elder in 1977. He was instrumental in organizing the current Palm Springs congregation in 1995, serving as assistant pastor until his death. He and his wife Rosalie, who survives him, served God's Church faithfully for many years. In addition to his wife, he is survived by a sister, three sons, a daughter, six grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Commentary

Seeds of Violence By Jeffrey Fall

Statistics *abound* that demonstrate an increase in violent behavior among school-age children. In recent years, we have heard of many tragic cases of high school students who have brought guns to school and murdered their own classmates and teachers. Everyone remembers the Columbine tragedy.

Many dismiss these as only the *rare* outbursts of a very few emotionally disturbed young people. Can we dismiss such violence as an *aberration*, or are there *seeds of violence* being sown today in our society, that will surface more and more in the future?

A recent study, reported in the journal *Science*, tracked 700 children over a 17-year period, evaluating their tendency toward violent behavior compared with their time spent watching television. According to the *Los Angeles Times*: “The authors found that 5.7 percent of those who reported watching less than one hour of television a day as adolescents committed aggressive acts against others in subsequent years.... Those acts included threats, assaults, fights, robbery and using a weapon to commit a crime. That figure rose to 22.5 percent of those who watched TV for one to three hours a day and 28.8 percent of those who watched more than three hours daily.”

Can anyone *doubt* the connection between television and violence? From their earliest years, children see countless cartoon characters knock each other unconscious or blow each other up—without any apparent lasting damage. Violence becomes entertainment, and children become desensitized. If we glorify violence, it will become increasingly acceptable as a means of handling conflict. Television can rapidly speed the assimilation of culture, either good or bad.

A skeptic might ask: “Are you trying to say that if all violence in television, videos and video games were eliminated, that would be the end of violence in our society?”

The answer is: “Of course not!” But violence can be learned, and television can *accelerate* this learning process. A steady diet of more than three hours of television per day can increase children’s violent acts by a factor of five.

The Bible shows that a time is coming when the Creator will establish His government upon this earth and *violence will be put to an end*. In Ezekiel 7:23, God comments on widespread violence: “The land is *filled* with crimes of blood and the city is *full* of violence.” Thankfully, God also foretells of the time when His government will rule the earth, when: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in *all* my Holy Mountain” (Isaiah 65:25).

What can parents do in the meantime? We can *limit* the amount of television that our children are allowed to watch. If children are not watching as much television, their time can be filled with something more worthwhile. This is where parents fit in! Frequent trips to the library can support the lifelong habit of reading. Time spent in more positive parent-child contact can go a long way in transmitting a parent’s values.

Parents can even use television as a teaching tool. In Deuteronomy 6:7, God instructs us to teach our children principles of His non-violent way of life: “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” When we are watching television with our children, we can use the opportunity to point out how harmful violence is.

Finally, parents can be non-violent examples. If parents control their anger and function with self-control in all situations, children *do* notice! If parents lose control and strike out in anger, children *do* notice! If we as parents follow the instruction found in Psalm 34:14 to “seek peace and pursue it”—children will notice!

The above is an excerpt from one of the many commentaries on key topics facing our world, available at the www.lcg.org and www.tomorrowworld.org Web sites.