

# THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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## Thank Him for Preserving Us in Truth

*Dear Brethren,*

It is good to consider the blessings God gives us, especially when we are going through difficult trials. Focusing only on our personal problems is often depressing—and counterproductive. The happiest people are those who focus on others' needs and are thankful for even the littlest blessings God gives them (Acts 20:35). It may not be easy to set our minds on our blessings and on other people when we are facing one of those truly great trials, such as an unrelentingly painful ailment or the death of a loved one. But there are *always* blessings to be thankful for and other people we should remember—even in our most difficult circumstances.

I used to thank God for the blessing of calling me into His truth, and I still do, but I have added something else: “Thank you for *preserving* me in the truth!” Holding on to the truth may appear to be simple—but consider how many have abandoned it, even returning to the errors they once rejected. “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Peter 2:22). Peter was quoting from Proverbs, which adds another detail: “As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (26:11).

### **Proud or Blessed?**

If you have been around the truth very long, you no doubt have heard individuals proclaim confidently that they will never leave the faith—but not a few of them have gone on to do just that. I personally cringe when I hear someone boldly pronounce that he or she would *never* do something. Trusting ourselves rather than looking to God is a serious error, because

there is an evil spirit, one much stronger than we are, who is doing everything he can to destroy us.

The Apostle Paul gave us a warning that we must not take lightly: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). Paul recognized that the path to the kingdom is not a *greased slide*. “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (9:27).

Describing a war taking place in his mind, Paul declared the utter helplessness of his own will to overcome his carnal human nature:

I find then a law [a force], that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law [force] in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* (Romans 7:21–24).

Do you, my dear brethren, see this same struggle in your mind? If not, why not? Are you overlooking something? Are you feeling proud, rather than blessed?

### **The Pentecost Connection**

Paul does not leave us without hope, as he answers his own question about deliverance from such a wretched state: “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (v. 25). But what does he mean, “*through Jesus Christ?*” Is it Christ’s death that saves us? The answer, surprising to many, is *No!*

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On the contrary, Paul explains that by the death of Christ we are blessed with reconciliation and brought into a state of forgiveness, but we are *saved* by His *life*: “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 [forgiven] by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God [no longer enemies] through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life*” (Romans 5:8–10).

But how is it that we are saved by His life? Paul told the confused Corinthians that unless there is a resurrection, none of this matters! “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:16–17). We are saved through the fact that the risen Christ lives *in us*.

Paul told the Romans that the only way to overcome the force that wars against our desire to be obedient to God is through the power of a greater force. We must have the Spirit of the living Christ dwelling in us, “for to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Indeed, “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His*” (Romans 8:6–9).

Among its many lessons, Pentecost reminds us that we must have the mind and power of Christ and the Father—Their Spirit—literally living in us. This is not something figurative. It must be real. People fall away when they trust too much in their own strength, in the way *they* think and act. Too often they hold on to their past religious foundations, figuratively placing new wine into old wineskins. Some fail to realize that there is a crucial difference between Sunday and the Sabbath. A few make the mistake of thinking that we are merely “Jews who believe in Christ.”

Many in other Church of God fellowships—as well as some in the Living Church of God—do not understand *why* God has blessed them with their calling. They hold on to the

old wineskin that God is calling people today mainly for their personal salvation. *Brethren, it is a mortal danger to put new wine into old wineskins!* Personal salvation is the by-product, *not the primary purpose*, of our calling. First and foremost, God is calling us now to do the Work and prepare for our future role in His Family. Let me say it again: God is calling you to do His Work, not just to get personal salvation!

Read and think seriously about the parable of the minas (Luke 19:11–27). Each servant was given a unit of money and told to *do something* with it, not simply to hang on to it! Notice that Jesus did not allow some servants the option of taking their blessing for granted, lazily drifting along until He returns. All in the parable were commanded to do business. The servant who sat back and did nothing *lost* what he was given. Do we understand that this parable gives us a glimpse into the future—and gives a warning?

The parable of the sower also carries a warning: “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience” (Luke 8:14–15). The seed sown among thorns represents those who are distracted and not laser-focused on the blessing and responsibility of their calling. Only the last group, with good soil for their seeds, recognizes that fruit must be produced.

Yes, brethren, you and I have many blessings for which to thank our Creator. Consider that—of the eight billion people on earth today—God has individually identified and revealed Himself to you. He has called you for an incredibly special purpose—to be one of His firstfruits. He has revealed to you the one and only truth regarding the purpose of life. He has given you His Spirit that Christ may abide in you, and He has preserved you in His truth. So, express your thanks to Him, look out for the needs of others—and appreciate the blessing that you have been called to do His Work!



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## “Keep Them from the Evil One”

**O**n the night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed for His disciples, saying, “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours” (John 17:9). God’s true servants are not of the world, as they have rather been set apart for His special purpose. This does not mean that we are called because we are special. On the contrary, 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 dispels that idea. We are the weak of the world—of ordinary birth, strength, and wisdom.

Yet we are Christ’s—and we are of God the Father, as John’s next verse explains. “And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them” (John 17:10). Imagine that! God is glorified in us! In other words, He is glorified in what He is doing in and through us. So, while we did not *begin* as special, we are nevertheless *called* to something very special. Notice how Peter makes this point: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *His own special people*, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:9–10).

He goes on to explain that with this calling comes responsibility. “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (vv. 11–12).

### Firstfruits of God

God designated a special Holy Day each year to remind us of our calling. Today we call it Pentecost, but in the Old Testament it was called “the day of the firstfruits” and the “Feast of Weeks.” We read, “Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to the LORD at your Feast of Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work” (Numbers 28:26). But while we are the firstfruits of God (James 1:18), it can be difficult for us to comprehend all that this means.

We understand that God’s Feasts revolve around the harvest seasons in the Promised Land. Christ was the first of the firstfruits of the barley harvest. We are the firstfruits of the wheat harvest—and the Feast of

Pentecost has profound meaning for those who are called during this age, as well as for those called later.

Several layers of meaning come with each of God’s special days. Passover pictures not only the events that happened in Egypt, but also the role of Christ as our Passover Lamb. The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us of Israel’s journey out of Egyptian slavery, from which we learn that sin is not freedom; sin is bondage. For seven days we practice putting out the leaven of malice and wickedness, feeding instead on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:7–8). When we respond to God’s calling, we enter into a lifelong journey out of spiritual Egypt, out of the bondage of sin. The Last Day of Unleavened Bread was when Israel was “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:1–2). Their crossing the Red Sea pictured our baptism, and baptism itself has many layers. It pictures a burial and coming up to a new way of life, just as Israel physically left Egypt behind and began a new life on the other side of the sea. But there is much more to baptism.

Baptism pictures what Christ literally did for us, so we are figuratively buried and resurrected with Him in a watery grave. When Saul—later called Paul—was struck down on his way to Damascus, a man named Ananias was told to “go, for he [Saul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:15–16). Ananias laid hands on Saul, who regained his sight, then commanded Saul, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Here we see, from Ananias’ instruction to Paul, that baptism pictures our sins being washed away. But our spiritual cleansing is not as simple as Naaman being healed of leprosy after dipping in the Jordan River seven times (2 Kings 5:10–14). Our cleansing involves being immersed in the word of God.

We often read Paul’s instructions regarding marriage without focusing on their larger meaning—marriage of the Church to the Lamb of God. To participate in that marriage, we must be cleaned up by God’s word. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by

the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” The full meaning is clear: “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:25–27, 32). We must individually and collectively be made ready for that great day:

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God” (Revelation 19:7–9).

### Layer Upon Layer

We see that God’s Festivals and Holy Days contain many layers of meaning—and this is certainly true of Pentecost. That momentous day began at Sinai as a covenant between God and Israel. It was a marriage covenant, which is one reason why the Jews read the book of Ruth during this Festival. And there are, of course, other parallels—some understood by the Jews and some only understood by those of us in Christ. Ruth left her homeland behind for a new home in Israel. She came to Judah at the time of the barley harvest and continued gleaning until the end of the wheat harvest. Boaz redeemed her and married her. The parallels to our calling should be obvious.

It was on the first Pentecost that the Ten Commandments were given in codified form. Later, the day became also a celebration of the early harvest. Israel was God’s firstborn (Exodus 4:22), His firstfruits (Jeremiah 2:3). Yet the Sinai covenant was only a type of the new covenant that would come.

Israel had the same problem that we see in our world today. People want to *be right with* God, but they use human reason so as not to *do right by* God. After reminding Israel of the Ten Commandments, nearly 40 years after the covenant at Sinai, we read that God moaned over Israel’s hardened heart. “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments” (Deuteronomy 5:29). Many see God’s commands as *burdensome*—whether as a formal doctrine, or simply as an uncomfortable feeling inflamed by the prince of the power of the air, who directs the course of this world. Satan convinces mankind that God is making harsh, unrealistic demands of us and keeping us away from what is good.

Sadly, humanity fails to understand the purpose of the commandments: “that it might be well with them and with their children forever” (v. 29). But far from being a burden, John tells us emphatically that “His commandments are

not burdensome” (1 John 5:3), and James tells us that the commandments are a “perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25). It is the *violation* of His law that places us in Egyptian bondage. We can see that people’s problems often involve clearly defined sins. Couples move in together prior to marriage and find themselves squabbling over who owns the television, who did not keep up his or her part of the rent, and who takes care of the dog. Recreational drugs create a whole host of problems. Adultery destroys marriages and leaves children in confusion.

### Two Spirits

We know that there are two spirits in the world. One is broadcast by the prince of the power of the air, who promotes disobedience to God’s laws. This spirit seems right to men and women everywhere, but its way does not end well. The other is the Spirit of God that was poured out on the first Day of Pentecost following Christ’s resurrection. God gave it to Christ’s servants to remove their human hostility against God’s law. This was prophesied hundreds of years earlier by the prophet Ezekiel:

“Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 11:19–21; see also 36:26–27).

Hebrews 8:7–9 quotes a prophecy made long before, in Jeremiah 31:31–34, revealing that God is putting His laws in our minds and writing them on our hearts. Our old hostility, whether overt or passive, has been removed—though we must always be on guard against attitudes that can rear their ugly heads if we are not careful. After repentance, upon entering into our baptism with commitment and sincerity, and after receiving the laying on of hands by a true servant of God, we are given the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. We become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Do we understand the magnitude of what that means?

The Spirit of God unites with the spirit in man, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:16–17).

Yes, we are begotten by the very seed of God. “Whoever has been born [begotten or conceived] of God does not sin, for His [God’s] seed [Gk. *sperma*] remains in him; and he cannot



sin, because he has been born [begotten or conceived] of God” (1 John 3:9). But the context here is describing how we behave right now, so how do we reconcile it with what John tells us earlier in his epistle? “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8–10)?

Yes, when we are finally born into the Family of God at the resurrection, we will never sin again. How wonderful that will be! But the context of this passage—as I remember Dr. Meredith pointing out at a Regional Ministerial Conference in Big Sandy, Texas, in the early 1970s—is not the time after we are resurrected, but rather the here and now. So, what is

**We know that there are two spirits in the world. One is broadcast by the prince of the power of the air, who promotes disobedience to God’s laws. This spirit seems right to men and women everywhere, but its way does not end well. The other is the Spirit of God that was poured out on the first Day of Pentecost.**

John telling us? He has already established that if we say we have no sin, we make God to be a liar, but he is saying here in 1 John 3 that if we have been conceived of God, it is totally incongruous for a begotten child of God to sin. The focus is on what we choose to practice today—whether or not we practice righteousness. This choice is what separates the children of God and the children of the devil.

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born [begotten] of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother (1 John 3:7–10).

The context is how we are living now—which way of life we practice, which way is the norm for us. Inherent in this is that we must love one another, but this is talking about *godly*

*love*, a kind of love that is very different from what is seen in the world. “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). This is the kind of “love poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

### **Exercise the Holy Spirit**

As we come closer to the end of this age, and as the accuser of the brethren is cast back down, knowing he has but a short time, we will need to exercise the love of God in us to resist all that Satan will throw at us, and to avoid hating and betraying one another—which is exactly what Jesus warned us will happen. “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray

one another, and will hate one another” (Matthew 24:9–10). And who are some of those who will be offended and betray one another? “Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death” (Matthew 10:21). Yes, before it is over, even family members will turn against one another!

Those who get caught up in the course of this world—in its emotion-

driven politics and ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious rivalries—will not by their own willpower be able to escape what Satan promotes. However, there *is* a way of escape from Satan’s devices. Godly love—the kind Christ demonstrated in sacrificing Himself on our behalf—is a result of God’s Spirit working in us. It is a fruit of the Spirit that was poured out on us at Pentecost and that is poured out on us upon our baptism—and it is accompanied by longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

Remember the words Jesus prayed on the night when He was betrayed.

I have given them [His servants] Your word,” He said, “and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, *but that You should keep them from the evil one*. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world (John 17:14–16).

Let us stir up the Spirit of God within us to *recognize* and *reject* the course of this evil world through prayer, study, meditation, and fasting. We cannot do it on our own, but we can with Christ in us. Let us not fail! (LN)



# Are We the Church of That Pentecost?

By **Wallace G. Smith**

**J**esus Christ said, “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Scripture testifies that Christ is the Rock on which His Church is built, and the Son of God promised us that this Church would endure. That Church began on the day of Pentecost, nearly 2,000 years ago, when God poured out His Holy Spirit on a relatively small group of believing people—and it exists today.

Jesus gave a commission to the Church that was to begin on Pentecost, saying, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15–16). He promised He would be with them every step of the way as they sought to accomplish their mission (Matthew 28:20). In the book of Acts we see that He fulfilled that promise, accompanying and empowering His Church. And we see what that Church—a relatively small, ragtag group of people—was able to accomplish because of this. Their impact was described by those who violently sought to silence their message in Thessalonica: “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too” (Acts 17:6).

That small group of people didn’t have the Internet. They didn’t even have printing presses. Yet they lost no time gaining a reputation as those who “turned the world upside down.” Earlier, Jesus had astonished the crowds with His power and authority (Luke 4:32, 36), and the Church that began on that Pentecost in AD 31 went out into the world with the same power and Spirit.

Whatever described those people must also describe the continuation of the Church that had its beginning on that Pentecost—the Church capable of turning the world upside down. So, are we the Church of that Pentecost? When we look at the characteristics of the people who were a part of that Church in AD 31, can we truly say that we are a part of *that* body of people? It’s up to us, because we are each part of a body of people, and we each contribute to what that body of people is like—or not like.

Let’s examine three characteristics of the Church of that Pentecost—because those characteristics should describe us.

## **Are We a Church with One Accord?**

The Church of that Pentecost was a Church “with one accord,” as a prerequisite to receiving the Holy Spirit. “When the day of Pentecost had fully come, *they were all with one accord in one place*” (Acts 2:1). What if they hadn’t been with one accord in one place? What if they’d been arguing and bickering? Surely, as human beings, they had some varying ideas—what if those ideas had grown so dominant that they prevented the disciples from being in one place to receive that gift? What if personality differences had kept them apart? What if some had said, *I love that guy, but I’m not going to be in a room with him*, or, *I do love him as a brother—just don’t ask me to shake his hand, because I can’t forget what he did?*

For those disciples at that first Pentecost, it wasn’t like that. The Greek word translated “with one accord” in the *New King James Version* is *homothumadon*. The *Outline of Biblical Usage* suggests that this word, used ten times in Acts, “helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community. *Homothumadon* is a compound of two words meaning to ‘rush along’ and ‘in unison.’ The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone.”

We can read further in Acts 2 to see *homothumadon* in action. What does it look like to be with one accord while empowered by God’s Spirit? After 3,000 people were baptized, “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”:

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42–47).

The brethren in that Church were *not* communists, and people were not expected to give *everything* they had—or even

to make this special donation at all—but they had sincere, mutual compassion for one another. Some of these people had traveled from far-off lands to be there for Pentecost, and suddenly, through God’s Spirit, they felt closer to their new brethren than to anyone else they’d ever known, and they didn’t look forward to going back to their home countries—yet they had only brought enough to stay for a certain amount of time. They shared with one another because they *longed* to keep spending time with one another, longed to be with those who shared a common mind, common accord, and common passion.

Two chapters later, we find another description that reflects this aspect of that Church. “Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common... for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (Acts 4:32–35). These resources were not given to enable someone’s vanity project—as some false leaders have sought in this age. People gave because there were people in need, and they trusted their leaders to know where the needs truly were.

Even beyond care and compassion, the Church’s *teachings* were a part of that *homothumadon*, because it’s just not possible for the Church to be with one accord if we’re all disputing about what is taught. You cannot be with one accord with a multitude of conflicting teachings. That is a part of having unity of mind—being “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

God’s people were “of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32). And when you share one heart and one soul, you want to have dinner together. When you go to a movie, you want to see it with God’s people, because those are the people you want to discuss it with afterward. When you get together for a volleyball game, you want to play with God’s people, because those people share something with you that is more important than volleyball, and playing volleyball with them means more than playing it with others. We need to be willing to examine ourselves as individuals—and seek, if necessary, to revive that kind of spirit. What does it take for us to become more like this description of our first-century counterparts—more with one accord?

### **Are We a Church That Is Doing the Work?**

The Church that was founded on the Pentecost of AD 31 had a divine mission to take a divine message to the ends of the earth—as we see from the very beginning.

In Acts 2, the account of that first Pentecost of the New Testament Church describes the miraculous giving of God’s Holy Spirit, accompanied by miraculous sights and sounds

(vv. 1–3). One gift of that Spirit gave the apostles the ability to be heard in languages they had never used before (v. 4).

Around where they were meeting, the sounds gathered Jews—“devout men, from every nation under heaven”—who heard these Galilean men speaking in *their own languages* (vv. 5–6):

Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God” (vv. 7–11).

Peter then proceeded to deliver what we might even call the very first *Tomorrow’s World* Presentation.

This divine gift of languages was not a *random gift*!

The moment God’s Church began, the *very first miraculous gift it was given* was the *ability to preach the Gospel to the world*! The New Testament Church began fulfilling its commission to preach the Gospel from the very first moment of its existence, and its Living Head, Jesus Christ, used the initial giving of His Spirit to empower it for that very task!

We cannot afford to miss this vital fact, and it is worthy of repeating: The very first act of God’s Church was to immediately do the Work of preaching the Gospel to the world, and the very first gift God gave to His Church was the ability to do that Work effectively. The Church came into existence and then, with its *first breath*, preached the Gospel, having been empowered by its Father to reach the entire world with His Message.

You *cannot* separate the Church of God from the Work. Many try, but they serve the purposes of the Devil in doing so. There is one thing this world needs, and—through no strength or greatness or wisdom of our own—God is empowering us to give it to them. We do not have the right to tell Him to use someone else. We need to be about doing the Work that He has called us to do.

The Church of the Pentecost of AD 31 certainly was preaching the Gospel—and its leaders were called before some of the highest-ranking government officials of the time for doing so. “So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). Now, for many who live in the Western world, it’s easy to envision a government with no “bite,” because we are accustomed to hearing people ridicule governments with impunity.

But the men to whom the apostles were now having to give account were men who held their lives in their hands—men who, at a command, could have them executed.

Knowing this, perhaps Peter and John could have said, “Well, it does seem that the door is closing, for it’s truly difficult to do the Work in this age. Perhaps at a time when we have greater budgets, when we can truly afford it, and things are a lot safer, we’ll seek to do the Work. Until then, let’s focus on family weekends, covered-dish meals, and local Bible studies.”

But *they did not*. Instead, God’s inspired word records their response to the authorities: “Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard’” (vv. 19–20).

That is a statement of *absolute commitment*. It is the language of *no-other-choice*. Peter and John looked at those men who commanded them—potentially at penalty of death—not to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ’s coming Kingdom and said, in essence, *No matter what choices you are about to make about our lives, no matter what words you are about to use to accuse us, and no matter what pains you are about to bring upon us, we cannot do anything else but preach this message.*

It is easy to get caught up in various diversions and controversies that are not the Church’s part to solve in this world. But be careful to notice precisely why the apostles were getting in trouble. It wasn’t for any involvement in the political controversies of the day—though there were many, just as there are today.

We should be ashamed if we get in trouble over this world’s disputes. Let the “dead” argue over those things (Luke 9:60). We have a living message that none of them can carry. This world’s passions don’t correspond to God’s passions. Getting caught up in worldly arguments is a trap the Devil lays for us, and we see that the Church of that Pentecost didn’t fall into that trap.

In another instance, the apostles were arrested by the Jewish authorities (again) for preaching the Gospel (again), but this time were freed from prison by an angel (Acts 5:17–19). A miracle! If we were among the apostles, we might assume that we would now be taken to safety—perhaps back to wives and other loved ones who were worried about us.

But what did the angel say? “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life” (v. 20). In other words, *What you just got in trouble for, what you’re being threatened for? Go do more of that. And the place where it’s easiest to find you—the middle of the temple? Go stand there.*

And they did not hesitate:

When they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and

those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, saying, “Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!” Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So one came and told them, saying, “Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!” Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned (vv. 21–26).

The priests recognized that there was something miraculous afoot—and that the audience was clearly receptive—so it was very different this time: *Well, hello, gentlemen. We see you’re preaching again today. That’s nice. The high priest would like a word, actually. You think you could come by?*

But it was a different story behind closed doors. “The high priest asked them, saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!’ But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’” (vv. 27–29).

And the only reason the apostles weren’t *killed* for this response was because Gamaliel, the one rational voice on the council, suggested that if the apostles’ work was not truly of God, it would die of its own, but if it *was*, he and his cohorts risked fighting against God Himself (vv. 34–39). This got through to his colleagues, “and when they had called for the apostles *and beaten them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (vv. 40–42).

So the apostles were miraculously freed—but to do what? To continue preaching and to be *beaten*. Regardless, they did not cease.

There are some who profess the name “Church of God” who would steal away lambs from the flock, trying to convince them that this is no longer a time to do the Work—that somehow, now, it’s too hard, or that God hasn’t opened the same doors He opened in the days of Herbert W. Armstrong. *Now is a time to focus inward*, they say. But whether or not those who



speak such words sincerely believe them, they are words of Satan the Devil. If they aren't spoken by deceivers themselves, they're spoken by people who have allowed themselves to be deceived. Some in the modern era have made excuses, like, *Well, money is tight, and few people are responding. God's just not calling anybody anymore.* But the Church founded on that Pentecost in AD 31 would have said something very different: *Well, they are only beating us—not executing us yet—we're still alive, so the door is still open!*

It is shameful to have the Holy Spirit and not be willing to do the will of the One who sacrificed so much so we could receive that Spirit. *The very first breath* of the Church that came into existence on Pentecost of AD 31 was preaching the Gospel. And for many of God's servants who have gone before us as martyrs over the centuries, their *last word* was *still* preaching the Gospel. If we say that it is no longer necessary to do the Work, we shame their memories—and we shame what Jesus Christ seeks to do in His body.

The Church founded on that Pentecost understood that preaching the message to the whole world is a *necessity*. If we are that Church, we will see it that way, too.

### Are We a Church of Courage?

It's very easy to think of only the ministry as those who need courage to preach the Gospel, but the *entire* Church that was founded on that day of Pentecost was made up of members who needed courage. They recognized that the burden is on *all* of us.

Now, that doesn't mean each of us should make our own YouTube channel and do our own preaching. But, at the same time, has God ever given you what seemed like a natural opportunity to tell someone something about what you believe? Where I used to work, I had such opportunities in my cubicle from time to time when I was asked about my beliefs (1 Peter 3:15), and I'm sure many of you have such opportunities as well.

Scripture tells us that the entire Church needs courage. Before he became the Apostle Paul, Saul the Pharisee hated God's Church with a passion—he believed that all its members were heretics corrupting men, women, and children. He had a passion for persecuting Christians, and it drove him to make examples of people. Acts 8 begins right after the religious authorities had made an example of Stephen by stoning him to death.

Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Steven to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and

dragging off men and women, committing them to prison (vv. 1–3).

Just imagine angry individuals not only coming for the people at Headquarters. They're coming into *your* home. They're coming to drag your wife away for an answer she gave about her beliefs to the salesman at the store. They're coming to grab your children out of your house.

What do you do?

In verse 4, we read what *they* did: “Therefore those who were scattered *went everywhere preaching the word.*” Intense persecution did not stop them, because they recognized that what began on Pentecost in AD 31 involved them *all*.

God sometimes directed ancient Israel to the examples of the Gentiles around them—not to worship foreign gods, but to help them see how they compared in their own devotions to Him (e.g., Ezekiel 5:7). That concept reminds me of an account that came out of World War II. Many people don't realize that Jehovah's Witnesses were rounded up in Europe during World War II and placed into concentration camps, much as the Jews were. Their message is *not* the true Gospel! Let there be no mistake about that. Yet they do believe they have an obligation to preach their message in the face of whatever persecution may be thrown at them.

A documentary I once watched told a tale of such devotion. At a concentration camp that was holding many Jehovah's Witnesses, word had gotten out to their Nazi captors that there was something suspicious going on in one of the camp buildings. As the guards stormed the room with their rifles—perhaps expecting to see people digging a tunnel to escape or building a stash of illegal, homemade weaponry—they found, instead, a group of Jehovah's Witness prisoners hand-printing copies of a magazine they had produced. Using bits and pieces of machinery smuggled *into* the camp, they had assembled a working mimeograph and were cranking out copies of their religion's magazine—from *inside* the concentration camp!

The account mentions the utter shock of the Nazi guards, who could not believe their eyes and asked, repeatedly, “What are you doing? What are you doing?”

Their answer: “You don't understand. *We must do this.*”

Would God find that kind of commitment and devotion in us—those who *do* carry His divine message to the world—to-day? Or would He find excuses? If we courageously stand fast as the Church that was founded on Pentecost in AD 31, He will find courage. Are we the Church of that Pentecost?

Those first Christians' “spiritual DNA” is in us—the Holy Spirit that connects us to them across almost 2,000 years. But whether we'll actually be that Church is not a matter of happenstance; it's a matter of choice. Let's not dishonor the name we bear. Let us not fail to be that Church. LN



# Why Do We Observe the Holy Days?

By **Josh Lyons**

**W**hether you've been a member of the Church of God for many years or a relatively short time, it's probably obvious to you that God's people stand out from mainstream "Christians" in a number of ways—and one of the most obvious is in the observance of the biblical Holy Days. Even more so than the keeping of the weekly Sabbath, our observing the annual Holy Days becomes obvious to coworkers, classmates, neighbors, and many others as they see us take off work or school and go to church at such "odd" and seemingly random times—especially the Feast of Tabernacles. I personally remember having a professor in college tease me for going on a "weird trip" to keep the Feast.

It's probably safe to say that keeping the entire cycle of annual Holy Days separates us from more than 99 percent of mainstream Christianity, because billions of Catholics, Protestants, and even members of Sabbath-keeping denominations like the Seventh-Day Adventists, don't keep them. Since observance of the Holy Days—even just that one practice—puts us so far into the minority, let's consider some of the fundamental reasons why we *do* keep them. This article will go over seven of the primary reasons why we keep the Holy Days, with the aim of helping us to answer, simply and directly, when people ask why we keep them—no matter our age, experience, or situation within God's Church.

## 1. The Holy Days Are in the Bible

One of the simple points of wisdom Mr. Richard Ames often emphasized was "Don't overlook the obvious," and this wisdom applies to our very first point: The Holy Days are *in the Bible*! In fact, all seven of God's festivals can be seen in one chapter: Leviticus 23. And if we seek to live according to His inspired word, that should matter!

When Protestant denominations observe Christmas and Easter, they contradict one of the great battle cries of the Protestant Reformation: *Sola scriptura*—a Latin phrase meaning "Scripture alone." Yet, the two most popular and "sacred" religious holidays in mainstream Christianity are Christmas and Easter—neither of which are found in the

Bible even once. Admittedly, the old *King James Version* says "Easter" in Acts 12:4, but almost all other translations recognize this as a *mistranslation* of the Greek word for Passover, *pascha*. A true application of the *sola scriptura* principle will leave one with God's Holy Days, not "the holidays."

Of course, many practices described in the Bible are no longer practiced today, and God does not require them. For instance, we do not offer animal sacrifices today. So, are there reasons to keep the Holy Days beyond the fact that they are mentioned in the Bible? Indeed there are—let's continue!

## 2. Jesus Christ Kept and Taught Them

Another point frequently overlooked is that Jesus Christ kept the Holy Days and taught us to follow His example. The New Testament gives direct evidence of Christ keeping four of the seven annual Feasts.

The gospels contain more detail of Christ keeping **Passover** than any of the other Feasts. We find Him keeping the Passover in Matthew 26 and Luke 22, and we can even read an account of Him keeping it as a child with His parents (Luke 2:41–42). For a detailed study on this point describing the final four Passovers kept by Jesus Christ, you may want to read "Lessons from Four Passovers" by the late evangelist John H. Ogwyn, published in the March-April 2004 *Living Church News*.

Immediately following Passover, the **Days of Unleavened Bread** were also kept by Christ (Matthew 26:17; Luke 22:7–8). It was around the time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that Christ explained one of the major ways He fulfilled its symbolism, explaining that He was the "bread of life" that came down from Heaven (John 6:33–35).

In John 7:2–14, John describes Christ keeping the **Feast of Tabernacles** and instructing His brothers, "You go up to this feast" (v. 8). John 7:37 describes Christ keeping and teaching on "the last day, that great day of the feast," where we get the name "**Last Great Day**." The events in chapters 8–10 occurred on the daylight portion of the Holy Day in AD 30, the final Last Great Day that Christ would observe before His crucifixion six months later. You can read more about this

in Mr. Ogwyn's article "The Writings of John: Their Timing and Purpose" in the May-June 2001 *Living Church News*. In that article, Mr. Ogwyn tells us the following:

John demonstrated that what both Jews and Greeks claimed to be searching for could only be realized in the person and the message of Jesus of Nazareth. He also made clear to the increasingly Gentile church that Jesus Christ had revealed His gospel in the context of the Holy Days. Nearly all of John's gospel is organized around the actions and teachings of Christ during selected festival seasons throughout His ministry. Far from "doing away" with the Holy Days, Christ's entire message was *revealed* in the context of Holy Day themes.

Considering that John wrote much of his gospel in relation to the observance of the Holy Days, it is significant that he likely wrote it in the 90s AD, approximately 60 years after Christ's death.

As these examples show, the New Testament provides significant detail of Christ keeping, teaching about, and teaching on the biblical Holy Days. This point may be quite simple and even obvious, but it is vital. As Christians, we strive to follow Christ's example, including keeping the days that He kept—and not keeping false "holy days" that He did not keep, like Christmas and Easter.

### 3. Christ's Followers Kept Them

This fact provides a simple and helpful answer to the criticism that the Holy Days no longer need to be kept after Christ's death because they were part of what was "nailed to the cross." For a more detailed study on this point, you may want to read Mr. John Robinson's article "Has the Law of God Been Nailed to the Cross?" from the March-April 2023 *Living Church News*.

One of the clearest passages making this point is found in Paul's first letter to the brethren of Corinth, who were predominantly Gentiles living in a major Greek city known for its wealth, immorality, and pagan worship. Around AD 56, about 25 years after Christ's death, Paul told them:

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

Twenty-five years would have been plenty of time for Paul, the apostle who was sent to the Gentiles, to discourage Gentile Christians from keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since he never did so, he was obviously expecting them to keep that Feast! It's important to note that the Feasts are not just "Old Testament days," because they are in the New Testament as well. Passover is especially prominent. Christ's followers, under His inspiration, continued to keep the biblical Feasts many years after His death and resurrection.

In the same letter to the Corinthian brethren, Paul followed Christ's example by teaching the people to keep the Passover with unleavened bread and wine, which symbolized Christ's broken body and shed blood (1 Corinthians 11:17–34). Notably, he wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup [annually at Passover], you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (v. 26), explaining that the new symbols of the long-established annual Passover observance would memorialize the Savior's sacrifice every year until His return.

Another important example is found in Acts 2:1–4, when God poured out the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, occurring about ten days after Jesus ascended to Heaven, having taught the disciples for 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3, 9). When Peter gave a sermon on that Pentecost, it could have been a good opportunity for him to explain that the Holy Days were no longer in effect for Christians—but, of course, that isn't what he did.

The New Testament includes other references to the Holy Days, such as Pentecost in Acts 20:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:8, the Day of Atonement in Acts 27:9, and the Feast of Tabernacles in Acts 18:21. We should note that Luke wrote the book of Acts around AD 62, about 30 years after Christ's death. Indeed, Christ's followers continued to keep the biblical Feasts after Christ's death, and after He was made alive and seated at the right hand of the Father as the Head of the Church. Just to reiterate—they were *not* keeping Christmas or Easter.

### 4. They Will Be Kept After Christ Returns

Many passages in Scripture reveal prophecies about Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. At that time, the Holy Days will be kept. We read:

And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of *all the nations* which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to *keep the Feast of Tabernacles*. And it shall be that whicheckver 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. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the

punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to *keep the Feast of Tabernacles* (Zechariah 14:16–19).

God inspired Zechariah to prophesy that, after Christ returns, *all nations*—not just the Israelites, but even Gentile nations like Egypt—will keep the Feast of Tabernacles from “year to year.” We even learn that God will punish nations by withholding rain if they don’t keep it. The Bible repeatedly points out that the proper amount of rain is a blessing from God, providing sustenance to plants, animals, and human beings (Leviticus 26:4; Isaiah 55:10; Matthew 5:45). This revealing passage shows how important the Feast of Tabernacles will be when Christ returns—and how important God’s Festivals are to Him now.

We find another indication of a Holy Day being kept after Christ returns in His explanation of the New Testament symbols of the Passover. “But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:29). The implication is that Christ will drink the Passover wine once God’s Kingdom has come to earth. He will not be keeping Christmas or Easter.

## 5. Their Meaning Runs Throughout Scripture

The Holy Days aren’t just days when we choose to get together for special fellowship with one another. They are days when we come before God and rehearse His plan for us. God called these days “My feasts” long ago, and they have been His ever since (Leviticus 23:2). Year after year, they have served as a sign of God’s people and given us annual reminders that explain the major steps in His plan of salvation.

Mr. Dexter Wakefield once made the point in a sermon that sometimes people can be critical of the Holy Days and ask questions such as, “Why do you talk so much about the Holy Days? Why don’t you talk more about Christ?” Mr. Wakefield’s answer was, “The Holy Days are *all about Christ!* They explain what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do.” Fundamentally, the Holy Days outline the major steps of God’s plan for humanity, revealing how He is bringing about salvation to every willing person.

Let’s consider Passover, because it provides one of the clearest examples and is described in great detail in the New Testament. Many chapters in the gospels describe Christ keeping and teaching about the Passover and its meaning. Let’s notice Luke’s account of Christ instituting the New Testament Passover symbols of the bread and wine.

When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer....” And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body

which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:14–15, 19–20).

Here we read of Christ teaching His disciples about the new Passover symbols that represent what He was about to do at that time for them and for the world. The bread symbolizes His broken body and the wine His shed blood as a key part of the New Covenant. The bread and wine He gave to them that evening—and the Passover bread and wine that God’s servants have partaken of down through the centuries—still to this day represent Christ’s broken body and shed blood and proclaim His death until He comes again.

Passover is one example, but the other Feasts are also rich with meaning and symbolism. And not only does each Feast have specific symbolism, the three *seasons* of the Feasts have overarching meaning. The first Festival season symbolizes God’s people being made innocent, the second Festival season represents God’s people being made holy, and the third Festival season reflects God’s people being glorified. For more about this, I encourage you to read Mr. Wakefield’s article “Three Times a Year” in the March-April 2016 *Living Church News*.

And, of course, none of this can be said about Christmas and Easter—because they aren’t in the Bible.

## 6. They Are a Sign of God’s People

Dr. Meredith made this point in one of his most powerful booklets:

The point is that these *annual* Sabbaths and Holy Days are also part of God’s “sign” by which *His people* would be identified. Notice God’s clear statement regarding the days of Unleavened Bread: “It shall be as a **sign** to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD’s **law** may be in your mouth” (Exodus 13:9). Wherever God’s true people are, wherever *His Church* is, His servants will have the identifying “sign” of God’s true Sabbaths, weekly and annual, for the weekly Sabbath points to the true God—the Creator—and the annual Sabbaths set forth His marvelous **plan** (*Where Is God’s True Church Today?*, p. 23).

A brief survey of the Bible shows that the Holy Days were kept by God’s people during the days of Moses (Leviticus 23), Joshua (Joshua 5:11), Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:8–9), Josiah (2 Kings 23:21–23), Ezra (Ezra 6:19–20), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8:18), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 45:21), and Jesus and His apostles (as described in our second and third points)—a period of time spanning about 1,500 years, from about the 1400s BC to about



AD 100. And for all of these periods, the keeping of the Holy Days separated God's people from the surrounding peoples and religions. The booklet *God's Church Through the Ages* provides numerous examples of God's people through the centuries—as well as today—understanding the need to continue keeping God's Feasts.

Again—none of this can truthfully be said about Christ-mas or Easter.

## 7. Arguments Against Them All Fail

Sadly, many professing Christians are blinded to the truth and beauty of the Holy Days. Why? Now that we've gone through six positive, biblical reasons why we keep the Holy Days, let's briefly consider one more: The fact that the arguments of professing Christians who *don't* keep them all fail to prove we shouldn't.

Let's consider two of the most common arguments. One of them says, *The festivals are Jewish and therefore just for the*

The popular, but incorrect, interpretation of Paul's words is essentially, "We shouldn't let anyone judge us for not keeping the Sabbath or festivals because what is important is Christ." **However, Paul is actually saying the opposite, which is made clear when we consider the context.**

*Jews.* This is a very popular argument often used to dismiss the annual Holy Days—along with the seventh-day Sabbath, much of the Old Testament, and even many of Jesus Christ's own teachings and examples. Much could be said regarding this point, but a short answer involves a few points already mentioned, such as that Christ Himself kept the Holy Days, Paul told a primarily Gentile group of saints in Corinth to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and that *all* nations will keep the Feast of Tabernacles after Christ returns (1 Corinthians 5:6–8; Zechariah 14:16).

Dr. Meredith's booklet *The Holy Days: God's Master Plan* gives more information on this point. As members of God's Church, we don't keep the Holy Days because the Jews did or do—we do so because we strive to live by every word of God and to follow Jesus Christ's example.

Another argument claims, *Colossians 2:16–17 shows that the festivals are not required.* These verses are vital for God's people to understand, because they are among the primary ones that are misinterpreted as being against the Holy Days. Let's review what Paul wrote here: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16–17, *King James Version*).

The popular, but incorrect, interpretation of Paul's words is essentially, "We shouldn't let anyone judge us for not keeping the Sabbath or festivals because what is important is Christ." However, Paul is actually saying the opposite, which is made clear when we consider the context of Colossians and the rest of the Bible. Remember—Paul told the Corinthian brethren to *keep* the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

What exactly was Paul saying? It is important to note that the word "is" at the end of Colossians 2:17 is not present in the Greek. Paul literally wrote, "... but *the body of Christ*." He was telling the brethren in Colosse not to let people outside the Church criticize them for keeping the Sabbath and Feasts, but to look to *the body of Christ*—the Church (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:12)—for guidance. Paul gave this instruction because of adversaries, such as the Gnostics, who taught that to be spiritual meant to deny oneself all physical pleasures, including good food and drink. Such critics were judging God's people for rejoicing at the Feasts and enjoying good food and drink as part of their celebration, and Paul was pointing out that we should look to the Church for guidance on how to keep the Feasts, not self-appointed critics.

Again, this is a vital passage to understand. Please see Mr. Gerald Weston's 2017 sermon "Shadow of Things to Come," in

which he specifically expounds Colossians 2:16–17. The *Questions and Answers* article in the February 2022 *Tomorrow's World* magazine also explains these two verses.

These two popular arguments against keeping God's Holy Days are easy to answer, especially when considering all that the Bible says about them.

Now that we've looked at some fundamental reasons why God's Church keeps the Holy Days and refuted popular objections, let's ask a simple question from "the other side of the fence." If a Christian decided not to keep the biblical Holy Days, what would be the alternative? There are really just two options. One would be to not observe any religious days. The other would be to keep religious days that are not in the Bible—which is the choice made by most professing Christians. Of course, neither option is a good one, nor a biblical one.

Instead, as we have seen, there are basic, biblical reasons that we in God's Church have for keeping His Holy Days—they were kept by Christ and His disciples, they will be kept after Christ returns, their symbolism runs through the entire Bible, they are a sign of God's people, and the arguments against them are incorrect. May we as members of God's Church, called out of the world, be very thankful for His truth and His plan for all mankind, beautifully outlined by His joyous Holy Days. (L)



# We Practice the Way of Give

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

**T**he Church has long taught that God's way of life is the way of giving, not getting. You may have noticed that when the Living Church of God reports its operations, the statistics generally emphasize what we've been giving. While we keep a careful eye on our income and expenses, all of our literature is free and there are no follow-up requests for donations. Scripture instructs us, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). The Living Church of God operates on that principle, and God has always provided what we need.

That way of give is reflected in the number of *Tomorrow's World* magazines we send out, as well as the number of requests for our booklets we grant. All totaled, in 2024 we sent out about 6,280,000 pieces of mail, which included 3,245,000 *Tomorrow's World* magazines, 1,153,000 booklets, 158,000 *Bible Study Course* sets, and 95,000 CDs and DVDs, in addition to tens of thousands of other mailings. All of these items were provided free of charge. The world's businesses are in the business of *getting*, but we like to say that God's family business is the business of *giving*. Overall, we measure our profitability in how much we give, which is quite the opposite of how this world measures the success of its endeavors.

The Church has the commission to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world and to feed the flock of God's people, in addition to preaching individual and national repentance as a witness and a warning. But God has also given other instructions concerning good works, which we apply not only as individuals but as an organization.

Concerning charitable activities, our first priority is taking care of our brethren, as the Apostle Paul admonished his brethren in Galatia. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, *especially to those who are of the household of faith*" (Galatians 6:10). Following this instruction, we have programs to meet the urgent needs of the brethren. "And let our people also learn to maintain good works, *to meet urgent needs*, that they may not be unfruitful" (Titus 3:14).

The first-century Church often did this, as Paul reminded the brethren in Corinth regarding aid to their brethren in need in Jerusalem:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1–3).

Paul emphasized that we are to engage in good works *as a result of our faith in Christ*, writing that "by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8–10). God's family business is giving. So, while our priority is "the household of faith," we also help others as we can.

Christ told us that our charitable deeds are not to be done as a show for the world:

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly (Matthew 6:1–4).

This has been our policy in the Living Church of God. Yet while we do not "show off" our charity, we strive to be responsible and accountable. We undergo an independent audit every year, and we make our complete, audited financial statements available at [LCG.org/about-us](http://LCG.org/about-us). And it is important that our brethren and co-workers can know what we are doing organizationally as good works and charitable activities, apart from preaching the Gospel and feeding the flock.

The Living Church of God has several categories of funds to accomplish good works—firstly among our members and secondly for others in need. Some categories of directed contributions are restricted by law to the specific purposes for which those funds were established, such as Disaster Relief, Festival Assistance, the Emergency Fund (for individual emergencies), and the Morgan Montgomery Fund, and it is appropriate that we report such activities to our readers from time to time.

### Members in Need

We have often provided hurricane relief for members from the **Disaster Relief Fund**. Because of legal restrictions on 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations like the Living Church of God, we must be careful in *how* we help, and we must observe all laws and regulations governing such help. When we are aware of a pending natural disaster such as a hurricane, our Legal Affairs and Risk Management Department readies a specific procedure to empower our local leaders in the affected area to provide help to our members in urgent need. Later help can be provided on a case-by-case basis upon recommendation by the local ministry and review by Church Administration.

Every year, we provide financial assistance to Church members who are in need, especially those who are widows. This is done through funds that are restricted for a particular purpose through the **Third Year Tithe Fund**. We also provide **Festival Assistance** for many members to attend the Feast of Tabernacles—all these expenditures for individual members are made on the recommendation of each member's pastor and reviewed by Church Administration in Charlotte. Similarly, assistance in other countries is reviewed and provided by the appropriate regional offices.

We have also provided support for our members outside the United States who have suffered from disasters or other sources of deprivation. For instance, we have provided assistance for typhoon victims in Indonesia and the Philippines, for victims of the Haitian earthquake and the Kenyan drought, and for our Cuban members suffering from severely limited food supplies.

Every year, the LCG international headquarters in Charlotte provides substantial support in the form of **international grants** for LCG offices in countries around the world. This is the largest category of assistance. From time to time, when they have the funds to do so, our offices in other countries—including Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and Germany—assist generously as well. Assistance includes funds for keeping the Feast, youth camps, preaching the Gospel, literature fulfillment, support of the ministry, and helping brethren in need. U.S. government regulations require that an extensive process be completed by our Legal Affairs and Risk Management Department before funds can lawfully be sent out internationally.

The **Morgan Montgomery Memorial Fund** provides assistance for Church youth around the world to travel to our youth camps. This year, travel assistance to the youth camps will be provided for youth from Malawi, Zambia, the Kingdom of Lesotho, and Indonesia.

### Others in Need

Recently, the Living Church of God has been active in relief for Hurricane Helene, which caused extensive damage in areas from the Gulf Coast through western North Carolina. This was in addition to looking to the needs of our members in the affected areas. A substantial donation was made from our **Disaster Relief Fund** to a facility in North Carolina that provided needed services to first responders as well as food and housing for displaced local residents. We made a similar donation to a charity that provided food, temporary housing, medical cost assistance, and assistance to “boots on the ground” services in the mountain areas. We carefully vet any such organization to ensure the quality of services and the substantial use of our donation for those in need.

In 2023, we quietly offered assistance to *Tomorrow's World* subscribers in a specific area that was affected by a tornado. Only a few needed our help, but they were certainly glad to receive it.

Religious faith is often under attack in our troubled times, and in today's litigious environment it is wise to foresee legal danger and avoid it (Proverbs 22:3). There are respected national organizations that provide legal services and advice to help many religious denominations defend themselves against challenges to religious freedom. They frequently engage in successful litigation to protect religious rights. To help protect our members, we make contributions to a few of the best ones, knowing that we may need their services someday.

While a spirit of giving is important, diligence in controlling our finances is also important, especially since the financial health of the Church is essential to our being able to send grants and other aid to other countries. So, we are careful to plan our expenditures to work within income expectations. By doing so, we can be assured of being able to continue a wide range of support.

God's Holy Spirit leads us to have love and outgoing concern for others, and our members' good works are not limited to what we do organizationally. The Living Church of God encourages its members, as individuals, to strive to be good neighbors to those around them in addition to providing personal support to family and the local membership's needs. God says that these works, both organizationally and individually, are pleasant sacrifices to Him (Ephesians 4:28; 5:2; 1 Peter 2:5).

Christ is teaching His Church a giving way of life. If we are well-trained in it, we will be able to rejoice in that way of life now and forever. (LN)

# Appreciating Blessedness

By **Peter G. Nathan**

**T**he term “Beatitudes” came into English from the French and has its roots in the Latin *beatus*, which means “blessed.” Though the word is not itself in Scripture, we commonly use it to identify that part of Matthew 5 in which Jesus Christ describes nine spiritual conditions that should characterize Christians’ lives. When we read these Beatitudes, we typically focus on the personal states that are outlined and on the rewards that are offered. But let us consider the word “blessed,” used nine times at the start of the Sermon on the Mount. What does the Bible mean in speaking of us as being blessed?

We can gain understanding of this term by seeing how it is used elsewhere in Scripture. The book of Psalms starts with these words: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1–2).

Hebrew writers often used “triads”—groups of three phrases or concepts—to emphasize the totality of a subject. For instance, “the stranger and the fatherless and the widow” (Deuteronomy 14:29) was a way to describe *all* the marginalized in society, not just people in those three categories. The command “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly” (Micah 6:8) was a call to develop *every* aspect of God’s holy and righteous character, not just those three qualities.

Similarly, the man described in Psalm 1:1 has totally rejected an evil way of life and has chosen instead the path outlined in verse 2. In that regard, King Solomon explained that “happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18). The words translated as “blessed” and “happy” in these two verses are derived from the Hebrew word *esher*.

In order to understand the meaning and intent of Matthew’s use of “blessed,” we should also examine another Hebrew word—*barak*—that is more frequently translated into English as “blessed.” *Barak* is first used when our Creator, having formed human beings, provides them with a blessing (*barak*) and gives them a charge (Genesis 1:26–28).

We also find this term in the blessing to Abram—four times in two verses, explaining that his seed would be a blessing to

all nations (Genesis 12:2–3). When the firstborn received the birthright blessing from his father, the term used for that blessing was *barak* (Genesis 27:4–29). With *barak*, the focus of the blessing is on what the giver does for the recipient.

Similarly, we find *barak* in the final words the Eternal spoke through Moses to the children of Israel: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing [*barak*] and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

*Esher*, the type of blessing referenced in Psalm 1:1 and in the Beatitudes, is clearly different from *barak*. *Esher* describes an appropriate response to an initial blessing bestowed by God.

## Terms of Blessedness

When we come to the New Testament, we find that different Greek words are used to translate the Hebrew terms *barak* and *esher*. The Hebrew *barak* compares to the Greek *eulogeo* or *eulogia*, from which we derive our ideas of a eulogy—speaking well of, praising, or blessing an individual. Luke, recounting the end of Jesus’ time with the disciples, describes that “He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed [*eulogeo*] them” (Luke 24:50–51).

*Eulogeo* is also used when Gabriel comes to advise Mary of her place in the Father’s plan for His Son to become flesh (Luke 1:28). It is the type of blessing we are to give those who mistreat us (Matthew 5:44)—and, above all, the blessing we receive when we inherit the Kingdom of God (Matthew 25:34).

But *eulogeo* is not the term used in the Sermon on the Mount. There, it is not a blessing given by God or a superior. *Makarios*, the word translated as “blessed” in the Beatitudes, is the Greek equivalent of *esher*, and the two words convey the same idea: the result of ordering our lives according to the revealed will of God.

*Esher* describes a blessing that requires something of us. The Psalmist gives us an insight when he states, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed [*esher*] are all those who put their trust in Him” (Psalm 2:12).

Here, the concept of blessing involves some action on our part. This form of blessing comes from putting trust in God.



This same concept is reinforced in the book of Proverbs: “He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the LORD, happy [*esher*] is he” (Proverbs 16:20).

This blessing associated with *esher* requires us to trust in God. To receive it, we must place ourselves under the authority of God’s word. It involves the creation of a relationship with God that is pleasing to our Father. This concept is repeated frequently throughout the Psalms (See Psalm 34:8;

## When we read the Beatitudes, we typically focus on the rewards that are offered. But let us consider the word “blessed,” used nine times at the start of the Sermon on the Mount. **What does the Bible mean in speaking of us as being blessed?**

84:5, 12). Notice also how the greatest exposition of God’s law begins: “Blessed [*esher*] are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed [*esher*] are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart” (Psalm 119:1–2).

Placing ourselves under the authority of God’s word means living in accord with God’s way. The Psalmist wrote, “The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide” (Psalm 37:31). Likewise, Solomon recorded a small vignette of a life lived God’s way: “He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy [*esher*] is he” (Proverbs 14:21). So, blessing (*esher*) requires a dedication to the ways of the Eternal.

### In Greek and Hebrew

This is brought out in the statements of Jesus Christ, where “blessed” is the English translation of *makarios*. We read that “He said, ‘More than that, blessed [*makarios*] are those who hear the word of God and keep it!’” (Luke 11:28).

Similarly, speaking to the disciples as they were gathered around the table for that last Passover and having just washed their feet in an act of great humility, Jesus stated, “If you know these things, blessed [*makarios*] are you if you do them” (John 13:17).

John was also inspired to use this term at the very end of the book of Revelation. Having described the New Jerusalem, with its river and its trees of life, he was inspired to record this charge for us: “Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed [*makarios*] is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Revelation 22:7).

*Makarios*, like *esher*, is the result of dedicating our lives to living in accord with God’s way of life, which in turn comes from having a yielded relationship with God. That action

on our part is central to this term. It relates to the covenant that our Father invited us to enter into with Him—a supreme blessing (*eulogia*) from Him.

The Passover relationship also involves such blessing in our lives. The Apostle Paul, writing to brethren in Rome, quotes King David from Psalm 32:1–2 in describing the effects of the Passover, the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin” (Romans 4:7–8).

Why is *makarios* used in this section of Scripture to describe the type of blessing involved? Because, when we take the Passover properly, we show that we have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as atonement for our sins. As a result of that acceptance, we are prepared to live a life that reflects an obedient relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ. The result is that we have confidence that God will do according to His word. This is a blessing that comes from giving ourselves to God’s way of life.

### The Blessed Outcome of Living God’s Way

The outcome of this relationship—the blessed effect of living the way so beautifully expressed in Psalm 1:1–2—is revealed in the Beatitudes as being poor in spirit, meek, and hungering for righteousness. This is so different from the normal attitude of those who have a relationship with someone influential, famous, or in high authority. Such situations are often flaunted, but our relationship with our Heavenly Father and His Son produces humility within us, allowing us to serve others as Jesus Christ has served us. It is the way of give as opposed to the way of get.

Our Father seeks to bless us by making us part of His Family. That was God’s initial intent in creating human beings, and it is why they were blessed as recorded in Genesis 1:28. Both Psalm 1:1–2 and Matthew 5:1–9 set out the proper response for each of us to that invitation to the ultimate blessing.

Most people seek blessings so they can be enriched or bettered. The blessings discussed here, however, come from a relationship based on our commitment to live a way of life—a way that benefits others rather than self. It is this form of blessing that the Father desires all to have.

The term “blessed” in the Beatitudes speaks to the yielded attitude through which we can display the character described in those verses. We cannot ever be that type of person without being totally submitted and committed to the way of life of our Father and His Son. Without that form of blessing, we cannot accomplish our Father’s goal for us. (L)



TITUS 2:3-5

# Woman to Woman

## *Embrace Your Femininity*

By **Janth B. English**

**R**adical feminism has invaded our society and most of Western culture. What may have been seen as well-intentioned by some—giving women the right to vote and equal pay for equal work—has morphed into a movement to abandon the God-ordained patriarchal family in favor of family structures defined by human imaginations. One of the goals of feminism is “fighting against gender stereotypes and performative behaviors” (“Feminism | Definition, Types & Purpose,” *Study.com*, accessed March 13, 2025). In other words, feminists want to do away with traditional roles and responsibilities for both men and women.

We see the results of this social experiment in a society with growing gender identity confusion, broken marriages, fewer commitments to marry, increased crime and poverty, and children without proper parental oversight—to name just a few of its many ills. Our society certainly fits the description of people doing what is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25). And it is obvious that most women in God’s Church vehemently oppose the radical feminism that has contributed to these ills. But while we disagree with the radical feminists, do we, as Christian women, truly embrace the God-given gift they reject? Do we really embrace *femininity*?

Many feminists adopt the view that femininity involves being vain, shallow, empty-headed, and powerless. While some women who appear feminine may possess such characteristics, true femininity is not about these things. Femininity can be thought of as behaviors and qualities that are traditionally characteristics of women.

Traits such as nurturance, sensitivity, supportiveness, gentleness, warmth, cooperativeness, expressiveness, modesty, humility, empathy, affection, tenderness, kindness, helpfulness, devotion, and understanding have been cited as stereotypically feminine. You may recognize many of these traits as what God expects from *all* Christians, male and female. Yet God has given women a special capacity to embody these qualities because of the roles and responsibilities He has given us. Let’s compare the radical feminists’ views to the feminine traits God has revealed in the Bible.

### **Feminine Responsibilities**

Feminists and their allies believe that the traditional feminine role of wife and mother has less value than work outside the home. But God created woman to be a helper and complement to man (Genesis 2:18–22), having her primary responsibilities within the home (Titus 2:4–5). By definition, a helper is one who is supportive and cooperative. One would also expect a helper to be warm-hearted, to embody empathy and kindness, and to be devoted to those she helps (Proverbs 31:10–20).

God’s intent for women was made known from the beginning when He called us *helpers*. Contrary to what the feminists say, being a helper in our relationships, especially in our marriages, can bring us the most long-term satisfaction because God ordained it that way. Christian women can embrace their femininity by embracing their role as helpers.

Many feminists believe that to be feminine is to be vain and shallow, concerned with only our outward appearance. But it is not femininity that is vain and shallow; it is feminists who have labeled femininity as such. They may feel this way because feminine women *do* consider the state of our outward appearance. While being overly concerned with outward appearance can be vanity, taking care to look presentable is a godly attribute. When we look at how He speaks of His relationship with Israel (Ezekiel 16:9–14), we can see God has no problem with women dressing well and wearing jewelry. God clothed Israel with silk and gave her a crown of gold.

Let’s be honest: It’s a lot easier to not bother about our appearance and just go along with the low standards of the crowd. However, dressing well is *not* vain or shallow. This aspect of femininity requires effort as we ensure that our outward appearance reflects the hope we have inside—our inner beauty. We as Christian women can embrace our femininity by taking care of our appearance and dressing well with godly modesty in mind (1 Timothy 2:9–10).

Radical feminists believe that embracing femininity involves “dumbing down” women. They believe femininity means women would pursue less education and fewer non-traditional jobs, ending up “just” being housewives raising children. To be candid, in those nations where traditional roles for women are still the rule, the women generally do

pursue less education, and most of them become wives and mothers—but is this an evil thing?

In fact, as He made us comparable to men, God created women with great intellectual capacity. Women are not stupid—nor should we pretend to be in order to appease someone's ego. We see throughout society that women are quite capable of performing many jobs that were once identified as within a man's domain. Women have made considerable inroads in many occupations—including CEOs and heads of state—that once were considered “men-only.” The question, however, is whether women *should* seek these jobs just because we *can* do them. The simple answer is not politically correct; it is *No* (see 1 Corinthians 10:23).

God has given women the awesome responsibility of being homemakers—a noble profession requiring many skills on many levels that we do not have time to discuss in this brief article. And yes, women *should* pursue knowledge while keeping in mind the homemaker role that God has for us. Education can be a boost to your future family and can also give you a head start financially. Single women may desire to pursue a career path before marriage. Sadly, in Satan's present society,

God has given women the responsibility of being homemakers—a profession requiring many skills on many levels. **Women can embrace their femininity by using wisdom and preparing to take their place in the family.**

some families may need two incomes to survive, in which case it can be beneficial to have an education that would allow you to earn a decent income from a suitable job.

A good foundation of knowledge can also equip women to teach their children—one of the primary duties of a mother—and we should also keep in mind a woman's role as her husband's primary intellectual companion and adviser. Far from being empty-headed, Christian women are clearly expected to exercise wisdom in their judgments (Proverbs 31:26). Christian women can embrace their femininity by using wisdom and by preparing to take their place in the family, through which they benefit society at large.

### Godly Patriarchy

Radical feminists believe that femininity encourages a harmfully patriarchal society in which powerless women are at the mercy of abusive, domineering men. But let's remember that God created the patriarchal system in family government (Ephesians 5:22–24). God created it, so it is good.

Do abuses occur in this system? Yes, at times. Mankind, under Satan's influence, has perverted and often abused a system God created to be a supportive, protective family en-

vironment for women, children, the elderly, the poor, and all who are disadvantaged.

However, can we truthfully say that femininity causes the problem? No. Can we say that giving up femininity will solve the problem? No. The problem is with the people of this world under Satan's influence; it is not with the system that God designed.

True femininity encourages the protective nature of men who have been properly trained in God's ways (Ephesians 5:25–28). When Christian women stay within the government structure God has provided and willingly submit to those God has placed over us, we know we are standing with God, depending on Him to work through those in authority (1 Peter 3:5). We have examples of godly women such as Sarah (1 Peter 3:6), Ruth (Ruth 3:8–11), and Mary (Luke 1:38), to name a few.

As far as the perception of being powerless is concerned, most would agree that women exert enormous power through the influence we have in our marriages and other relationships. It takes great faith in God to let another human being lead you, but we can do this because we have the faith of Jesus Christ in us (Galatians 2:20). Christian women can embrace their femininity by appreciating the family structure that God has established.

When we think of women who exemplify femininity, we think of those whose demeanor is graceful, charming, and elegant. We expect to see in them a caring, genteel, and kind nature. These expectations agree with biblical principles concerning women and their behaviors. For example, God finds a gentle and quiet spirit a precious attribute in women (1 Peter 3:3–4), and a virtuous woman is described as being caring, honorable, and kind (Proverbs 31:20, 25–26). These attributes are fruits of the Holy Spirit that both men and women are to cultivate (Galatians 5:22–23). We can see that true femininity requires us to put into practice the godly virtues that God has prescribed for Christian women.

We live in a society in which many are trying to get rid of gender, masculine and feminine, in opposition to God, who says that He created us male and female. He designed men to be masculine and women to be feminine. Being female is a matter of anatomy, but being feminine is something that must be learned and cultivated. If you have not had this example in your life, as many have not, it will take time and concerted effort to develop that beautiful attribute called femininity. As most of us have heard, “Practice makes perfect.” God will help us to become more like the women He wants us to be—women after His own heart—if we call out to Him. If we appreciate God's order of things, we will learn happiness as we embrace our femininity. (L)





# From Living Education— Charlotte: Student Writing

*Students in Living Education's Fall 2024 Writing Workshop were asked to identify the central theme of a biblical narrative and to expound on how three elements of that narrative serve to develop the theme. To give you an idea of the work students are doing, we present here (edited very lightly for publication) Miss Abigail Wissinger's essay discussing the testing of Noah's faith. Other students wrote on such topics as Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac, Daniel's friends' deliverance from Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, and Satan's temptation of Christ. Living Education—Charlotte is much more than the many enjoyable field trips and fellowship opportunities it provides for students, and we hope you will enjoy this sample of those students' work!*

—Editorial Staff

“**B**y faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Hebrews 11:7). During Noah's lifetime the world around him fell into depravity, and he had to work hard to follow God in everything he did. Due to Noah's righteousness, God called him to make an ark in order to save him and his immediate family along with a certain number of the clean and unclean animals, while those around him jeered and made fun of him for building a large ark on dry land. After a period of time, God sent a flood upon the land, saving those within the ark who endured there for many days and nights. In obeying God, Noah showed that trusting in God and yielding to Him through persecution brings faith to a higher level.

Throughout Noah's life, he worked hard to follow God despite those around him turning away from Him. Noah's faith was unwavering and did not turn aside. God called him a “just man, perfect in his generations” (Genesis 6:9). God characterized Noah as a man who followed Him despite a world where “every intent of the thoughts of his [the people's] heart [were] evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). God recognized Noah as a man who obeyed Him faithfully and was not willing to follow the crowd despite the immense pressure to do so. Noah's faith is contrasted here with the people's turning away from Him and their complete lack of regard for God's purpose in creating the world around them and placing them within it.

To further contrast Noah's faith and willingness to work hard and follow God despite outside pressure, Noah did not complain about the task of building an ark. Noah was patient and complied with all of God's tasks, “Thus Noah did; accord-

ing to all that God commanded him, so he did” (Genesis 6:22). This shows how Noah was patient and willing to go along with what God told him to do, even if these were not the plans that he had created for himself. This contrasts greatly with the people, who cared only about themselves, as the “wickedness of man was great in the earth” (Genesis 6:5). All this led to Noah being able to trust God even more, because he faced difficult trials while staying with Him and not straying.

Noah's life was filled with incredible hardship, but he never gave up. There was continual conflict with the people, as they were actively working to oppose God and Noah in their everyday lives. For years, Noah worked on building this ark that was “the length of... three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits” (Genesis 6:15). This ark was of huge proportions as the ark had to be able to contain all the animals, clean and unclean, as well as Noah and his immediate family. Due to the size of the ark and length of time for him to build it, the people would most likely have made fun of him. How could this man who was preaching about a coming worldwide flood be right? Despite this pressure, Noah refused to give in and “moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Hebrews 11:7). He overcame the hardship of living in a world where no one else believed his message. Noah never once gave up for an easier life, but instead moved forward and pushed himself to make sure his every action came into alignment with God's will and purpose.

Noah came through this period of his life with a stronger faith than before. He was in the ark during the flood and “the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights” (Genesis 7:12). The number forty here signifies a period of preparation, trial, or testing that Noah had to go through to test



his faith in God, to see if he would stay faithful or would call it quits. Being stuck inside the ark for forty days and nights is a significant period of time, especially with animals and family around him constantly. Noah needed to be able to trust God during this time, to believe that this period of time in his life would come to an end even if that time did not seem to be appearing soon. This time of being in the ark was preparing him to grow stronger and better place his trust in God and make sure that he was truly relying on God and not on himself.

Also, the great flood which Noah had to endure represents a cleansing, a sort of baptism. Noah needed to be cleansed and forgiven of his sins and had to realize that although he was “perfect,” he still needed to be forgiven for who he was, a fallible human being. This foreshadows how people are now to be baptized and be cleansed of their sins and realize that they as human beings still have the possibility to repent as they are not yet made complete.

In addition, the symbols of the rainbow and the dove with the olive branch play a prominent part in showing how this world is not the end. When the ark landed on Mount

**Noah’s life was filled with incredible hardship, but he never gave up. There was continual conflict with the people, as they were actively working to oppose God and Noah in their everyday lives. For years, Noah worked on building this ark.**

Ararat, God made a covenant promise to Noah, promising to never bring a worldwide flood to destroy human beings again. God told Noah, “This is a sign of the covenant which I make... I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth” (Genesis 9:12–13). The rainbow symbolized how God’s power was everlasting, and that when He made a promise His promise would be kept. This shows that if we place our trust in God we should have absolute faith and not worry because He is the Ever-Living One. God’s power lasts forever and when He says something will occur, it will come to pass. This allowed Noah and all of us to understand that we can have complete faith and trust in His words, knowing that He cannot and will not lie.

After the flood had passed, Noah “sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had receded from the face of the ground” (Genesis 8:8). The dove along with the olive branch symbolized Noah’s hope in finding dry land. By this time Noah had been on the ark for many days and was undoubtedly growing tired from having to spend time in cramped quarters

with animals and his immediate family, and this dove along with the olive branch symbolized for him the hope of finishing this great trial that he had come through. Further, the dove who carried an olive branch when he came back to the ark represents the hope that Noah will be able to walk in the newness of life. Instead of continuing in the ways in which he had beforehand, Noah now had more opportunities open to him, demonstrating that he had overcome this hardship. Noah would be able to walk on dry ground again, but this time in a world without human beings who disregarded God at every opportunity. The rainbow and dove show that while the immediate time seems tough, God is there, and “He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Through the trial of having to build an ark and be on that ark for so many days while the earth was flooded, Noah’s faith was able to grow as he could see that if he could face this trial and get through this trial then he could get through any.

However, this trial was easier to conquer due to his previous life and the trials he had endured before embarking on the ark. Noah was about 500 years old when God called him to build the ark to rescue the animals, himself, and his immediate

family. While the Bible does not mention about his life greatly beforehand, Noah must have been actively showing his willingness to obey God through his actions and must have endured some trials as the world had not descended into evil and depravity overnight. The matter-of-fact way in which God states that Noah was “perfect” and “walked with [Him]” (Genesis 6:9), shows how this must have been a well-known fact to his family and

neighbors. Since Noah obeyed God in a society where they actively rejected Him, he must have faced being made fun of throughout his entire life. These trials in his life beforehand, as well as the trial of building an ark, took many years.

Noah was prepared to face the situation that lay ahead. These trials prepared him for life aboard the ark, they built resilience. Through the cumulation of all the trials throughout Noah’s life, but especially that of the flood, Noah’s faith was able to increase to a level that otherwise would have been unattainable.

Overall, the biblical story of Noah and the flood demonstrates how trusting in God through persecution brings faith to a higher level than was previously attainable. This passage of Scripture utilizes the elements of symbolism, juxtaposition, characterization, and narrative conflict in order to develop how Noah was able to persevere and grow stronger in faith despite the enormous pressure against him to quit. The story of Noah not giving up inspires us, and helps us to understand how it is possible to persevere to the end of our lives and grow in godly character and faith. (L)

## Births

Mr. and Mrs. Wilson and Catelyn Brown are thrilled to announce that their second son, **Oliver Glenn Brown**, was born on August 30, weighing 8 pounds, 6 ounces, and measuring 21.5 inches long. The family is doing well, and Oliver's big brother loves the new addition! The Dallas, Texas, congregation is delighted to welcome this new member.

Mr. and Mrs. Timothy and Lucy Mager are excited to announce that their beautiful baby girl, **Anya Elene Mager**, was born on November 17, weighing 3.53 kilograms (7.78 pounds) and measuring 51 centimeters. Mum and baby are doing very well. The family attends the Adelaide congregation in Australia.

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## Ordinations

**Mr. André Donhachi** was ordained an elder on February 4, at the All-Africa Ministerial Conference, by Messrs. Gerald Weston, Peter Nathan, and Rees Ellis. Mr. Donhachi serves in Cameroon.

**Mr. Hermann Loko-Aikpe** was ordained an elder on February 4, at the All-Africa Ministerial Conference, by Messrs.

Gerald Weston, Peter Nathan, Rees Ellis, and Oladele Akin-Ogundegi. Mr. Loko-Aikpe serves in Benin.

**Mrs. Corry Watt** was ordained a deaconess on September 28 by Messrs. Graeme Hemphill and Ed Lever. Mrs. Watt serves in the Sydney, Australia, congregation.

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## Weddings & Anniversaries

**Michael Brightman and Melissa Pate**, both from Tacoma, Washington, were united in marriage on August 11 in Centralia, Washington, with many of their friends and family in attendance. Mr. Jonathan Bueno officiated the ceremony. The two lived in the same neighborhood as children and met one summer day at a nearby playground. They became friends and maintained that friendship even when Michael moved away after graduating from high school. When he moved back into the area, their friendship grew into love. Mr. and Mrs. Brightman live in the Tacoma, Washington, area.

**Mr. and Mrs. Joseph and Jeanette "Tillie" Brown** celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on February 4. They first met when they were 14 years old and got to know each other mostly by mail. Later they were able to date, and they were married on February 4, 1965. Mr. and Mrs. Brown have set not only a "diamond" example of love and commitment in marriage, but also as a team committed and faithful in service to others. Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Brown on this wonderful milestone!

**Steven Lee "Trip" Schneitman III and Rachel Concetta White** were married on September 1 in Panacea, Florida, as friends and family looked on in delight. Mr. Ryan Dawson officiated their beachside ceremony, which was followed by a joyous and lively reception the next day. Mr. and Mrs. Schneitman are both alumni of Living Education-Charlotte, and they now reside in Live Oak, Florida. Congratulations to the happy couple!

# In Loving Memory

**Mr. Eugene Api, 88**, finished his race and died on November 10 in the Philippines, where he was born. He was baptized 60 years ago and lived a very full life. After serving in the U.S. Navy, Mr. Api eventually settled in Pasadena, California, where he served for many years as a chef at Ambassador College and for Mr. Armstrong. He prepared food for the visit of Queen Sirikit of Thailand in 1985. “Chef Api” will be remembered for his love of cooking, fishing, and gardening, as well as his love for God, for his family, and for the brethren. He liked to tell others that he could walk on water—which he did most winters while ice fishing. Mr. Api attended the Rawlins, Wyoming, congregation for many years but moved back to the Philippines last fall. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Phyllis, in 2013. Mr. Api is survived and mourned by Divina, whom he married in 2016, and his four children, as well as his grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and stepchildren. He was widely known and will be missed by many.

**Mr. Gil Baust, 86**, died on February 3. Born in Queens, New York, in 1938, Mr. Baust heard the broadcast while serving on a ship in the Navy. He informed his commanding officer he could no longer perform his duties on the Sabbath—he was miraculously granted permission, and he received an honorable discharge in 1964. He was baptized in August of 1965. Shortly after, he met his future wife, Linnea Williams, at Sabbath services. Mr. and Mrs. Baust relocated to Florida in 1995. Mr. Baust was ordained into the ministry of God’s Church in 2000 and faithfully served God’s people in the Ocala congregation until his death. Mr. and Mrs. Baust were married for 58 years.

**Mr. Joe Braden, 86**, died peacefully on November 22. Mr. Braden attended the Cheyenne, Wyoming, congregation during the last few years of his life and was always a joy to be around. He lived a full life, having started his adult life in the Air Force in Fairbanks, Alaska. He and his wife Geri celebrated their 68th anniversary in December. In a last conversation with her, he kissed her, said he was not afraid, and said, “I will see you later.” Mr. Braden will be missed greatly.

**Mrs. Ida Clamp, 83**, died peacefully on November 16. She was baptized in June 1960 and had a long history in the Wyoming area. Mrs. Clamp was a shut-in for a number of years, but she enjoyed hearing from brethren and was always positive and upbeat to visit with. She loved God, her family, and her Church brethren.

**Dr. Michael Germano, 87**, died on February 12, surrounded by his loving family. Born in Spring Valley, Illinois, Dr. Germano learned about the Church of God while a student at the University of Illinois. He was baptized in 1959 and enrolled in Ambassador College. After graduation from Ambassador, he was hired to work at Imperial Schools, where he met his

future wife, Brenda Jones. During his lifetime, Dr. Germano earned advanced degrees from several different universities and served on the faculty and administration of Imperial Schools and Ambassador College for many years. He served as President of Living University from 2007 to 2018. Ordained into the ministry in 1983, in recent years he served in the Kannapolis, North Carolina, congregation. Dr. Germano loved learning and serving God and His people in whatever capacity he could. Dr. and Mrs. Germano were married for 61 years. Besides his wife, Dr. Germano is mourned by their two daughters and one son, nine grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren, as well as many friends.

**Mr. Terry Hess, 91**, died at his home on January 26, with his family by his side. Baptized in 1969, he was a longtime member of God’s Church and served for years as a deacon. Mr. Hess worked in granite and stone and as a contractor, building houses and developments across Rowan County, North Carolina. He is survived by his beloved wife of 65 years, Doris G. Hess, as well as by one brother. Mr. Hess enjoyed his family and friends, and he was loved and will be missed by very many people. Mr. Paul Shumway conducted his funeral.

**Mr. Stan Hynes, 81**, of the Grande Prairie, Alberta, congregation in Canada, died on November 19 after a short illness. Mr. Hynes was called later in life and was baptized in 2022. He enjoyed coming to services to learn more of the truth and to join in the fellowship, always happy to see everyone. He resided in Grande Prairie with his son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter. Mr. Hynes will be missed at services and by his family.

**Mr. James Jacobs, 86**, died on December 21. Born in Illinois in 1938, he began to understand the truth shortly after his discharge from the U.S. Air Force in 1963, and he and his wife, Carol, were baptized in 1964. They were both faithful members of the Peoria, Illinois, congregation, serving the Church and the members in many ways. His wife died in 2003. Mr. Jacobs continued serving as long as his health allowed, and thereafter continued as a prayer warrior. Though the last few years were difficult for him, his steadfastness and diligence set a great example for all. He will be very much missed.

**Mr. Kyle Moore, 68**, died on November 4, surrounded by his sons and grandchildren. He was baptized into God’s Church in 1978 and enjoyed talking about his early days in the Church, when he attended in Pasadena, California. Mr. Moore had a tender heart and showed special concern for the well-being of the shut-ins. He will be missed by family (including his twin brother, Keith, a member of the Dallas, Texas, congregation), friends, and members of the Grand Junction, Colorado, congregation.

## Olive Oil: A Biblical Symbol

**O**live oil has been used for millennia and is well regarded for many health benefits. This green or golden liquid, treasured by ancient cultures and modern chefs alike, plays a very important role throughout the pages of the Bible.

Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO) contains predominantly healthful monounsaturated fatty acids, most notably oleic acid. It also contains polyphenols, which provide benefits in reduced inflammation and also have antioxidant properties that protect against oxidative cellular damage from free radicals. In addition, EVOO has anti-bacterial properties and helps promote healing of wounds (e.g., Luke 10:34). EVOO can have many benefits for heart health as well, and it serves as an excellent salad dressing and cooking oil. Olive trees are grown in many countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Tunisia are the largest olive oil producers, but other nations that grow olives include Australia, Argentina, Chile, China, and the United States.

The Bible first mentions oil in Genesis 28:18—after Jacob dreamed about a ladder reaching to Heaven, he poured oil on the rock where he had slept. Decades later, the Promised Land was called “a land of olive oil” (Deuteronomy 8:8). In the Exodus from Egypt, God gave Israel many instructions for the Tabernacle service, which included “oil for the light [the lamps], and spices for the anointing oil” (Exodus 25:6). The oil was to be “pure oil of pressed olives for the light” (Exodus 27:20).

Oil was used in the unleavened cakes for offerings (Exodus 29) and to consecrate the priests, as well as the Tabernacle, the ark, and many other things dedicated to the Lord. The holy anointing oil was to be olive oil infused with quality

spices. The recipe was holy, not to be copied for ordinary use on punishment of death (Exodus 30:23–33). Later, kings were anointed. The Messiah (“anointed one”) is the King of kings (Revelation 19:16) and “a great High Priest” (Hebrews 4:14).

Anointing signified being consecrated for a divine purpose. James instructs Christians who are sick to ask the elders of His Church to anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14). When anointing the sick, oil is used symbolically to represent God’s Spirit, love, and power to heal, Christ having suffered the wounds in His body for our healing (1 Peter 2:24).

The parable of the ten virgins gives us a vital lesson about being wise, watchful, prepared, and filled with God’s Holy Spirit—the wise virgins having enough oil to keep their lamps burning (Matthew 25:1–13). The prophet Zechariah was given a vision of a lampstand and two olive trees on each side of the lampstand, representing the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth (Zechariah 4:1–5, 11–14). And it was revealed to the Apostle John that the two end-time witnesses are “the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth,” and they will prophesy for 1,260 days and be given great miracle-working power (Revelation 11:3–12).

Jesus spent a good deal of time on the Mount of Olives during His ministry. When He comes back, His feet will stand again on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). Let’s be thankful not only for God’s gift of physical olive oil, but especially for the awesome gift that oil symbolizes—the Holy Spirit, which enables us to be ready for our Savior’s return!

—Roger Meyer