

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

LCG.org

September-October 2020

A Month of Rejoicing!

Dear Brethren,

Let us rejoice as we remember God's wonderful plan of salvation as pictured during the seventh month of God's sacred calendar. While many Americans look forward to a three-day weekend celebrating Labor Day in early September, and many in nations around the world celebrate the weird holiday called "Halloween" at the end of October, we in God's Church keep the Feast of Trumpets, celebrating the end of mankind's misrule. At Atonement we delight over the soon-coming removal of the prince of the power of the air, who directs the course of our present evil world. We rejoice during the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day, rehearsing the meaning of those Festivals that mean so much to us—and eventually to all mankind, even those who died without ever having been introduced to the Truth.

There is the story, whether true or not, of Christopher Columbus discussing his "discovery" of the "new world." Many at his table dismissed the adventurous discovery as something they all could have figured out for themselves. At that point, Columbus picked up an egg that was on the table and asked each of them to stand it on its end. Each tried, but—of course—failed. When it came back to Columbus, he gently tapped the end of the egg on the table—breaking it, but gently enough that it did not spill its contents. He then stood it on end with the flat surface. "Oh, we could have done that," the men protested. "Yes," Columbus replied, "once you've been shown how."

You and I have been shown how God is working out His great and glorious plan. This knowledge, so easily taken for granted, was lost for many years until God used a man to open up the Bible and reveal it—knowledge that we now see as so

obvious that we may wonder why everyone cannot see it. And we should remember: not only did that knowledge—those scriptures—have to be pointed out to us, but a *miracle* also had to take place. God had to *open our minds* to recognize the profound message that was right before our eyes.

As we know, and as we celebrated earlier this year at the Feast of Pentecost—the last of the annual Festivals so far to have had its historical fulfillment in this age—God is not calling everyone to salvation at this time. I have previously asked the simple question, "If God is not calling everyone, why is He calling anyone?" As a member of God's Church, you should know the answer. He is calling some—that is, you and me—to do a Work *now*. If we fail to do that Work, we fail to fulfill the incredible calling we have been given. We dare not do that. Seeking only personal salvation and neglecting the Work for which we've been called will end in disaster (Ezekiel 33:1–7; Proverbs 24:11–12).

When Jesus walked the dusty trails in Israel, He worked through the physical body given Him. Now He is at the right hand of the Father, and it is abundantly clear that the Church is now His body (Colossians 1:18, 24; 2:17; Ephesians 1:22–23). This is vital knowledge we must deeply understand. It is part of the big picture that both Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong and Dr. Roderick C. Meredith passed down to us. We lose sight of it at our own peril.

God made us with the potential for incredible variety. Some are tall, some are not so tall. Some are slender, some are not. Some are light-skinned and blond, some are darker and have black hair. More than outward appearance, though, we all have varying degrees of abilities. A brilliant computer programmer may know nothing about plumbing or electrical

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work. A gifted engineer may be lost when it comes to surveying land, running an earth mover, and mixing concrete. It is obvious that we need them all: computer programmers, plumbers, electricians, engineers, and construction workers. It is a beautiful thing when everyone knows his part and plays his part.

In the same way, the Apostle Paul explains that the body of Christ is made of many different parts (1 Corinthians 12), and we know it is human nature to desire to be one of the comelier parts of the body (1 Corinthians 12:22–25). How many men have striven to hold an office in Spokesman Club or to be in front of the congregation leading hymns or speaking? And it's not just the men. We've seen ladies get into what we sometimes call "coffee pot wars," fighting each other over where best to place the pickles on the serving table. This may sound humorous and even preposterous, but those of us who have been around for any length of time know that these things really do happen!

Notice that Paul tells us it is Christ who determines where each of us fits within the body (1 Corinthians 12:11, 18). A body will not function properly with two mouths and one ear. As Paul explains, "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body?... If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?" (vv. 15–17).

As Paul explained, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling" (Ephesians 4:4). Then, one of the clearest passages of Scripture—yet one of the most difficult for most people to accept—is found just after that. Christ has placed in the body positions of responsibility so we can have unity and, "speaking the truth in love, 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" (vv. 15–16).

To those who really get the big picture and faithfully hold on to it until the end, God will give a great reward. The

current spirit ruler who directs the course of this world, along with the angels who fell with him when he "got the big head" and thought he knew better than God, will be removed and replaced (Revelation 12:4; 20:1–4). His removal is emphatically shown in the Day of Atonement. And the fact that we will replace him and his minions is stated in numerous scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments (Daniel 7:27; Matthew 19:27–29; Luke 19:16–19; Revelation 20:4, 6).

Further, we are not to become angels or some kind of super-humans in the resurrection, as so many professing Christians mistakenly believe. You do not need me to remind you that we in God's Church have been called to become sons and daughters of God, the very children of the living God—brothers, sisters, and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14–21; Hebrews 2:10–18; 2 Corinthians 6:18). Can there be a more glorious future for such flawed beings as we now truly are?

Thank God that He is a loving Father, "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6–7). But there is even more to the big picture. Those called in the first resurrection will collectively be the bride of Christ—getting in on the "ground floor" of the Kingdom of God (Revelation 19:7–9; Ephesians 5:30–32)!

These truths are there for anyone to see, but we understand God must open the minds of those who may see. *He* must call us. When we respond, *He* chooses us—and we must be faithful to the end (Revelation 17:14). Even though this has been a very strange and trying year, let us focus faithfully on the big picture—doing the Work of God as one unified body and fulfilling God's eternal calling that we've so graciously been given!



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

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Postmaster: Send address changes to

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

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EDITORIAL By Gerald E. Weston

How Real Is God's Plan to You?

As the people of God, we love His Festivals—even, perhaps especially, on a physical level. It may sound strange to some, but it makes many of us feel good to humble ourselves and wash someone else's feet. We enjoy the meal on the Night to Be Much Observed and look forward to those unleavened treats that grace our tables and fill our lunchboxes for seven days each year.

Pentecost may involve getting together with spiritual brothers and sisters for a fine meal—sometimes a special covered-dish meal between services, other times in someone's home or at a nice restaurant after services. And when the Feast of Trumpets comes around, we know that the Feast of Tabernacles is not far behind, but again, we may enjoy Trumpets with a fine meal surrounded by wonderful company. And can I say anything to describe the Feast of Tabernacles that has not been said before? Only the Day of Atonement lacks a bit when it comes to our physical enjoyments.

Of course, we tell ourselves that these Festivals are about the spiritual, not the physical, and I have no doubt that we are sincere in this assessment. Yet the coronavirus lockdown has challenged us all to do things differently and to evaluate our thoughts and emotions. Why is it, dear brethren, that the physical too often overshadows the spiritual? Is there a disconnect between what we profess and what we truly think? We say that God's Feasts are about spiritual matters—about living out the meaning of each Festival—but some, if they cannot go to a new site or cannot meet up with their family and friends, suddenly consider these same Feasts problematic. Please stop and consider, brethren: What is most important to you?

Occasionally I hear people say, "Going to the Feast is my vacation time," and it is true that many brethren must take "vacation time" from work in order to go to the Feast. But is that what the Feast is about? We profess that it is not, but do our actions tell a different story? Some think that Church employees, who get vacation time *in addition to* time off for the Feast, do not fully appreciate the challenge others may face. That is a fair observation—however, this is not always as cut and dried as it may appear. Many men and women in our employ could, and did, make more money by *not* working for the Church, and have given

up higher-paying jobs in order to work for the Church. And for many of us, the Feast, while enjoyable, is hardly a vacation. Just ask my wife what it is like to travel to two or three sites and hear the same messages from her husband several times!

As she describes it, the Feast for her is something akin to *Groundhog Day*, a movie in which Bill Murray plays a weatherman who gets trapped in a time loop and keeps living the same day over and over again. Sometimes ministerial wives and children experience a similar feeling—hear the sermon that was given yesterday, pack up, travel, unpack, and go to the next site to hear the sermon a third time. The Feast is meaningful to those of us who spend it that way, but experiences like seeing the local attractions and getting together with our physical families are often sacrificed. We are there to serve, and we serve joyously. Ministers experience the Feast differently in some ways, but that does not mean that we cannot remind you of what the Feast is about for all of us.

The "Faith Hall of Fame"

How real to you, brethren, is the meaning of each Festival? That may sound like a simple question, but it is not. God was real to Abraham and the other heroes listed in Hebrews 11, which we frequently call the "Faith Chapter." That is why they sacrificed so much during their lives. Ask yourself, *What would I do if God instructed me as He did Abraham?* It is easy to say we would follow Abraham's example, but would we? Picking up and moving is not easy, but even beyond that, consider the whole picture of his life.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8–10).

Seriously, brethren, I have been around long enough and heard enough complaining about things

so comparatively trivial that I doubt one in a hundred would obey such a command—and I have to look in the mirror and ask myself if I would. Then there was the test to sacrifice his son. Wow! How difficult that must have been—but we read of no hesitation on his part.

And it was not Abraham alone who exercised great faith. Many others listed in that “Hall of Fame” in Hebrews have gone before us, putting everything on the line. They may not have been alive to hear Jesus’ warning in Luke 14:26–33 concerning sacrificing all we have—a warning we almost always review with new converts before baptism—but they certainly lived their lives with that understanding, for as we are told,

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:13–16).

The full evidence that these who went before us put it *all* on the line is shown at the end of Hebrews 11. While many received miraculous interventions, we see that others became witnesses of faith in a very different way. Clearly, God was real to those who “had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment... [who] were stoned... [and] sawn in two” (vv. 36–37). Yes, as portrayed in the “Museum of Torture” in Mexico City, people once did see their fellow man asunder in Europe and elsewhere—and not that long ago! God was real to those who “wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (v. 37). God was real to Daniel, who was thrown into a den with hungry lions, and to his three friends, who were thrown into a fiery furnace. It is so easy for us to think, *I would do that if confronted with the same choices*, but we know the end of the stories while they did not. How easy it is to talk a good fight. Let us not forget the example of Peter when Christ was taken into custody (Mark 14:29–31, 66–72).

Will We Pass the Test?

Brethren, how many of us are willing to put it all on the line? That is not an easy question to answer, as none of us knows what we will do when such a supreme test comes—but we do have a hint. The best indicator of future behavior is current behavior. Someone who today does not stand up to keep the Sabbath or Festivals or who does not tithe faithfully will not likely

stand up when the going really becomes difficult. If, during a time of turmoil, it is such a big test to go to an assigned Festival site without murmuring, what will we do when our lives are on the line? And yes, that *is* a reasonable question to ask.

When I first came into the Church, I wondered how the Israelites could murmur so much when they saw God perform mighty miracle after mighty miracle. I no longer wonder. How naïve I was and how little I understood about my own nature.

God lovingly and compassionately spoke to Jeremiah, “If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?” (Jeremiah 12:5). It is helpful to understand the reason for Jeremiah’s feeling sorry for himself—there was a credible threat against his life, even from his own brothers!

So, what is it about these Festivals that is most important? Is it the special unleavened bread? Is it a wonderful meal on the Night to Be Much Observed? Is it going to some new part of the world for the Feast of Tabernacles? Is it your “vacation” time? We all enjoy the physical aspects of God’s Festivals—I certainly do! We enjoy family and friends and seeing a new part of God’s great planet. But especially here in North America, we enjoy things not available to many of our brethren around the world.

It is easy to get caught up in the physical, to deceive ourselves—even sincerely—that it is the spiritual that is most important to us, until a rock is thrown in our path. If we truly believe that what these Festivals portray is real, the spiritual should so overtake the physical that we will find joy and fulfillment wherever, and with whomever, we share them.

A Larger Vision of God

Do we really believe that a member of the God Family “emptied Himself” and was born of a woman? Do we really believe Bible accounts of Noah’s Flood, the Tower of Babel, and the children of Israel walking through the Red Sea? Do we really believe that the fulfillment of the four Festivals of the seventh month is just around the corner? Are we willing to give up everything because these truths are real to us? I hope so!

Ancient King David meditated on God’s reality—which he could see all around him. He wrote, “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well” (Psalm 139:13–14).

If God was so real to David that He could say this with the limited knowledge of the universe available to him, how much more ought we to believe, based on what we can see at the end of this age? David could see the big things about physical life—let’s say the eyes, ears, mouth, taste buds, heart, liver,

kidneys, lungs, etc. He no doubt butchered many animals and saw how marvelously they were designed. He also saw human birth and the beginning of life itself. He could see birds, fish, and every form of living creature, and he recognized the hand of God in them all. But we can see all of that and more! We are now able to peer more deeply than David ever could into the very mysteries of life itself. When we do, we find the structure of even our microscopic cells is amazing beyond belief.

Mr. Richard Ames and I have quoted from Bill Bryson's 2004 book *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, in which he describes the odds as

one in 10^{260} against a typical protein of 200 amino acids forming by chance. That is one chance in 1 followed by 260 zeros. Collagen, the most common protein in our bodies, is much

larger at 1,055 amino acids meaningfully strung together, and the odds of it forming by chance, he admits, "are, frankly, nil. It just isn't going to happen" (p. 288). Now, if the odds against a much smaller protein of 200 "letters" spontaneously self-assembling is greater (*much* greater) than all the atoms in the known universe, what are the staggering odds of *titin*, the largest protein in our bodies, forming by chance?

Bryson's 2019 book *The Body: A Guide for Occupants* mentions titin, which helps control muscle elasticity and is made from a string of, not 200, not 1,055, but 189,819 amino acids (p. 7)! That is like writing a sentence by randomly drawing out one letter out of 20, one at a time and in order, and stringing them together until you have a meaningful sentence. There is a formula one can use to figure the odds, but without the formula it would take you quite some time to work it out the slow way—by multiplying 20, the number of amino acids, times itself 189,819 times! And titin and collagen are just two of a million or more different kinds of protein found in the human body!

Bryson, who against all reason believes in evolution, points out the incredible complexity of life and the kind of Mind necessary to pull it off. "You could call together all the brainiest people who are alive now or have ever lived and endow them with the complete sum of human knowledge, and they could not between them make a single living cell" (p. 4). And yet we are expected to believe that life somehow evolved by chance! No wonder God tells us in Romans that those who reject Him are without excuse!

Brethren, *awesome* is too inadequate a word to describe our Creator. We are at a total loss to describe Him—no word or combination of words is sufficient. The Mind that could put us together as working, living creatures—and put together all the other creatures, seen and unseen—is a Mind that can tell the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). That

Mind can resurrect us from the dead and give us life eternal! Either that is reality to us or it is not. But that Creator must know that He can trust us to be loyal to Him forever. He must know that we will obey Him through thick and thin, during good times and not-so-good times. He must know what is truly important to us.

Not a New Challenge

Some things, brethren, never change, because there is always a downward pull on our human nature, and sometimes it is

subtle. We do not always see clearly what is happening in our thoughts and emotions. When it comes to the approach we have regarding the Feast, the problem of human nature is nothing new. In a

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sermon he recently recorded here in Charlotte, Mr. Phil Sena pointed back to old *Worldwide News* articles from the 1970s that plainly illustrated how the Church has historically faced the same problems we face today. For instance, comments then described the need to emphasize "the spiritual aspect of God's Festival." The comments made 40–50 years ago in those pages spoke of being careful not to see the Feast as simply a big vacation, and even discussed concerns about too many members transferring from their assigned sites. One article even mentioned Pasadena was considering limiting transfers to "emergency situations" only. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Of course, *none* of this is meant to say that the Feast of Tabernacles is not to be enjoyed. Of course it is! God certainly desires for us to *rejoice* during all His Festivals—He even commands us to do so! We all love the special foods, as well as the opportunities to see friends and family members and do things that we might not be able to do on other occasions. But we must never lose sight of the purpose for these special occasions and the profound meaning they hold for us. We must not carry a "vacation" mentality.

If we are faithful and grasp the big picture, we will—in the very near future—be changed or resurrected to share eternity together. We must not set dates, as many prophecies have yet to be fulfilled. But this year, of all years, is a reminder of how suddenly things can happen and how the end can come at a time when we do not expect it. Let us keep the Feast this year with the realization that Jesus Christ will return soon, that He will remove the great troublemaker, that we will rule with Him for a thousand years if we prove we can live under His rule, and that a Great White Throne Judgment is coming. (LH)

You Can Take It with You!

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

The Fall Festivals focus our attention on the time of Jesus Christ's return and the wonderful events that follow! And the Bible teaches very plainly that there is a reward for our works, which Christ will bring to us at His return (Matthew 16:27). Yet we know that our works alone are insufficient to earn salvation (Ephesians 2:8–10). How can works be rewarded if eternal life is a gift and unearned (Romans 6:23)? Being well-versed in the basics of our faith is vital, especially concerning doctrines that “mainstream” Christianity often misunderstands. So, how would you explain this apparent dilemma? In this article, we will review what the Bible teaches about your reward and its relationship to your salvation.

Possessions That Are Yours Forever

Everybody says “You can’t take it with you” because, as they say in the funeral business, “The undertaker takes it all.” The Apostle Paul confirmed this in a letter to the evangelist Timothy: “we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:7). Paul was likely thinking of a similar comment in Ecclesiastes 5:15.

Paul was referring to physical things that can be carried out. You may have seen Egyptian kings’ burial chambers, filled with gold, trinkets, and personal items from their human lives. Those aren’t going anywhere. But are there, in fact, non-physical things we *can* take with us when we die? Yes! According to your Bible, there are several possessions that you have in this life that you will retain when you die—and that you will have in God’s Kingdom! They are possessions that will not just be beneficial in God’s Kingdom but will also enhance your life today.

God’s economics are different from man’s. People sometimes chuckle at “The Iron Law of Distribution,” which states, “*Them that has, gets.*” But Jesus Christ refuted and confounded that carnal perspective when He taught, in ef-

fect, “*They that give, have.*” Understanding Christ’s teachings about service to others is a key to understanding how God rewards the works of His children—and also to understanding *how to take it with you.*

Rewards are earned. So, why does God talk about unearned salvation through faith? Does the reward the Bible talks about come by unearned grace, or does it come by works?

These basics are important, and many outside God’s Church misunderstand what we teach about them. Let’s look at the doctrine of *reward for works* and see why we have a good reason to work diligently at our calling (2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:11; 2 Peter 1:10).

Distinguishing Justification from Salvation

Many mainstream Christians, confused by the non-biblical idea of an immortal soul, make the mistake of equating justification with salvation. In God’s Church, we believe in both—but, unlike most mainstream Christians, we understand that they are not the same thing. Mainstream Christianity typically teaches that when you “accept Jesus” your immortal soul enters a “saved” state within your body, which makes your soul eligible for heaven rather than hell when your body dies. This, of course, contradicts the Bible’s clear teaching that *resurrection from the dead* is our Christian hope for life after death.

By contrast, we in God’s Church understand that the gift of Christ’s sacrifice saves us *now* from our past sins, when we accept it through repentance and baptism and we receive the Holy Spirit. That is an unearned gift of justification and prepares us to put on immortality in the future at the resurrection of the just, when Christ returns at the end of this age. In order to put on that immortality, we must overcome and endure to the end. Many New Testament verses tell us that resurrection to eternal life is ours *if* we overcome to the end. You may want to do a brief Bible study on this topic on your own, reviewing the verses below, beginning with some strong admonitions by Paul from the book of Hebrews:

- Hebrews 3:6, 12, 14; 4:11; 6:4–8, 11; 10:35–39; 12:14–15
- Matthew 10:22
- John 15:1–6
- Romans 8:13
- 1 Corinthians 9:27; 10:12
- 2 Corinthians 6:1; 13:5
- Galatians 5:4; 6:7–10
- Colossians 1:20–23
- 1 Timothy 3:6–7
- 2 Peter 1:8–10; 2:20–22; 3:17
- Jude 24
- Revelation 2:5, 10, 16, 25–26; 3:5, 10–12, 16, 21; 17:14; 21:7

As you can see from the Bible's plain explanations above, justification and salvation are *not* the same. If we willfully turn to the practice of sin, hardening our hearts, quenching the Holy Spirit, and repudiating God's free gift, there is no more sacrifice for sin. We know this because, when writing to the Church, Paul warned in the book of Hebrews, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:26–27).

No, we do not earn our salvation by obedience to God's divine law, but we can *lose* our salvation by disobeying Him willfully. Yes, it is possible to fall away, as many scriptures state, and the popular doctrine of "Once saved, always saved" isn't in the Bible. God tells us to live repentant lives and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—and we obey. Overcoming sin throughout our lives is very important, according to God's word. And, happily, if we repent when we do sin, we have *ongoing forgiveness*, because "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9; 2:1–5).

Remember that when "mainstream" Christians use the words "saved" and "salvation," they are usually thinking of their sins being covered by Christ's sacrifice. We in God's Church, however, recognize that Christ's sacrifice has indeed saved us *now* from the penalty of our sins, but that in the ultimate sense our salvation from death will come *in the future* when we are resurrected at Christ's return.

Eternal Life: The Unearned Gift

We must remember that it is always by grace—unmerited pardon—that we can be saved through faith from our sins and the penalty they earn. Although faith and works go hand in

hand and we must have a *living* faith, not a dead one (James 2:14–26), this is not the same thing as *earning* our forgiveness or future salvation through keeping God's law. "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Yet the law *does* give us the knowledge of what sin is, which is why so many in mainstream Christianity do not understand God's definition of sin. As a result, they have difficulty understanding repentance.

Christ's sacrifice did not do away with God's divine law. Always remember that God's commandments define what is right and wrong, and therefore express His character. Transgression of God's commandments is shown to be sin in both the Old and New Testaments (1 John 3:4, *KJV*). Therefore, Paul wrote that "by the law is the knowledge of sin." Yes, the law tells us what sin is, and when we know we are sinning, we know we are not repentant of that sin. If you are breaking God's commandments, you aren't repentant of those sins!

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong often said, "Repentance means change!" But repentance can only change what you are going to do—it can't change what you already did. You can't un-ring a bell. For instance, if you have been taking God's name in vain all your life and you repent of it, your repentance will change what you are going to say. If it doesn't, and you continue to take God's name in vain, you haven't repented. But, while you can repent and remove sin from your future, only one thing can remove the penalty of your past sins: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ! That sacrifice—that gift you cannot earn—is given as generously as your repentance, and it opens the way to your eternal life in the resurrection!

Paul's letter to the Romans presents Christians as being *justified in the past* and *saved in the future*.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, **having now been justified** by His blood, we **shall be saved** from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we **were reconciled** to God through the death of His Son, much more, **having been reconciled**, we **shall be saved** by His life (Romans 5:8–10).

He added in his first letter to the church in Corinth that we *put on immortality in the future* as a gift of God. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal **must put on immortality**. [We don't have it now!] So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal **shall have put on immortality**, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:53–54, *KJV*). "For the wages of sin is death, but the **gift of God** is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Paul gave this instruction to Titus:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us [past tense, from the penalty of our sins], through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that **having been** justified by His grace [in the past] we **should become** [in the future] heirs according to **the hope of eternal life**. [We are not immortal now.] This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men (Titus 3:5–8).

Good works are “good and profitable,” but they *do not* earn us grace or eternal life.

Receiving Your Reward

It’s important to remember that eternity in heaven is not our reward, despite what many mainstream Christians mistakenly assume. “For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; **and we shall reign on the earth**” (Revelation 5:9–10).

There is a reward for works when Christ comes: “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will **reward each according to his works**” (Matthew 16:27). Christ will bring the reward with Him when He comes. “Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, **His reward is with Him**, and His work before Him” (Isaiah 40:10). “And behold, I am coming quickly, and **My reward is with Me**, to give to every one according to his work” (Revelation 22:12).

Christ told His disciples that our reward will be *offices of service* in God’s Kingdom on the earth:

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom,

just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and *sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Luke 22:24–30).

Jesus explicitly stated that the disciples’ reward would be offices of service. He also compared these future offices in His Kingdom to the offices that the priests occupied, located in various rooms of the temple.

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions [great rooms]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know (John 14:1–4).

Christ is currently with our Father in heaven, at His right hand, having received all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). He is preparing many positions of authority and service for His Kingdom, and He said that His resurrected saints will sit with Him on His throne as He currently sits with His Father on His throne (Revelation 3:21). When Christ appears, He will bring our reward to the earth with Him. He will set up His Kingdom on the earth, where we will be kings and priests with Him—the King of kings.

How will our reward be determined? The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–29) illustrates a reward for works by the principle of *faithful in little, faithful in much*. Jesus said it explicitly: “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10). It is important to remember that God does not measure our works by mere size or visibility. Jesus praised the widow’s quiet gift of two mites as a greater work than the much larger gifts given ostentatiously by the rich (Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4).

Remember that Christ is watching what we are becoming—what fruits we bear in this age—in order to determine what our reward can be in the age to come.

Your Character Is Eternal

Your character is something else you can take with you. And it is closely associated with the reward of your office.

When we are resurrected or changed at Christ’s coming, God will change *what* we are, not *who* we are. We will “put on immortality” and will be clothed in a new “tent” (2 Corinthians 5:1–4).

In the Parable of the Talents, we see a principle acted out. Each faithful servant received an office—rulership—and its

scope depended on the works and personal character of the one receiving the reward. Faithful in little, faithful in much. *Character counts!*

The Bible is clear that the resurrected saints will hold

When Christ appears, He will bring our reward to the earth with Him. **He will set up His Kingdom on the earth, where we will be kings and priests with Him—the King of kings.**

positions of ruling authority and priesthood in His Kingdom. “And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and **has made us kings and priests** to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:5–6). In God’s Kingdom, we must choose as He would choose—forever. So, as we become more converted, God changes our nature and character. Our repentance, our love, and our obedience expressed in righteous actions change us inwardly, which enables us to receive greater roles as servants—kings and priests in God’s Kingdom. Paul emphasized the importance of this inward change: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

I like to say that we are being trained to be part of God’s family business—and He’s in the business of *giving*, the opposite of this world. How good are *you* at giving? He’s setting up offices, and He wants to know.

The greater our conversion, the more outgoing concern—godly love—becomes a permanent facet of our character. With this comes a greater ability to serve others in love. For Jesus Christ, living God’s way of life is self-expression—just “doing His own thing.” And we are commanded to grow in the stature of Christ.

How wonderful it will be—living God’s way of life in His family, according to His law and His government, and “doing our own thing” forever! But our own thing must also be God’s thing—that’s called **conversion**. Our human will is being changed to be like God’s divine will, so we will for eternity choose as He does.

In Luke 16:10, Jesus stated the principle of *faithful in little, faithful in much*. Then, He explained why: “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own?” (vv. 11–12).

Loving Relationships Are Forever

We will also take with us **our relationships**. Jesus said that one of the two great commandments is to love others as ourselves. But He gave His Church a higher standard: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). The Apostle John exhorted us further, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, *for God is love*” (1 John 4:7–8).

As God is love, loving one another is the very spirit of the divine law that expresses His character.

Much of the Bible—in both the New and Old Testaments—teaches us about relationships. The biblical emphasis on relationships is vital for us and of utmost importance to God, because our relationships are meant to last forever.

In a Nutshell:

All the world’s gold, silver, money, pyramids, mountains, governments—it all will pass away. So will you, as a mortal human being. Your human life will come to an end. But, thanks to God’s plan, you will take some things with you when you finally go to sleep at death and wait to receive eternal life:

- **Your works** will determine the reward reserved for you in heaven. Christ will bring it with Him when He returns. God is a perfect accountant, and He misses nothing. *Entering* God’s Kingdom comes only by grace through living faith in Jesus Christ. That is an infinite gift and cannot be earned. *How you serve* in God’s Kingdom—your office and position for eternity—will be determined by your works which reflect your character.
- **Your character** is yours forever and determines your ability to hold office in a Kingdom ruled by love and outgoing concern for others. God says He is doing a good work in us. How you build His holy and righteous character in your life today demonstrates your spiritual aptitude for service and rulership in His Kingdom.
- **Your relationships** are meant to continue forever in God’s family. It is essential to learn *now* how to build good relationships, and to hold them as vitally important.

Your works, your character, and your relationships: You **can** take them with you! (LH)



How to Have a Healthy Feast

By **Douglas S. Winnail**

We read in the Scriptures that we are to “rejoice” at the Feast as we “learn to fear the LORD” (Deuteronomy 14:23–26). However, as we celebrate the festival, sitting in services, meeting with friends, eating delicious food, and talking into the night, it is not uncommon to wind up not feeling well, or actually getting sick at the Feast—because in the excitement of the moment we forget to do what is required to stay healthy. In this time when so many are mindful of their health and the health of their loved ones, doing what we can to live more healthful lives has the potential not only to help us have a wonderful Feast this year, but also to bring blessings that will last us far *beyond* the Feast.

Taking Responsibility for Our Health

Bible prophecies reveal that pestilence and disease will be widespread as we approach the end of the age (Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:10–11), and that Israelite nations, as well as others, will suffer from these plagues because they have violated the laws of God (Deuteronomy 28:15, 21–22, 27). While God promised He would protect His people from disease, He also stated that protection would come with a condition: “If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes” (Exodus 15:26). This and other scriptures indicate that there are things we need to do if we hope for God’s protection from disease, and they highlight that God may allow us to reap what we sow (Jeremiah 2:17–19; Hosea 8:7). God wants His people to learn how to live so they can show others how to avoid a multitude of problems that afflict human societies (Deuteronomy 4:1–10; Matthew 5:14–16).

Today, millions of people around the world are suffering from both chronic and infectious diseases, including the COVID-19 pandemic that has prompted governments to all but shut down the world. We hear much about the importance of washing our hands, wearing a mask, and practicing social distancing to avoid catching this new plague. However, little is said about *other vital practices*

that can and should be done to strengthen the immune system—one of the most important systems of our marvelously designed bodies. A robust immune system can help defend us from the coronavirus, as well as many other diseases. The amazing bodies God has given us operate on principles that let them respond in remarkable ways to avoid illness and enjoy good health—if we follow those principles. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon advised that we should learn from what happens around us (Proverbs 1:20–22) and that a wise person sees trouble ahead and seeks to avoid it (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12).

Let’s look at a number of important actions we can take today to maintain our health and avoid the plagues that are afflicting so many. And much of this is advice we can take during the Feast, as well!

Don’t Ignore Your Diet

One of the biggest contributing factors to both chronic and infectious disease involves food choices that we make every day. Of course, God’s people are blessed to understand the laws of clean and unclean animals, which help protect us from the diseases that plague those who consume unclean meat. But pursuing a diet that promotes health goes beyond those commands, alone. In the developed world, the typical “Western diet” has been widely identified as a primary reason for deaths from high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, lung and kidney diseases, various types of cancer, obesity, and many other chronic conditions. Most hospital admissions and deaths linked to the coronavirus involve people who already have serious underlying conditions involving pathologies that are largely brought on by our modern diet and lifestyle.

Gluttony is condemned in the Bible right alongside drunkenness (e.g., Proverbs 23:21), but eating without regard to the bigger picture is regrettably a cornerstone of the Western diet. That diet often includes the *overconsumption* of refined sugar and refined carbohydrates in breads, pastries, soft drinks, desserts, and other products; too much fried, processed, and packaged foods; too little fiber (from complex carbohydrates in whole grains, fresh fruit, and vegetables); and too many calories. As the saying goes, we appear

to be digging our own graves with a fork and spoon. Such dietary habits *also* cause serious damage to the immune system, diminishing its ability to protect us from infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

With just a little effort, many people can make immediate dietary changes to protect against both chronic and infectious diseases. By reducing or eliminating refined sugars, starches, and unhealthy fats, and by eating more fresh fruits and vegetables, leaner meats, fish, and nuts, seeds, beans, and fiber-rich lentils, we take in essential vitamins, minerals, and other essential micronutrients. These dietary improvements help our immune system to function at an optimal level in the manner God designed, producing white blood cells that attack invading pathogens, and manufacturing antibodies to ward off infections. Foods that contain vitamins A, B, C, D, and E, and minerals like zinc, selenium, copper, chromium, and iron, are believed to contribute to building stronger bodies and strengthen the immune system. Conversely, deficiencies in these vital nutrients make us more susceptible to various diseases. Multivitamin or mineral supplements can sometimes be helpful in this regard, but the best way to obtain these nutrients is by eating a variety of whole foods, which avoids overdosing on any specific nutrient, as that can create other problems.

Get Up and Move!

However, choosing a more healthful diet is not the only thing you can do to avoid serious chronic and infectious diseases. There are other important steps you can take to prevent disease and strengthen your immune system, such as making time for regular exercise, getting enough sleep, learning to manage anxiety and stress, reducing alcohol consumption, and maintaining a healthy body weight. A considerable number of people suffering serious complications from the coronavirus are overweight or obese—a condition that both reduces the number and effectiveness of white blood cells and increases the time of recovery when one *does* become sick.

God designed our body to move, and regular exercise is a vital factor in maintaining a healthy body, a healthy weight, and a strong immune system. For those able to do so, engaging in physical activity for 15 to 30 minutes every day provides a number of important benefits. Studies have demonstrated that people deprived of physical activity are more prone to bacterial and viral infections. However, people who are physically active are less prone to infections, have less severe symptoms when infected, recover sooner, and may spread fewer viruses to others (Richard J. Simpson, Ph.D., “Exercise, Immunity and the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *ACSM.org*, March 30, 2020).

Daily physical activity also reduces anxiety and stress, contributes to better sleep, and burns off calories that contribute to weight gain. Going for a walk either outside or in

your home, climbing stairs, stretching and bending, lifting even a book several times, working in a garden, running a vacuum cleaner, or playing a sport can do wonders for your attitude and your body. The bodies God gave us need to move to stay healthy. In our modern, couch-potato world that suffers from an epidemic of inactivity, we need to consciously focus on getting more physical activity every day so we can maintain a healthy body and a strong immune system capable of fighting off infectious diseases.

In addition to physical activity, keeping *regular hours* of waking and sleeping contribute to healthful, natural, and refreshing sleep. And when we sleep, our body restores its natural defense mechanisms that fight infections.

A God Who Cares for Our Health

In the ongoing battle with disease, we need to remember that God is our Healer and a merciful Father who knows our weaknesses (Exodus 15:26; 34:6–7; Psalm 103:13–14). However, it is also good to notice that along with the biblical instruction to call the ministry for prayer and anointing in times of sickness, we are also told to confess our sins—to recognize what we may be doing that has contributed to the problem—and begin to change those behaviors (James 5:14–16).

We are told to “glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). This involves learning to take care of our bodies and use them wisely, so we can “prosper... and be in health” (3 John 2). It is interesting today that many people of all faiths “feel that God is telling humanity to change how it lives” (“Poll: U.S. believers see message of change from God in virus,” *Associated Press*, May 15, 2020). That is good advice for all of us to consider when it comes to improving our health and defending against disease. For more information on this vital subject, take time to read and study our newest booklet, *Biblical Principles of Health*, so you can prepare to show others how to enjoy a more vibrant and fulfilling life.

In the meantime, beginning to practice these principles today will not only make a difference for your overall health, but also make a positive impact on your Feast! Having some extra money to spend in the form of second tithe is a blessing, to be sure—and we *should* enjoy it! Enjoying our tithe, both as we spend it on ourselves and as we serve others with it, is a part of God’s design for the Festival. Yet, as we do so, we can continue to seek to honor God with our approach to diet, find time for physical activity, and ensure that we get good sleep each night. Such choices will help prevent the mid-Feast illnesses too many of God’s people suffer so unnecessarily each year. God wants you to enjoy this Feast of Tabernacles! And taking the initiative to begin practicing new, lifelong habits during the Feast will bring benefits that will last long after the Feast is over. (LH)

Make This a Giving Feast

By **Scott D. Winnail**

The Feast of Tabernacles is a spiritual highlight of the year for God's firstfruits. This holy time points us to the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ and His saints on the earth—a time of reeducating and teaching humanity how to live God's way of life. It is a time when the saints of God, as full members of the God Family, will give of themselves, their time, and their energy—24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a thousand years—as they help humanity understand that God's way of life is the only way to true, lasting happiness. The Feast is a time when we contrast God's "give" way of life with the "get" way of life that currently undergirds Satan's failed society.

God commands His people to rejoice during His Feasts in the locations He chooses (Deuteronomy 12:12–14; 16:13–15) and to learn to fear Him always (Deuteronomy 14:23). To help us accomplish this, God also instructs His people to withhold ten percent of their annual increase and spend it at His Feasts (vv. 22–25). God commands us to use this special *festival* or *second tithe* to enjoy whatever our heart desires within His law, be it wine and similar drink (in moderation, of course), special foods, or other desires (v. 26). As God commands us to leave our homes and stay in "temporary dwellings," He wants us to reflect on the difference between Satan's *world today* and His coming *world ahead*. The Feast is a time when God intends for His people to enjoy extra means—beyond what is normal—as a tool to help them rejoice! In fact, God promises to bless those who obediently save their festival tithe, "so that you surely rejoice" (Deuteronomy 16:15). We must remember that the physical abundance God intends His people to experience at the Feast is a foretaste of the physical abundance the entire world will experience when God's Kingdom is finally established on the earth! This physical abundance is God-intended and good!

Another Feast-related command is to use our festival tithe to serve others (Deuteronomy 14:27). Truly, during the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day, God's people have the opportunity, the time, and often the financial means to give to others in special ways. As God's people rehearse the coming millennial rule of Christ and His firstfruits on the earth during

the Feast, He wants us to practice His *give way of life*. After all, as Christ taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The Apostle John encourages us to "walk just as He [Christ] walked" (1 John 2:6). Christ taught His disciples that those who desire to be great must first learn to become servants (Matthew 20:26). And He also taught that, to the degree we give to *others*, He will bless *us*, in "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over" (Luke 6:38). Indeed, when we look to Christ's personal example, we see that He came to earth not to be served, "but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

During the Feast of Tabernacles, we spend a great deal of time focusing on the eternal reward of the saints—inheriting the coming Kingdom of God as joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). It is God's "good pleasure" to one day give us His Kingdom (Luke 12:32). As we celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, we must develop a heart of even greater giving to others, just as during the Millennium we will assist Christ in giving His Kingdom to humanity! Giving is a godly characteristic that God wants us to make a habit in our lives—a habit we can and should plan to develop further during the Feast.

A Test of Character

This year, the Feast of Tabernacles will be unique for most of us thanks to societal adjustments introduced because of the COVID-19 pandemic. While some may attend a Feast site they have been to before, the attendees at that site will likely be different than they were in years past. Many of our Feast sites will not have "transfer" brethren this year. Most of our Feast sites will be smaller and will consist primarily of brethren who live in relatively close proximity. In some cases, we may not be at the Feast with extended family members this year.

For some—especially those used to extensive Feast travel—this year's Feast may be a test of our character. This could be the first time some of us have ever attended our *assigned* Feast site! However, we must all remember that we have been personally invited to attend the Feast of Tabernacles by Almighty God Himself! Attending God's Feast is a privilege, regardless of where we are blessed to attend—a privilege that God has only extended to a very few at this



point in time. And attending the Feast with our local, spiritual family of like-minded believers—even if we already know many of them—is truly a special blessing!

A Wealth of Opportunities

As we attend the Feast, we have the opportunity to spend concentrated time with many brethren we already know, but also many we may not know well—yet. *Now* is the time to begin planning how we will share with and serve our fellow brethren at the Feast. For families attending the Feast together, it may be wise to sit down with each other and plan how you want to serve and share at this year's Feast. For singles, consider not only how you might serve and share individually, but perhaps consider gathering with two or three other singles and together planning something special for others. For those with extra festival tithe this year (and many may have extra, due to attending a local Feast site), plan how you might be able to use some of the extra to serve others. As you consider different ways to serve others at the Feast, be sure to include people you do not know well or do not know at all. Rejoicing with friends and family at the Feast is a very special opportunity—and serving those we do not know well and those who have less wealth is also something God expects of each of us (Luke 14:13–14).

The following are several ideas you might consider as you ponder how to serve and share at the Feast this year—different ways to live God's *give way of life* at His Feast!

1. Volunteer to serve in an area related to daily worship services (e.g., ushering, the mother's room, public safety, setting up the stage, greeting, sound, and AV).
2. Plan to share a meal and fellowship with brethren—you can go out to a restaurant or “eat in” at your temporary dwelling.
3. Plan to meet and fellowship *at services* with people you do not know or do not know well.

4. Invite a widow or a single out for a meal or to experience an excursion with you.
5. For single men: Each day of the Feast, invite a different single woman to sit with you during services. Give a date to a few different single women during the Feast, whether in groups or one-on-one. Remember that going out on a date does not always need to be about future matrimony—it can simply be about giving and building friendships. Of course, if something longer-lasting results, that is an added bonus!
6. Be sure to pray each morning that God will use you to encourage and uplift His people. We are tools God uses to stir up our fellow brethren to “love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24–25).
7. Watch for ways to assist others. Help a young family carry their gear into services. Help an elderly couple to their seats. Go out of your way to befriend a shy person who is sitting alone. Grab an umbrella and walk someone to the car when it is raining. Babysit for a young couple so they can go out on a date together.
8. At services or activities, look for and reach out to those who cannot come to you or may be uncomfortable coming to you to fellowship. Some people are very shy, while others may have physical infirmities that make it difficult to move around easily. Do not “push” yourself on them, but do show your outflowing concern and desire to share fellowship.
9. There are many other ways to give at the Feast. Be sure to pray about and ponder different ways to serve and share.

God's Feast of Tabernacles is always a blessing, regardless of the location we are privileged to attend. Ultimately, the Feast gives us a special opportunity to develop a greater, clearer vision of God's coming Kingdom on the earth while we intensely practice *the give way of life* for eight days. As God's seasoned saints know well, the best Feasts are those at which we intentionally give and serve. As we prepare for *this year's* Feast of Tabernacles, let's be sure to take time to *plan* to serve and share. As we each do our part, we will make our Father in Heaven proud of us—and we will help make this “the best Feast ever” for our fellow brethren! (LN)



A Feast to Remember

By **Rod McNair**

One purpose of the Feast of Tabernacles is to teach us to *remember*. From its very inception, the Feast was designed to remind the Israelites of events that occurred as they came out of Egypt: “You shall dwell in booths for seven days... that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 23:42–43). God wanted them to rehearse, generation after generation, a yearly reminder of their experience in the wilderness.

In God’s Church, we continue to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. We are reminded of God’s deliverance of His people in the past, and of the prophesied millennial reign of Christ in the future. And as each year goes by, we each build personal collections of Feast memories. For many, it is the spiritual and physical highlight of the year. We leave our homes, gather with other brethren, and worship God for eight unforgettable days. We obey God’s command to assemble, we worship Him as one body, and we take away valuable memories that guide us throughout our lives. Everything about the Feast—the tastes, the sights, the sounds—is intended by God to create memories that give us lifelong strength and encouragement.

Whether we have been in the truth for a few years or walking this Way for decades, we have memories of Feasts past. The question is, what will we remember from this year?

Unexpected Obstacles

We can probably all agree that the 2020 Feast of Tabernacles experience will be especially memorable. None of us expected the COVID-19 virus and the consequences it has brought. A year ago, most of us probably assumed that when the Feast rolled around again in 2020, we would plan for another Feast just like all the others. Little did we know the upheaval this year would bring!

Although Headquarters announced this year’s U.S. Feast sites in February, the decision was made to postpone Festival registration until after Passover. And we all know what happened in February and March: The COVID-19 crisis hit with a vengeance. Governments around the world shut

down international travel and issued edicts severely restricting group meetings. This had a dramatic effect on our Sabbath, Passover, and Feast of Unleavened Bread services. But it also directly impacted our Feast plans. Looking back, we can see that God directed Mr. Gerald Weston’s decision regarding the timing of registration. It gave everyone more flexibility when plans had to be revised. It meant that thousands of brethren did *not* have money tied up in hotel reservations, housing deposits, and airplane fares. Sometimes God’s hand is best seen in hindsight.

As April came and went, we held meetings to discuss options for the Feast. While it seemed possible that everything would be opened up and normal by Feast time, there was also the real possibility of extended restrictions or even a second wave of the virus bringing new regulations. Important questions were asked: What was the most likely Feast-time scenario? What steps could be taken to prepare for a multitude of possibilities in dozens of different localities? What should be done about contractual agreements the Church had already signed? Not only was the virus “novel,” but the Church was facing an entirely new situation regarding Feast planning.

Starting Over

The decision was made to reevaluate our sites all over the world. It was vital to consider the existing local restrictions as well as likely scenarios that could arise five months later. The goal was to come up with broad guidelines that could apply to sites all over the world, and yet also allow for local conditions. The decision was to go “smaller and more local.” International transfers were put on hold, sites would be limited to 200 attendees, and brethren would be directed to their local sites.

During the months of May and June, existing sites were renegotiated and new sites were rolled out. While many international sites stayed the same size, some adjustments had to be made and some additional sites located. Sites in Australia and Canada were multiplied to hedge against potential travel restrictions that might prevent members from crossing state or provincial borders. Sites that attract a high number of international transfers were scaled back to accommodate local members only. As of this writing, many countries are still in lock-

down or in early phases of opening up, and few concrete plans can be made with hotels. In some countries, “micro-sites” had to be organized, where local brethren will watch sermons via livestream. In the United States, 23 sites were organized, with either renegotiated contracts or brand-new agreements.

As plans unfolded, the flexibility and creativity of Festival Site Coordinators and the help of local volunteers assisting with searching out new venues proved to be crucial elements in the massive task at hand. Online meetings provided a vital link with coordinators, Regional Pastors, and Regional Directors for instant feedback and advice on major decisions.

When speaking of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Bible dictates that God’s people come before Him where He has placed His name. As He commanded, “You shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name

In God’s Church, we continue to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. We are reminded of God’s deliverance of His people in the past, and of the prophesied millennial reign of Christ in the future.

abide” (Deuteronomy 14:23). But how do we know where God has placed His name? The leadership of the Church makes decisions about venues that fit the parameters for the Feast. But, more importantly, we pray for God’s guidance to open the doors that He wants us to go through. And how encouraging it is when doors open quickly and in unusual ways! As one member who volunteered his efforts commented on the amazing way plans came together in that area, “We just hit it at the right time.” Coincidence? Those working on Feast arrangements have no doubt that God’s hand was at work.

Canceled Plans

For some brethren, 2020 has been “the year of canceled plans.” For those accustomed to transferring away from their assigned sites, staying local is a new experience. Travel restrictions have put people’s plans on hold. In some cases, such restrictions are even in place between states and between provinces. As of this writing, some countries are not accepting travelers from the United States. There are many uncertainties as to what restrictions will still be in force at Feast time or what new ones will be added.

This year, we are strongly encouraging brethren to attend their assigned Feast site. For many of those living outside the United States, Canada, and other more affluent countries, this is nothing new. In many places, there is one Feast site for an entire country—or for several countries. Even in the U.S., where more people travel to other locations, around 50

percent of the membership normally attend their local Feast sites. So, this is nothing new for them. They appreciate the privilege of attending the Feast, even at the same site they have attended for many years in a row, because it is where God has placed His name.

Some who have the blessing of traveling each year may be wondering, *Why the cutback on transfers?* There are several reasons for this. For one, government restrictions may not allow travel at Feast time. If we make plans to stay local, it is less likely that plans will be disrupted if restrictions are issued. As the news constantly reminds us, this is a season of massive volatility in government regulation, and we need to plan accordingly, staying flexible in an environment where local restrictions may change dramatically without much notice. Another reason to stay local is in case

someone comes down with the coronavirus at the Feast—the closer to home they are, the better (for hospitalization, or even just to return home for self-quarantine). The guidelines also enable us to plan for a consistent number of attendees at each site—this year, 200. If an open-transfer policy were enacted, it would be impossible to maintain consistent numbers across the board and satisfy many

of the Church’s contractual obligations. And if facilities in any area are suddenly faced with unexpected restrictions on the number of people they can allow in their hall at any one time, a group of 200 provides flexibility to adapt as needed, to ensure the Feast is not disrupted.

This has been disappointing to some, and that’s understandable. The Feast is a time to enjoy the blessings of life, and maybe in most years God has blessed you with the resources to travel. But if you can’t travel this year, does that mean this Feast of Tabernacles will be the “great year of disappointment”?

Moments That Bring Joy

We sometimes face challenges at the Feast. When we look back to past Feasts, we may remember times when things went wrong, when we had difficulties. Think about your life. In the past, you may have had to deal with a debilitating health crisis or serious car trouble at the Feast. Sometimes members come to the Feast while grieving over a lost spouse. Let’s not kid ourselves—sometimes we have trials even while keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. For some, the test is not being able to go to the Feast at all. Perhaps you are in that situation this year. It would be easy to “write it off,” so to speak, and consider this Feast as one we would rather just forget. But is that what God wants us to do?

In every difficult situation, there are unexpected blessings if we look for them. Even in the direst of trials, we can

and *should* look for blessings from God. As we submit to God's will—and even when His answer to some request has been “No!”—we can still ask God for His blessings, believing with rock-solid faith that He *is* involved and seeks to reward His faithful people. Notice what the prophet Joel writes about a very difficult and serious time to come. He writes that the servants of God, facing very dark times, would mourn, fast, and humble themselves—and expect a blessing from God! “So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him?” (Joel 2:13–14). Sometimes, even in grievous trials, there have been moments that we remember and smile—even though we would rather not repeat the trial. When we think back to those memories, we remember the “peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

What will you remember about this year? It has been an unusual one, to be sure. Many plans have been disrupted. Sites are smaller, meaning fewer teens or singles at each site. Activities may be scaled back, with no large banquets and dances. But we will still have the opportunity to fulfill what God wants for the Feast. As God desires of us, we will still be able to “eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide” and will have the opportunity to “learn to fear the LORD your God always” (Deuteronomy 14:23). And we will still be able to include “the stranger and the fatherless and the widow” along with our family, as we rejoice before the Eternal (Deuteronomy 16:14).

When it's all over, what will be our primary memories of this year's Feast? The ways we were disappointed, or the moments that brought us joy and stirred us to rejoice before our Father in heaven? It really depends on how we choose to approach the Feast and what our expectations are. It depends on whether or not we have our focus on what the Feast is really about.

Challenges, Growth, and Satisfaction

When I was a college student, I worked one summer at the Church's youth camp in Orr, Minnesota. For six weeks, we took campers on three- and four-day canoe trips into some of the most beautiful wild country in America, the northern Minnesota Boundary Waters. It was one of the most memorable summers of my life. I loved being in the outdoors, the camaraderie of working with the canoe staff, and the responsibility of guiding the campers through an unforgettable experience.

Over a six-week period—two camp sessions—we took dozens of campers out on the water. But the trips I remember most are the ones during which we faced and overcame adver-

sity. Some memories are of waking up on a frigid and sunless morning with ice on my tent, pulling on still-wet clothes, stopping on a rocky point to eat lunch while huddled under tarps because of the driving rain, and hauling canoes over a muddy portage trail nearly a mile long and strewn waist-high with debris and logs.

Ironically, these memories are much more vivid—and even more meaningful—than those of days when the sun was shining, the breeze was gentle, and the puffy clouds drifted in the blue sky. Why? Not because they were more pleasant, but because they were times when we all dug deep, pulled together, and worked as a team. We helped one another and made sure no one was left behind. We shared our burdens and finished the race together.

I also remember being a young person in the Church and going to the same assigned site, Wisconsin Dells, nine years in a row. The Feast site was a two-hour drive from our home and not an “exotic getaway.” We stayed in the same hotel year after year, and its outdoor pool was empty, save for a few moldy leaves and the occasional dead squirrel. Most years, the Last Great Day in that area brought the first chill of winter, a biting wind, and even snow flurries.

But I look back and count those nine years as some of the best Feast memories of my life. What do I remember? Sure, we had sibling arguments on the way to the Feast—but those turned into fun times with those same brothers and sisters as we went on outings together, laughing and joking with one another. Did the Feast orchestra rehearsals seem boring and never-ending? Absolutely! But they also turned into experiences of playing stirring, chills-up-your-spine brass fanfares to announce Opening Night services. Was setting up chairs what I dreamed of as an optimal Feast experience? Not exactly. But those same service projects turned into meeting new friends and having a part to play in enabling a whole congregation of Feast-goers to worship together, sing together, and learn together. I will never forget those Feasts.

What will you remember from the Feast of Tabernacles 2020? Undoubtedly, this year's Festival will be an unforgettable one. It is not “business as usual.” Things are different. But will our primary memories be the inconveniences, obstacles, and annoyances? Or will we someday look back and smile as we remember the little things that will happen this year: working together, pulling together as a family, and learning deep, spiritual lessons from our heavenly Father?

The last few months have reminded us of just how important it is for us to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days. As the end of this age draws near, we will live through the worst time of trouble in history. We need this Feast and the lessons God is teaching us. We are all making memories this year. What will yours be? (LN)



Kings, Priests... and Police?

By **Jonathan McNair**

On May 25, a nation reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic was horrified and shaken by the death of George Floyd, when a brutal confrontation escalated after he allegedly passed a counterfeit \$20 bill. Floyd, a paroled felon and the father of five children and two grandchildren, had lost his job as a security guard as a result of the pandemic. But this time it was not a virus that was the culprit, but a police officer. Derek Chauvin, a 19-year veteran of the Minneapolis Police Department, was charged with murder after pressing a knee on Floyd's neck for more than eight minutes, asphyxiating him as he lay face-down on the ground. Now, with protests and violence convulsing major cities, some are demanding that police departments across the United States be defunded and even disbanded.

As Christians, we believe in the blessings of a lawful society. God does not condone confusion and chaos (1 Corinthians 14:33). His creation is one of order and harmony. We follow Paul's guidance: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1). The Apostle says plainly that the governing authority in our society "does not bear the sword in vain" (v. 4). And, as Jesus Christ noted, His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), and we wisely seek to avoid pointless debates about reshaping a society permeated by wrong thinking about human relationships. As King David noted, "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3).

Knowing these truths, calls to "Defund the Police" can alarm us, because we do not see around us anything close to the effort it would take to establish a truly *godly* world in which police would not be necessary. Short of the return of Jesus Christ to reshape the very foundations of the world, removing the police seems very clearly a fantasy. Yet, as we celebrate these Fall Festivals, we express our absolute faith in the fact that Jesus Christ most certainly *is* returning!

So, while defunding the police seems a delusional goal in today's world—as some cities are now learning firsthand—what about the world of the future?

As we contemplate the confusion around us, we may wonder, *Will police be part of the Kingdom of God on earth?* It is easy for us to assume that fundamental elements of today's world will be present in tomorrow's world, though perhaps "improved" or "purified." We know that God's Law will guide the Kingdom of God, under the loving rule of its King, Jesus Christ. So, will there be a "police force" to enforce those laws? What do the laws given to ancient Israel teach us about policing? The truth of the matter may surprise both supporters and critics of today's police!

"Community Policing" Has Ancient Biblical Roots

Law enforcement has not always meant a centralized force of full-time enforcers. With a code of laws that was spelled out for everyone, every Israelite was responsible for living accordingly. Furthermore, being an honest **witness** was an important obligation of a good citizen. One of the Ten Commandments clearly defines being a false witness as sin (Exodus 20:16).

Leviticus 5:1 goes further, stating, "If you are called to testify about something you have seen or that you know about, it is sinful to refuse to testify, and you will be punished for your sin" (*New Living Translation*). Recognizing that witnesses can be mistaken in what they have seen or heard, multiple witnesses were required in capital punishment cases (Deuteronomy 17:6). And to ensure that witnesses take their role seriously, Scripture mandates that false witnesses suffer the *same penalty* that would have been applied to the accused had they been deemed guilty (Deuteronomy 19:18–19).

Elders of each city, *not* a separate cadre of full-time enforcers, were responsible for the enforcement of justice, presenting cases as necessary to the priests and judges. Deuteronomy 21:1–9 details what to do in the case of unsolved murders, and the elders and judges were to take the lead in determining how to proceed. In Deuteronomy 19:11–12, we read that the elders of a city were responsible for bringing a murderer to face his penalty. Yet the one who was to obtain justice for the victim was not an agent of the city government, but a close relative of the victim who was called the *gaal*, meaning *redeemer* or *avenger*. It was his duty to pursue the perpetrator of the murder and execute the punishment, and the elders were to assist him in seeing justice done. But

it was imperative that no partiality be shown. In Leviticus 24:22, we read, “You shall have one standard for stranger and citizen alike; for I the LORD am your God” (*JPS Tanakh*). Deuteronomy 16 gives a similar instruction: “You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous” (Deuteronomy 16:18–19).

A sense of community obligation was a cornerstone of peace and well-being, according to God’s instructions for

Reading through the laws and statutes of ancient Israel makes it clear that **neighbors and leaders of the community—not a professional police force—bore the obligation for each other’s safety, security, and well-being.**

the Israelites. Exodus 21:29 implies that neighbors should let each other know if their animal is acting dangerously. Exodus 23:4 instructs a citizen to return a lost animal to its owner if it is discovered. Exodus 22:4 describes how restitution for theft of an animal should be made by requiring the thief to pay double the value of the animal to its owner—the implication is that someone discovered the thief and confronted him with his crime.

What is the point? Reading through the laws and statutes of ancient Israel makes it clear that neighbors and leaders of the community—not a professional police force—bore the obligation for each other’s safety, security, and well-being. But this decentralized community approach to law enforcement is not what most of the world’s kingdoms and empires have chosen.

A Short History of Policing

Of course, no human society has been able to avoid crime. This has been true from the beginning. Cain committed the first murder by killing his brother Abel; since then, mankind’s history has been one of crime and violence, and of efforts to control and punish the perpetrators of these actions. Organized police forces date back to the days not long after Noah’s Flood. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* gives a fascinating description of the development of institutional policing in its entry “The History of Policing in the West,” available at Britannica.com. Here is a brief summary.

The first policing organization is believed to have been created in Egypt, with “[t]he empire... divided into 42 admin-

istrative jurisdictions; for each jurisdiction the pharaoh appointed an official who was responsible for justice and security. He was assisted by a chief of police, who bore the title *sab heri seker*, or ‘chief of the hitters’ (a body of men responsible for tax collecting, among other duties).”

Ancient Greece and Rome had police forces responsible for maintaining peace and order in public places, fire protection, and the prevention of violence in the streets. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, organized urban police forces apparently disappeared from western Europe, though they continued in the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire.

By approximately 1000 AD, policing in England was accomplished by community-based systems. Adult males were grouped into “tithings,” led by a “tithingman.” Ten of these groups were collected into a “hundred,” which in turn was included in a “shire” under a “shire-reeve.” This leader was responsible for administering justice in his “shire,” resulting in our modern county *sheriff* in England and the United States today. After the Norman conquest, “constables” were added—officers appointed to serve under the direction of sheriffs

and responsible for overseeing night watchmen, among other duties. Yet, as late as 1285, when the Statute of Winchester was ratified, peace and order in the community was the duty of all adult males. This statute, for example, authorized any citizen to arrest a lawbreaker. It also required everyone to take part in a posse to apprehend a criminal when a “hue and cry” was raised. This system functioned in England for centuries and was exported to its colonies.

On the European continent, between 1536 and 1544, France developed its own system of social order, particularly to protect its citizens from disbanded, renegade soldiers. The solution was establishing a system of military officials called *prévôts* who sought out the bandits. In time, a need for urban policing led to a system established in Paris by King Louis XIV in 1666—in fact, giving us the word “police” that we use today. The French system inspired many of the elements of modern policing, including covert informers, a differentiation between serious and minor crimes, and public safety, as well as responsibility for morality and public health. The Industrial Revolution transformed policing even further, as did, in the United States, chattel slavery and immigration.

The Modern Challenge

While it helps to know the history of policing in order to understand how we arrived at our current approach, it is also important to clarify the challenges facing police institutions today.

Alex S. Vitale is a Professor of Sociology and Coordinator of the Policing and Social Justice Project at Brooklyn College with 30 years of experience in research, writing, and consult-

ing with police departments on the topic of policing. His 2017 book *The End of Policing* takes aim at the factors that undermine the efforts of police departments around the world—and the ineffectual solutions that have been promoted. For example, while some insist that the solution to police bias is to recruit more officers of color, Vitale writes that this has not been the case. Even as the racial composition of U.S. police forces tend to correspond well to the racial composition of the country—even leaning toward higher minority representation in the largest departments—use of force remains about the same: “There is now a large body of evidence measuring whether the race of individual officers affects their use of force. Most studies show no effect. More distressingly, a few indicate that black officers are *more* likely to use force or make arrests, especially of black civilians” (pp. 11–12).

Vitale contends that the solution to the problem of policing in the United States requires more than imposing quotas upon police departments. It also involves dealing with the “mission drift” that has expanded the role of police departments. For example, police have often become responsible for providing security and safety in schools. He writes, “in the 2013–14 academic year, there were more than forty-three thousand school-based police officers in the United States. Over 40 percent of all schools now have police officers assigned to them, 69 percent of whom engage in school discipline enforcement rather than just maintaining security and enforcing the law” (p. 55).

Their role in managing people with mental illness (PMI) has been dramatically expanded. According to Vitale,

... studies suggest that anywhere from 5 to 20 percent of all US police incidents involve a PMI, and that these incidents take longer to resolve and are more likely to result in arrest. In addition, the number of incarcerated PMI has grown dramatically. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) found that 11 million people a year are admitted to US jails; of them, 15 percent of men and 30 percent of women have a serious mental illness. The largest inpatient psychiatric facilities in the United States are the LA County Jail, New York’s Rikers Island Jail, and Chicago’s Cook County Jail; the PMI in jails and prisons outnumber those in state hospitals ten to one (p. 80).

Many of these incidents end violently, as “one in every four police killings is of a person with a mental illness” (p. 77) according to Vitale.

Vitale identifies the fundamental problem when he writes, “Is asking the police to be the lead agency in dealing with homelessness, mental illness, school discipline, youth unemployment, immigration, youth violence, sex work, and

drugs really a way to achieve a better society?” (p. 29). He correctly concludes that the police simply cannot be expected to solve all of society’s problems, and that we need “a society designed to meet people’s human needs” (p. 54).

But how might such a society be conceived and organized? God’s people know that a time is soon coming when His “firstfruits” will reign with Jesus Christ as kings and priests in the Kingdom of God. Is there any reason to think that we will do better in establishing peace, justice, and equity among peoples? Indeed there is, when we consult that much-ignored organizational manual—God’s word, the Bible.

The Ultimate Authority

The most important element missing from today’s criminal justice system is the One who created man, who knows the heart of man, and who will provide the ultimate authority during man’s 1,000-year rest. In Isaiah 9, we read about that ultimate authority, Jesus Christ:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;
and the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of
the increase of His government and peace there will
be no end, upon the throne of David and over His
kingdom, **to order it and establish it with judgment and justice** from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this
(Isaiah 9:6–7).

The officers of any human government are subject to human nature, and the way that they wield their authority can therefore be called into question. Are they acting with honesty? Are they treating people with fairness and equity, no matter their skin color or economic level? Are they abusing their authority?

By contrast, the authority and integrity of Jesus Christ and those who are part of His government will not be in doubt. Christ, as loving King of all the earth, will have no ulterior motives for His actions and decisions. His only agenda will be to teach, protect, and bring prosperity to His subjects, and His righteous and purely motivated mind will be reflected in those who serve under His leadership. Isaiah prophesied of this future time: “Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver, instead of wood, bronze, and instead of stones, iron. *I will also make your officers peace, and your magistrates righteousness*” (Isaiah 60:17).

What a contrast to modern society’s idea that there is no absolute right or wrong! And what a contrast to enforcing law democratically, by the will of the people! In today’s society, police are not enforcing moral absolutes; they are expected to

enforce whatever happens to be the legal letter of the law at the moment. Today's police are expected to exercise governmental power, not God's moral authority.

In God's Kingdom, Christ will rule with absolute, righteous authority. And He will personally exercise that authority as needed. If individuals decide to disobey God's instructions regarding the keeping of the Feast Days, for example, there will be consequences. "And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain" (Zechariah 14:17).

The firstfruits who will be resurrected to serve as kings and priests will extend that authority and use it for good. As Isaiah wrote to those who will live during those days, "And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:20–21).

Those who serve under Jesus Christ as part of His government will *preempt* unrighteousness and *explain true righteousness*. But this instruction and correction will take place in a world that does not blur and confuse right and wrong, good and evil.

The Role of the Family

God commanded the Israelites to teach their children, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12). Authority taught in the home becomes a building block in ensuring obedience to the laws of the land and to those who are implementing them. And God expects parents to use their authority to teach right and wrong to the next generation. Notice what God said about Abraham in Genesis 18:19: "For I have known him, *in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice*, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Genesis 18:19). God commanded the Israelites just as He taught Abraham. He said of His decrees, "You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 11:19).

Fathers were commanded to take the lead in instruction and in enforcing discipline within their family. In the New Testament, after repeating God's command to honor parents, Paul added, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). It was not left to teachers, coaches, or policemen to teach children right from

wrong and require adherence to that standard. *It was the job of the parents, led by the father.*

This is a powerful contrast to our society. According to *Fatherhood.org*, one third of the children in America, around 24 million, do not have their father in the home. Children living without their father are at a greater risk of poverty, behavioral problems, abuse and neglect, and becoming pregnant as teenagers. They are more likely to abuse drugs, drop out of school, commit a crime, and go to prison. Indeed, "there is a 'father factor' in nearly all of the societal ills facing America today" ("The Father Absence Crisis in America").

Instead of fostering hostility toward a patriarchal home, the culture of God's Kingdom will encourage fathers to take an active, leading role as the authority figure in the family *That is a role that fathers—not police—can uniquely fill.*

God intended marriage to create a loving and peaceful environment where children learn patience, kindness, and gentleness—not hostility and hatred. Husbands are commanded to love and cherish their wives, treating them as precious and valuable (Ephesians 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7). Wives are commanded to respect and follow their husbands (Ephesians 5:22). Sadly, many marriages become battlegrounds that require police intervention and sow seeds of future problems involving police in the shattered lives of mates and children. How sad it is that so many fathers have abdicated their responsibilities, leading some women to believe that fathers aren't even necessary, while others try to take on the paternal role for themselves.

In the Kingdom of God, families following godly principles will provide training in peace, love, and respect for authority. Those lessons will be taught by *husbands and wives—fathers and mothers*—according to God's design for the family.

God Speed That Day!

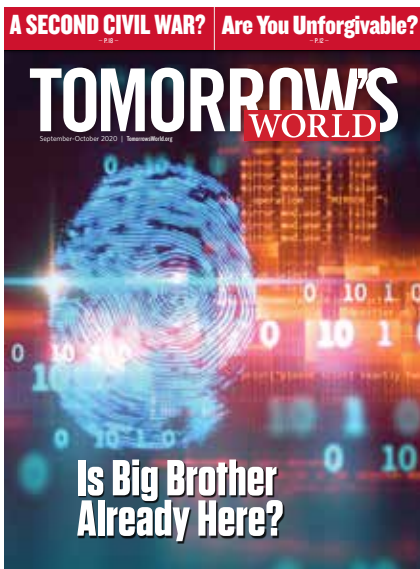
We could say much more about God's view of crime and punishment, and the topic makes for valuable and fascinating Bible study. Some details are plain as day, while others may remain unknown until we are in the Kingdom.

But as for the notion of "policing" God's Kingdom? As we have seen, the enforcement of God's benevolent laws, administered under the authority of the One who revealed them, will create an atmosphere far different from that of today's world, in which carnal rulers use laws of their own devising to control their subjects. Administering God's law will not be an exercise in brutality. Instead, it will be an exercise in service and loving care, when families are again the basic building block of society and citizens are taught their responsibility to care for one another—fulfilling the golden rule and loving their neighbors as themselves (Mark 12:31). ^(L)

In **Loving** Memory

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Behind the September-October 2020 Cover: A Spotlight on “Big Brother”

Pictured here is the cover of the September-October 2020 *Tomorrow's World* magazine, showcasing an article that dives deep into conspiracy, technology, and biblical prophecy. “In the early days of the COVID-19 crisis, we realized that some of the weird, wacky ideas that were going around—in terms of the intrusiveness of tracking and whatnot—could be an interesting topic with an unexpected twist,” said Mr. Rod McNair, the writer behind this timely and insightful article. “A lot of people are thinking some of our modern challenges are part of some massive conspiracy, but there’s really an unexpected, underlying layer that the Church of God knows. We needed to get that out there.”

“I think what jumped out at me,” he said, “is that we in our culture are doing it to ourselves. We are setting ourselves up, with the conveniences we have, to be manipulated in a very sinister way. It’s so easy to point fingers and look at tyrants, dictators, outside forces—‘Look at all the horrible things they do!’—and not see that we are actually a part of it. Examining how we look at our conveniences and the intrusiveness that we are wholeheartedly embracing, I found that really fascinating.”

Mr. McNair emphasized that people need this information now more than ever. “I think this topic is so important right now because even within the last few months, we really have seen some of the traditional structures collapsing around us. Time is short. We’ve been sounding the alarm to our audience for many decades, and the closer we get to the events that we’ve been talking about, the more urgent the message. The coming ‘Big Brother’ power is such an important topic—not for people to be frightened of the future, but to be aware, to have their eyes open and know how they can prepare.”

—Editorial Staff

Halloween Creep

Last year, my family moved into a new house. It was an exciting and hectic few weeks of transition. The excitement of a new home and a new neighborhood was dampened, however, when we discovered ghosts—more than one, actually, along with a resident witch, and even a werewolf. All joking aside, of course, there weren't any real ghosts or monsters, but you've probably guessed it by now: Halloween decorations.

Earlier Every Year

Perhaps a "ghost" or "goblin" inhabits your neighborhood too, courtesy of neighbors who seem to have been eagerly anticipating the holiday all year long. Labor Day is barely behind us when the Halloween "season" goes on display in stores across America, as well as on decorated front lawns, for weeks that feel like months.

It seems that the creepy things of the night come out earlier and earlier each year. Recent years have presented a challenge for my wife and me, as our daughter is now old enough to notice what's normal and what isn't. The first time she saw a skeleton, she was terrified. For better or worse, she has begun to get used to them—sort of. We walked into a store one morning and she yelled "Eww!" upon seeing a witch. Good job, kid! (We didn't teach her that.)

Her reaction brings up a good question: Is Halloween just harmless fun and a good outlet for kids' imagination? A better question is, what does the Creator God have to say about the subject?

A Real World of Real Dangers

God, who does not change (Malachi 3:6), warned ancient Israel not to seek out the spirit world, or to have any part with it (Leviticus 19:31; Isaiah 8:19). There is a very real, fallen, evil, and dangerous spirit world that can influence human beings in terrible ways if we choose to interact with it. It is a world that Bible-believing Christians are clearly told not to toy around with. The Apostle Paul identifies these wicked spirits as our enemies (Ephesians 6:11–13). They are led by the "ruler of this world," Satan the devil (John 14:30; Ephesians 2:2). His deception is twofold. Halloween piques the interest of some just enough to trick them into experimenting with the occult and allowing demons into their lives. For most, though, it seems like "harmless fun," because it is not real to them. Deceiving people this way is one of Satan's tactics. As the saying goes, "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist."

A Ghoul-Free Alternative!

And yet Halloween exists, every year seeming to creep up further on the calendar and parade itself in stores, public celebrations, and lawns. Even amidst the pandemic this year, we won't be able to avoid obvious signs of it all around us. Thankfully, we in God's Church have the blessing of God's own Holy Days. When millions around us are celebrating Halloween, we will have recently returned to our homes after observing the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day—Holy Days free of goblins and ghouls! How blessed we are to have had our minds opened to keeping the true Holy Days given by our Creator God!

—Jonathan Bueno