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# BIBLE NEWS PROPHECY

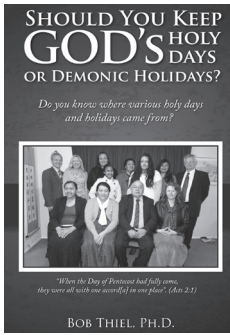
## LAODICEA: 50+ Laodicean Prophetic Misunderstandings

*Laodicea is filled with ineffective structures.*

The World's Fall  
and Early Winter  
Holidays

Do Unconverted  
People KNOW  
You Are a  
Christian?

# BIBLE NEWS PROPHECY



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## 50+ Laodicean Prophetic Misunderstandings

One thing that I have noticed is that the Laodiceans, as well as those of the remnants of the Sardis Church, misunderstand many aspects of end time prophecy.

On the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, here is some of what the Apostle Peter taught:

14 ... “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. 15 For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. 18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:14b-18)

Most Laodiceans do not accept that God has been doing that in the 21st century.

Those with at least a partial WCG background should consider that the late Pastor General of the old Worldwide Church of God, Herbert W. Armstrong, taught that Acts 2:17-18 had a future application in a 1981 sermon:

Joel 2:28-29 And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: (29) And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

So there is a time coming when God will start pouring out His spirit on human beings. ... Day of Pentecost, 3000 were baptized. Peter preached a sermon. They were pricked in their hearts.

God began to draw them. God was now ... Remember He said, “I will pour out of my spirit on all flesh.” All right, there’s a duality of that. (Armstrong HW. Building The Temple. Sermon, February 14, 1981)

Herbert W. Armstrong said the time was coming when God would pour out His Spirit. There was a duality to what Peter preached in Acts 2 — and that duality is for the last days — our current time! His old correspondence department also taught that God would again use dreams.

Yet, those of Sardis and Laodicea have discounted how God’s Spirit has been poured out in ways such as dreams as well as through a prophet.

Scripture shows that those of Sardis have lost truth (Revelation 3:1-6) and those of Laodicea think they do not need anything (cf. Revelation 3:17) Their attitudes and works have led them to misunderstand many aspects of prophecy. Jesus told both those groups of Christians to repent related to this current time.

Before going further, here is a key to the abbreviations of groups mentioned in this article (some of which are no longer functional):

BICOG: British Israel Church of God; CBCG: Christian Biblical Church of God; CCG: Christian Churches of God; CEG: Church of the Eternal God; CG7-D: Church of God, Seventh Day-Denver; CG7-S: Church of God 7th Day, Salem (West Virginia); CGF: Church of God Faithful; CGFF: Church of God, Faithful Flock; CGI: Church of God, International; CGG: Church of the Great God; CGPFK: Church of God-Preparing for the Kingdom of God; CGSC: Church of God, Southern California; CEM: Christian Educational Ministries; COGalc: Church of God, an International Community; COGWA: Church of God, a Worldwide Association; GCG-UK: Global Church of God, United Kingdom; GCW: God’s Church, Worldwide; ICG: Intercontinental

Church of God; LCG: Living Church of God; PCG: Philadelphia Church of God; RCG: Restored Church of God; SL: Shining Light; TPM: Triumph Prophetic Ministries; UCG: United Church of God.

While most of those groups are Church of God, not all the leaders or members truly are.

## 50+ Errors

This article does not have list all the prophetic errors various non-Philadelphian COG groups have, but should help those with “ears to hear and eyes to see” that their misunderstandings have many ramifications.

Here is an abbreviated list of prophetic misunderstandings in various claimed COG groups that I have personally denounced:

1. Many COG groups (ICG, CGI, UCG, COGaIC, CG7-D, CGG, CEM, etc.) do not officially teach and/or do not believe in the idea of Church eras (The Churches of Revelation 2 & 3), though they sometimes teach about the churches of Revelation. They tend to take more of a preterist (past) view of those churches, despite the fact that many statements made to them had to have future prophetic ramifications (e.g. Revelation 1:19; 3:3; 3:10). Because of that they do not teach certain prophetic aspects of this, most do not see their own problems and will have to go through the Great Tribulation.
2. Several COG groups do not believe that the Gospel of the Kingdom of God still needs to be preached to the world as a witness per Matthew 24:14 (e.g., GCW, PCG), do not really make that a high priority (e.g., COGWA, CGG), or do so in less than truly loving the truth (cf. Jeremiah 48:10), hence do not have the real Philadelphian work. As only the Philadelphians are promised to be protected from the hour of trial that will come on the whole world, they will not understand when Matthew 24:14 is fulfilled or when to flee per Matthew 24:15. Hence they do not have or lead the Philadelphian work. Only the Philadelphians are promised to be protected from the hour of trial that will come on the whole world.

3. At least three groups misunderstand the Gospel and COG doctrines so much (PCG, CGPFC, and RCG) that I question if their top leaders are actually converted members of the COG. The leaders of those groups have had major predictions been proven to be false (CGPFC, PCG, and RCG).

4. Many, if not most, COG groups do not realize that the Great Tribulation begins with the King of the North invading the USA, UK, and/or their Anglo-Saxon descended allies (Daniel 11:39).

5. Many COG groups misunderstand the identity of the King of the South (Daniel 11:40-43), and some have the wrong prophetic sequence regarding the King of the South (see the article: PCG and LCG do not understand the end-time King of the South sequence – do you? at cogwriter.com). Theirs is not the order that Daniel 11 teaches. This view overlooks the fact that since the Great Tribulation is the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), that it begins with the USA and its Anglo-Saxon allies like the United Kingdom getting invaded (cf. Daniel 11:39). Some of those groups cling to their sequential error, because it was once held by the late Herbert W. Armstrong, who changed his view by 1979 (Armstrong, Herbert W. The Time We Are In, Now. Pastor General’s Report-Vol 1, No. 15, November 20, 1979). Since the King of the North will eliminate those of the strongest fortresses (the USA, Canada, etc.) in Daniel 11:39, prior to invading the King of the South in Daniel 11:40, those who hold to a differing view will not know when the Great Tribulation will begin until after it has started.

6. Some (CEG, GCG-UK) teach that there is no biblically-required King of the South, while at least one group is unsure (CGF-NW) — but this is an error. This error contributes to other prophetic errors that those groups have.

7. Some have insisted that the final King of the South will be from the nation of Ethiopia. This is partially based upon a mistranslation in the KJV version of the Bible as well as a position that the late Herbert Armstrong once held. However, he changed his position in the 1960s and 1970s to

an Arabic-Muslim confederation. Those who insist that the final King of the South must be Ethiopia will not possibly realize that the Great Tribulation will begin until it is too late (RCG once held that position, but later changed it).

8. Several COG groups (like CGG, RCG, PCG, COGWA) clearly misunderstand Daniel 9:27, the second half of which ties in with Daniel 11:31 and Jesus' words in Matthew 24:15. Those who misunderstand it will not have a proper pre-warning of what is happening nor likely know when the Great Tribulation will begin.
9. Various COG groups (UCG, COGWA, COGalC, RCG, and CGOM, come to immediate mind, but they are not the only ones) have so many areas of undefined prophecy that they will not know what certain events will mean. And groups who define matters wrongly will have problems that way as well (PCG and LCG come to immediate mind, but so do nearly all other COG claimed groups).
10. A couple of groups, such as CGPFK and TPM, have been repeatedly proven wrong about their dates for the start of the Great Tribulation and (like RCG) the return of Jesus Christ. Those who rely on teachers of those groups really do not understand biblical prophecy.
11. Certain groups teach improper interpretations of the 1335, 1290, and 1260 days of Daniel 12 (CGPFK is one) or have other problems with that (most other COG groups) that they will not understand when the Great Tribulation will start. Herbert Armstrong changed his view on this by 1979 and many never understood the change.
12. Most COG groups fail to understand Habakkuk 2:2-8 and hence are not properly getting the warning out to the USA and UK. PCG totally misses it, and LCG, while it once would teach it, has backed off because of what appears to be internal politics. The rising 'time bomb' of USA debt is something that needs to be pointed out and Habakkuk 2:2-8 points out the biblical threat that this poses. It should be proclaimed and we in CCOG are doing it. Many do not realize that Habakkuk 2:2-8 is related to fleeing and the start of the Great Tribulation, that the time will come when those Philadelphians who understand it in its proper timeframe will flee, and is one of the reasons for the attack against the indebted descendants of the tribes of Joseph.
13. At least one group (LCG) is no longer certain that France or certain other Israelitish nations will support the Beast power. This differs from the position specifically taught by the late evangelist Dibar Apartian as well as what the Bible teaches. Those who misunderstand this are likely to not possibly realize when the final Beast power has formed.
14. Many COG groups have various 'Elijah heresies' (most CGI-derived groups as well as RCG come to mind). Because of this, they will not be able to recognize the final Elijah.
15. Some think that either there is no Elijah to come (ICG, CGI) or that it is the church and perhaps not an individual (cf. LCG), which goes against Jesus' teachings on the subject in Mark 9:12-13.
16. Some independents and some groups (PCG comes to mind) insist that the late Herbert W. Armstrong was the final 'Elijah to come' despite the fact that he has been dead since 1986, and that death disqualifies him according to his writing about that (Mystery of the Ages. 1985, p. 349).
17. Leaders of at least two groups (CGPFK and RCG), who once insisted publicly that Herbert Armstrong must be the final Elijah, now falsely claim that they hold that role.
18. At least one group has confused the final Elijah with the return of Jesus (LCG comes to mind).
19. Many groups do not understand the differing persecutions (and other matters) to come in Daniel 7:25, 11:30-39, Matthew 24:9-22, and Revelation 12:14-17, hence when the prophesied wave of persecution initially hits the Philadelphians primarily (and not them), they will not see this persecution as evidence that the Great Tribulation is about to begin. The old Radio Church of God specifically applied the

persecuting scriptures of Daniel 11:32-35 to the end time Philadelphian church.

20. Most groups that came out of groups once led by the late Garner Ted Armstrong (ICG, CGI, CEM, etc.) do not seem to teach that there is a physical place of safety (despite what Revelation 12:14-16 teaches), hence they will not be inclined to flee towards one just prior to the start of the Great Tribulation.
21. One CG7 group (CG7-S) has the place of safety as the 'sea of glass' and before the Bible says Christians will be there.
22. Most 'independents' do not believe that they need to 'gather together' prior to the time to flee despite what Zephaniah 2:1-3 teaches, hence it is not likely they will be inclined to flee together when a group they are not part of does just prior to the start of the Great Tribulation (cf. Revelation 12:14-17).
23. At least one group (PCG) misunderstands the final Prince of Rosh. Those who insist on a pre-return of Jesus Christ for the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 will be disappointed as that is in scriptural error. Ezekiel 38, including its first several verses, will not be fulfilled until well after Jesus returns.
24. At least one COG group (CG7-D) basically teaches that most of the events of Revelation have already taken place and no one needs to be concerned about coming persecution as none supposedly is coming. Jesus warned those of Sardis to be careful about losing the doctrinal understandings they had (Revelation 3:1-6), and this loss of prophetic knowledge proves that those in Sardis will not know when the Great Tribulation will begin.
25. At least one COG group (LCG) erroneously believes that the abomination of desolation of Daniel 11:31 occurs after the King of the North invades the King of the South (Daniel 11:40-43). Since this will not happen that way, those who hold to that position will not understand when the Great Tribulation will begin.
26. At least one group (RCG) totally misunderstands various prophecies in Haggai and Zechariah and has expected a type of COG reunification that is not prophesied. Those who rely on this and other misinterpretations will not know when the Great Tribulation will begin.
27. At least one group (LCG) erroneously teaches that the 'Falling Away' warned about in 2 Thessalonians 2 has mainly to do with the world and Protestants and not the Church of God. This improper emphasis seems to be leading to a falling away of certain prophetic understandings for those who hold to it.
28. Some groups teach (UCG, COGWA, LCG, CEG) that the man of sin who sits in the temple of God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4) is the Antichrist/false prophet, not the Beast of the Sea. Yet, it is this Beast of the Sea, the final King of the North. So, when this happens, those who hold to the wrong position will not understand its prophetic ramifications. The Beast identity of the 'son of perdition' (cf. Revelation 17:7-11) is important to understand in the end times.
29. At least two groups teach that the 'man of sin' is (or could be) Joseph Tkach, Jr. (PCG, COG-FF). This absurd position also partially leads to many other misunderstandings.
30. At least one group (RCG) has improperly declared Satan will enter a COG leader to make him the man of sin.
31. A few teach that a massive Jewish temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt before Jesus returns (CBCG, RCG, COGFF, CEG, and TPM teach this, as do some in LCG). While this is remotely possible it is not required (the "temple of God" in the New Testament has to do with a Christian, not a modern Jewish, location; e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Since this will not happen as a few sometimes teach, those who hold to that position will not understand when the Great Tribulation will begin.
32. At least two groups (PCG and LCG) teach that the Beast power will consist of 10 or 11 current nations in the European Union. The European Union has 27 nation members with several others hoping to join it. And while it may lose nations, the reality is that if the Beast power rises up

- when there are more than 11 nations in it, those who hold to that position will not understand when the Great Tribulation will begin. Under Herbert Armstrong, the old WCG taught in at least a dozen documents (Plain Truth, Good News, Tomorrow's World, booklets, Co-worker letter, Bible Correspondence Course) that this passage referred to 10 nations or GROUPS OF NATIONS. Presuming it will be another number of nations, those who insist on 10 or 11 will not realize when the Great Tribulation will begin.
33. Some groups (CBCG and CGG) teach that the ten kings are to be in charge of ten regions around the world as opposed to being a primarily European power (though CBCG acknowledges that 10 European regions are possible). Overlooking what will happen in Europe could mean that such a group would not understand when the Great Tribulation would begin.
34. None of the Laodicean or Sardis COGs seem to teach that the "strongest fortresses" in Daniel 11:39 refers to the USA — but it does. Although the evangelists at LCG all agreed I was correct about this, when I checked LCG's two major websites in the past, there was no place where LCG teaches this — this is an improper and dangerous error of omission for LCG — and for the other claimed COGs.
35. At least two groups seem to teach that the first verse in the Daniel 11 sequence relating to the beginning of the Great Tribulation is Daniel 11:40 (LCG does this in its Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, whereas PCG does it elsewhere). Instead, they should teach that it begins with Daniel 11:39 (see USA in Prophecy: The Strongest Fortresses at cogwriter.com), which is shortly after Daniel 11:31, and also consistent with the start of the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7; see also Who is the King of the North? at cogwriter.com). Those who hold to the Daniel 11:40 position will not understand when the Great Tribulation will begin.
36. The leader of at least one former group (SL, James Malm — died Spring 2020) has claimed that the Great Tribulation could begin within a year for the last dozen or so years. Since he did not recognize why this was in error, any who still accept his logic will not truly know when the Great Tribulation will begin. Of course, if someone guesses each year or the correct year, some may accidentally get it right, but the non-Philadelphians will not know enough to handle it.
37. One group (CGF, a PCG split) claims that the Great Tribulation will begin in 2023 — but that is too early as items, such as Daniel 9:27a must occur years ahead of it.
38. At least one group has publicly claimed that God has no prophets today and will not have any until the two witnesses are empowered (LCG comes to mind). This downplays how God works (cf. Ephesians 2:20), what is expected for now (cf. Acts 2:17-18), and that the Bible teaches, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Does anyone think God provided no possible warning related to the coronavirus which impacted the feeling of peace of the world more than almost anything since WWII? Yet, this author did in 2013 and 2014.
39. At least one group (CGG) teaches that the Beast power is not European. Since the Beast power will arise in Europe, those who do not understand this will not realize when the Great Tribulation is about to begin.
40. At least one group (LCG) was taught that the European Union will collapse like the old Roman Empire. But the lessons of history and the Bible contradict that.
41. One group (PCG) erroneously teaches that Vladimir Putin is the Prince of Rosh of Ezekiel 38.
42. One group (CGFF) taught that Hillary Clinton would be President of the United States by now; whereas one (PCG) strongly asserted that Donald Trump would remain in office and Joe Biden would not assume office.
43. One group erroneously taught (PCG) that half of the Laodiceans would die before April 30, 2021.

44. At least two groups (CGG and CG7-S) assert that the three angels of Revelation 14 are (or may be) humans, not angels.
45. Two groups (PCG and CGFF) have falsely asserted that the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 was Herbert W. Armstrong. That is wrong.
46. At least two groups (BICOG and TPM) have taught that a US president is the King of the North or could be the Antichrist.
47. Many groups do not teach much about prophecy (I have received complaints that this is the case for UCG and COGWA, to name just two). How can Christians be “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and live “by every word of God” (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4) if prophecy (which is between 1/5 to 1/3 or so of the word of God) is not taught? Well, you cannot properly do so. This is very lukewarm (cf. Revelation 3:14-19).
48. Nearly all COG groups and independents do not accept that God has been fulfilling prophecies of Acts 2:17-18. Laodiceans do not accept God’s standards, but prefer their own interpretations on how God works.
49. Laodicean groups often say the end is near, but do not have a history of explaining when each of the first three seals of Revelation 6 may have been opened, or at least an ante-type of those has been happening. CCOG, however, has.
50. One group has published (LCG), without retraction, that Russia is/may be one of the two legs of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision. That is wrong.
51. One group has published (LCG) that Ukraine may be the leading nuclear force against Europe. Ukraine, however, has no nuclear weapons, so this makes no sense. This author, not only warned them of that error, he also stated that Russia would end up with territory claimed by Ukraine in 2013 (which happened in 2014 with Crimea) and that more of Ukraine would either support Russia or become part of it prior to Russia’s “Special Military Operation” into Ukraine in February 2022.

This being said, some will come up with their preferred rational as why not to agree with the position of the Continuing Church of God (CCOG) on these matters. Yet not only are they biblical, on most of those points, the old WCG taught what I believe that the Bible teaches on them (on the few that it did not, one is consistent with a November 1979 HWA writing and on the others, a former adviser to HWA told me that HWA would have agreed with me on those as well, as one HWA had not investigated and some others were not issues when he was alive — and, of course, the Bible, and not HWA’s opinion, is the standard).

It should be noted that leaders while in the Living Church of God and/or the United Church of God confirmed to me personally that I was biblically correct on pretty much all the above points (there were some I did not discuss with them), despite the fact that their respective churches hold to several of the errors pointed out above (I have also had discussions with leaders in other COGs). Those who rely too much on a compromised ministry (Ezekiel 34:7-10) to teach them prophecy that is not truly in accordance with scripture need to realize that according to Jesus’ words in Revelation 2 & 3 and Luke 21, only relatively few Christians will be protected from the hour of trial that will come upon the whole world.

There are also more prophetic differences that other COG groups have from the Bible. The reality is that without the right emphasis on the final phase of the work, holding the Bible in sufficiently high regard, practicing Philadelphian love, and ignoring one anointed like Elisha, the COG groups that ignore prophetic warnings are doing so to their peril.

Laodiceans and others who rely on non-Philadelphian understandings of prophecy will fail to “gather together before the decree is issued” (Zephaniah 2:1), and hence have to go through the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21-22), as they will not be protected (Zephaniah 2:1-3, Revelation 12:17).

Without repentance, those who hold to certain of the listed errors will NOT be protected from the coming Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21) as they will not even know when it will begin until it has already started.

While some discount prophecy, notice what Jesus admonished His faithful to do:



# The World's Fall and Early Winter Holidays

We encounter a lot of the world's holidays in the Fall and Winter each year.

What about Christmas and other religious days that many professors of Christ observe?

Do they come from the Bible? If not, where do they come from? Does it matter, according to the Bible, if you keep them?


There are numerous holidays that the world's churches endorse, though not all of them are endorsed by all of them. Throughout history, some churches have sometimes endorsed, as well as sometimes condemned, those same holidays.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to go into all the details about each holiday and their origins, the reality is that many are repackaged demonic ones as they often originally were intended to honor a pagan god/goddess before various churches adopted and/or renamed them.

Many would be surprised to learn that Greco-Roman theologians have sometimes condemned these holidays as pagan and inappropriate for Christians — despite the fact that various Greco-Roman churches

SHOULD YOU KEEP  
GOD'S HOLY DAYS  
OR DEMONIC HOLIDAYS?

*Do you know where various holy days  
and holidays came from?*



*"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come,  
they were all with one accord[a] in one place". (Acts 2:1)*

BOB THIEL, PH.D.

promote them in the 21st century.

## Halloween/All Saints' Day

While the idea of honoring the memory of the life and death of a person like a saint is not opposed to scripture (cf. Judges 11:38-40), veneration of saints and sacrificing to them is opposed to apostolic teachings.

Satan wanted Christ to bow down and worship him (Matthew 4:9), but Jesus refused (Matthew 4:10). Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-23) reportedly encouraged his followers to venerate/worship him (Irenaeus. Adversus haereses, Book 1, Chapter 23, Verses 1-5).

The Apostle Peter not only denounced Simon Magus, he forbade a Gentile from bowing down or paying homage to him (Acts 10:25-26). The Apostle Paul forbade Gentiles from sacrificing to him and Barnabas (Acts 14:11-18). The Apostles basically both argued that they were men and this should not be done. Early Christians understood this and did not do such. Over time, however, some heretics began to venerate

*Continued on next page --->>>*

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35 For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. (Luke 21:35-36)

Are we not a lot closer to the end now than when Jesus stated that? Should you not be watching world

events as properly explained in the light of Bible prophecy?

In the Continuing Church of God:

19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19, KJV)

relics in the late second century.

The veneration of claimed saints began to be a significant problem with the Greco-Roman churches in the fourth and later centuries, despite the fact it was not an apostolic practice.

Notice the following:

By incorporating familiar Pagan images, such as Celtic gods, the Green Man, and bicephalic heads within churches and cathedrals, church officials encouraged the populace to intermingle the two spiritual traditions in their mind supposedly easing their acceptance of the new religion and smoothing the transition from the old ways to the new. (Pesznecker S. Gargoyles: From the Archives of the Grey School of Wizardry. Career Press, 2006, p. 85)

In a book, the above statement preceded a truncated version of the following that Pope "Gregory "the Great" wrote around 600 A.D.:

Tell Augustine that he should be no means destroy the temples of the gods but rather the idols within those temples. Let him, after he has purified them with holy water, place altars and relics of the saints in them. For, if those temples are well built, they should be converted from the worship of demons to the service of the true God. ... Let them therefore, on the day of the dedication of their churches, or on the feast of the martyrs whose relics are preserved in them, build themselves huts around their one-time temples and celebrate the occasion with religious feasting. They will sacrifice and eat the animals not any more as an offering to the devil, but for the glory of God to whom, as the giver of all things, they will give thanks for having been satiated. (Gregory I: Letter to Abbot Mellitus. Epsitola 76, PL 77: 1215-1216)

Pope Gregory advocated the incorporation on pagan practices. Yet, the Bible opposes this and these type of sacrifices as demonic (1 Corinthians 10:20-21). Furthermore, the Bible teaches that after the sacrifice of Jesus that there is no need for animal sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1-10). Allowing the above for 'saints days' shows that this is also relic of paganism and that they are truly demonic holidays.

Many dress biblically inappropriately (cf. 1 Timothy

2:9) and sometimes also as witches (which the Bible condemns — Exodus 22:8) on Halloween. This is not a biblically-appropriate celebration and certainly was not an early Christian one.

All Saints' Day was declared in the seventh century, and later moved to November 1st and the evening before became known as Halloween (Mershman F. All Saints' Day. The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 1. Nihil Obstat. March 1, 1907).

October 31 was a date the ancient Druids observed:

The Druids, and order of priests in ancient Gaul and Britain, believed that on Halloween, ghosts, spirits, fairies, witches, and elves came out to harm people. ... From these Druid beliefs come the present-day use of witches, ghosts, and cats in Halloween festivities ...The custom of using leaves, pumpkins, and corn stalks as Halloween decorations comes from the Druids. The early peoples of Europe also had a festival similar to the Druid holiday ... In the 700s, the Roman Catholic Church named November 1 as All Saints' Day. The old pagan customs and the Christian feast day were combined into the Halloween festival. (Halloween. World Book Encyclopedia, vol 9. Chicago, 1966: 25-26)

It may be of interest to consider what a Catholic writer wrote:

Why would a pope put the Catholic celebration of the dead on top of the pagans' celebrations of the dead? Because the Catholic feasts are in continuity and fulfill the meaning of the pagan ones. (Killian Brian. Halloween, as autumn celebration, reminder God's name is hallowed. Catholic Online International News. 10/31/06)

It is a fact that many associated with the Church of Rome relish and boast about pagan connections for their faith. It is the Bible that they, and all, should look to as the source of doctrine (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16) and it condemns using pagan forms of worship (Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Jeremiah 10:2-6; 1 Corinthians 10:21; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

## Christmas

The Bible never endorses the celebration of birthdays, including that of Jesus. The early Church of Rome did not celebrate Christmas nor any other birthday.

Birthday observances were still condemned in the late 3rd century by Arnobius (Against the Heathen, Book I, Chapter 64).

Furthermore, Tertullian warned that to participate in the winter celebrations with wreaths and gift-giving made one behold to pagan gods. There was one such celebration known as the Saturnalia that was celebrated by the heathen in late December.

The claimed “father of Latin theology,” Tertullian denounced winter celebrations, such as Saturnalia (from a pagan deity whose name meant plentiful) which morphed into Christmas as he wrote:

The Minervalia are as much Minerva’s, as the Saturnalia Saturn’s; Saturn’s, which must necessarily be celebrated even by little slaves at the time of the Saturnalia. New-year’s gifts likewise must be caught at, and the Septimontium kept; and all the presents of Midwinter and the feast of Dear Kinsmanship must be exacted; the schools must be wreathed with flowers; the flamens’ wives and the aediles sacrifice; the school is honoured on the appointed holy-days. The same thing takes place on an idol’s birthday; every pomp of the devil is frequented. Who will think that these things are befitting to a Christian master, unless it be he who shall think them suitable likewise to one who is not a master? (Tertullian. On Idolatry, Chapter X)

Around the time of Tertullian, the Roman Bishops Zephyrinus (199-217) and Callistus (217-222) had a reputation of compromise and corruption and this is confirmed by such Roman Catholic saints such as Hippolytus (Hippolytus. Refutation of All Heresies, Book IX, Chapter VI) and allowed people in their church that compromised with paganism, etc.

The Roman Saturnalia and the Persian Mithraism themselves were adaptations of an even earlier pagan religion — that of the ancient Babylonian mystery cult. The ancient Babylonians celebrated the reborn Nimrod as the newborn Tammuz by worshipping an evergreen tree. The Bible condemns worship involving evergreen trees (Deuteronomy 12:2-3; Jeremiah 3:13; 10:2-6).

The Babylonians also celebrated a rebirth of the sun during the season of the winter solstice. December 25th was eventually chosen as the date of Jesus’

birthday, because the Saturnalia and other sun god worship happened at that time of the year:

In 354 A.D., Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered the people to celebrate on December 25. He probably chose this date because the people of Rome already observed it as the Feast of Saturn, celebrating the birthday of the sun. (Sechrist EH. Christmas. World Book Encyclopedia, Volume 3. Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, Chicago, 1966, pp. 408-417)

Helios Mithras is one god ... Sunday was kept holy in honour of Mithra, and the sixteenth of each month was sacred to him as mediator. **The 25 December was observed as his birthday, the natalis invicti, the rebirth of the winter-sun, unconquered by the rigours of the season.** (Arendzen J. Mithraism. The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume X. Nihil Obstat, October 1, 1911)

Emperor Constantine had been the follower of the sun-god Mithras, who was considered to be the unconquered sun and was one born from a rock in a below ground cave. Perhaps because of this, his mother Helena decided to believe the myth that Jesus was born in a below ground rocky cave.

Rome now teaches this (and this author has seen that ‘nativity’ displayed multiple times in Vatican City), but in the third century one of its supporters, Commodianus, condemned the rock deity:

The unconquered one was born from a rock, if he is regarded as a god. Now tell us, then, on the other hand, which is the first of these two. The rock has overcome the god: then the creator of the rock has to be sought after. Moreover, you still depict him also as a thief; although, if he were a god, he certainly did not live by theft. Assuredly he was of earth, and of a monstrous nature. And he turned other people’s oxen into his caves; just as did Cacus, that son of Vulcan. (Commodianus. On Christian Discipline)

Jesus was not born from a rock, yet that is partially how His birth is now portrayed. It is also not true to teach that He was born on December 25th. Scholars recognize that shepherds would not have been out with their flocks in the field (like the Bible shows in Luke 2:8) as late as December 25th and that the

biblically-mentioned (Luke 2:1-5) “census would have been impossible in winter” (Christmas. The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1908).

Many of the practices and customs associated with Christmas come from paganism as real scholars will admit. Neither Jesus’ apostles nor their early followers observed Christmas.

## **New Year’s Day Honored Janus (god of time) and Strenua (goddess of purification and well being)**

The Bible begins the year in the Spring (Exodus 12:2), but what is commonly called New Year’s Day is observed on January 1st on modern calendars. In the late 2nd century A.D., Greco-Roman theologian Tertullian condemned those who professed Christ who were celebrating a version of it. But, that did not stop many who wanted to celebrate.

*The Catholic Encyclopedia* reports:

Christian writers and councils condemned the heathen orgies and excesses connected with the festival ... celebrated at the beginning of the year: Tertullian blames Christians who regarded the customary presents — called *strenae* (Fr. *étrennes*) from the goddess *Strenia*, who presided over New Year’s Day (cf. Ovid, *Fasti*, 185-90) — as mere tokens of friendly intercourse (*De Idol.* xiv). (Tierney J. New Year’s Day. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 11, 1911)

Around 487 A.D., the Greco-Romans seemed to adopt the “Feast of the Circumcision” on January 1st. This, however, did not stop all heathen activity.

*The Catholic Encyclopedia* notes:

Even in our own day the secular features of the opening of the New Year interfere with the religious observance of the Circumcision, and tend to make a mere holiday of that which should have the sacred character of a Holy Day. St. Augustine points out the difference between the pagan and the Christian manner of celebrating the day: pagan feasting and excesses were to be expiated by Christian fasting and prayer (P. L., XXXVIII, 1024 sqq.; *Serm.* cxcvii, cxcviii). (*Ibid*)

So it also states:

... towards the end of the sixth century the Council of Auxerre (can. 1) forbade Christians *strenas diabolicas observare*.

The expression *strenas diabolicas observare* roughly translates from Latin to English as “observing the new time of the Devil.” It is likely that New Year’s resolutions are related to prayers and practices once given for the pagan goddess.

January 1st is not a biblical holiday, and even the Church of Rome has forbidden some of its attributes as demonic.

## **Repackaged Pagan Holidays**

While the Bible does not prohibit secular holidays (like sober independence day observances), early Christians did NOT pray to dead saints nor observe anything like All Saint’s Day nor Christmas. Many pagan deities were essentially changed from being the ‘god of something’ to being called the ‘saint of something.’

Some of the pagan practices may have changed, but the repackaged demonic holidays are still not Christian, nor are they those that Jesus and His early followers kept. Many holidays that people keep came from paganism, and even have ties to the ancient Babylonian mystery religion. When God sent Nehemiah to help the children of Israel who had been influenced by Babylon, notice what Nehemiah said he did:

30 I cleansed them of everything pagan.  
(Nehemiah 13:30)

The New Testament warns of a compromised faith and “Mystery Babylon the Great” (Revelation 17:5). Notice what the Bible teaches that God’s people should do in regards to “Babylon the Great”:

4 Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.  
(Revelation 18:4)

Christians should flee temptation and sin (1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:22), not embrace it nor promote it. They should not combine pagan practices in with the worship of the true God (1 Corinthians 10:19-21; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18), even it is a tradition (Matthew 15:3-9).

# STUDY THE BIBLE COURSE

Preface: This course is highly based upon the personal correspondence course developed in 1954 that began under the direction of the late C. Paul Meredith in the old Radio Church of God. Various portions have been updated for the 21st century (though much of the original writing has been retained). It also has more scriptural references, as well as information and questions not in the original course. Unless otherwise noted, scriptural references are to the NKJV, copyright Thomas Nelson Publishing, used by permission. The KJV, sometimes referred to as the Authorized Version is also often used. Additionally, Catholic - Approved translations such as the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) are sometimes used as are other translations.

## LESSON 22A: REPENTANCE

**Bob Thiel, Editor-in-Chief**

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**H**OW TRUE it is – we are just little babies grown up!  
And we still have the very same HUMAN NATURE!

We don't begin to realize just how many of OUR THOUGHTS ARE DIRECTED TOWARD OUR SELVES! IT'S THESE SELFISH THOUGHTS and actions, which Satan reinforces through his broadcasts, that make so MANY miserable and FRUSTRATED!

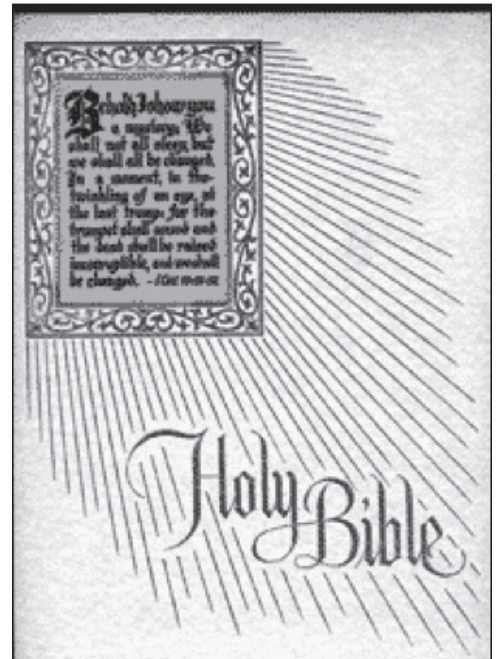
Look at the world around you. Notice how most seem bent on GETTING HIS/HER OWN WAY in everything he/she does. Is this really much different from a tiny squalling baby?

Babies exhibit little, if any, outgoing concern for their parents. They NEVER THINK of the trouble they cause their parents when they begin to cry in the middle of the night!

In business, ambitious young executive "climbers" knife and stab each other in the back TO GET themSELVES ahead.

How many wives try to convince "hubby" they urgently need a new dress or coat when they really could wait? And how many children try to convince their parents they need a larger allowance, more freedom, and fewer restrictions around home?

On the international scene, nations try to bully, cajole, or trick other nations into serving their selfish interests.



Everywhere you look, many are out to GET THE BEST OF SOMEBODY ELSE!

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patience], gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance ...” (Galatians 5:22-23, KJV) – all diametrically contrary to human nature!

True love is outgoing CONCERN for OTHERS – a desire to give, serve, and help. BUT HUMAN NATURE IS SELF-LOVE – wanting to give to, serve, and help THE SELF!

God's Spirit is full of JOY. But human nature is so intent upon fulfilling its own selfish aims that it often has NO TIME for the expression of true JOY!

God's Spirit brings PEACE – contentment and peace of mind. But human nature is always STRIVING to obtain more for the self. It knows no rest, no relaxation. It is full of worry, fears and frustrations!

God is PATIENT. God will perform His promises and pour out His blessing IN HIS OWN GOOD TIME. God is willing to suffer long, and endure reproach for love's sake.

Not so, human nature! It is in a great RUSH, an excited hurry – full of HASTE! It wants to get, and get NOW! RIGHT NOW, it cries in anguish, thinking only of its OWN selfish needs and desires!

Human nature is brusque, hurried, sharp with others, BLUNT, has no consideration for their feelings or weaknesses.

God's Spirit, known as **the Holy Spirit** is not the "third person" of trinity that the Greco-Roman Emperor Theodosius declared at dogma in 381 A.D. Instead, it is **God's nature and power. The Holy Spirit is His divine power in action. Through His Spirit, God creates, animates and influences. Through His Spirit, God can dwell in us and transform us.** Through it, we have communion with God and can better know Him and His mind.

What about goodness? GOD gives His blessings freely, to all, without respect of persons. God seeks to lavish GOOD upon His people! It rejoices God to be able to BLESS others. But human nature, on the contrary, is RUDE, INSOLENT, and feels that others are worthless, undeserving of any favor.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit OF faith – patient TRUST, and RELIANCE upon GOD. One imbued with God's Spirit is willing to put their trust in God and look to HIM, NO MATTER HOW CIRCUMSTANCES MAY temporarily appear, knowing that GOD is ABLE TO change and alter circumstances to produce His promised blessings!

BUT HUMAN NATURE DOES NOT HAVE THAT KIND OF FAITH! It does NOT really believe in God's promises. It mainly believes what it can SEE, FEEL, HEAR AND TASTE. It relies upon self, seeks to WORK THE ANGLES, and is often preoccupied with LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE! "Every one for his/her self" is its motto.

What about HUMILITY? The Spirit of God in one causes one to be humble, respectful of others, recognizing their potentialities and qualities. God's Spirit helps us to be willing to GIVE UP our own comforts, even our own LIFE, in order to serve and help others! God's Spirit helps us, when needed, to be willing to abase the SELF and SACRIFICE for others! – even as JESUS CHRIST Himself was willing to forsake all and suffer the ignominious death of the stake for OUR sakes!

But not so, human nature! "Surely every man at his best state is ALTOGETHER VANITY"! See Psalm 39:5, KJV.

Human nature is often PROUD, INSOLENT, full of

SCORN for others. Self is placed upon a towering pedestal, enshrined in an ivory tower, and puffed up like a bloated balloon! It is haughty, highminded. It often DESPISES others.

Analyze yourself now. How OFTEN do you submit to selfish temptations? HOW OFTEN do you exhibit competitiveness, greed or selfishness? How often do you become hasty, rash, in seeking your own way? How often do you become WORRIED, ANXIOUS, OR FEARFUL that you won't GET what you want? How often do you sulk or brood over "what could have been"?

How often do you "play the angles"? How often do you try to "impress people"?

How often do you permit human PRIDE and vanity to become manifest in your life – taking pride in YOUR accomplishments, boasting of what you have done, bragging on yourself?

We need to realize Jesus Christ also had HUMAN NATURE (Hebrews 2:14-18). He was TEMPTED IN ALL POINTS like as we are (Hebrews 4:15).

But He had the Holy Spirit!

And He KNEW human nature – knew "what was in man." He MASTERED His human nature. He kept it under control – ALWAYS – by the POWER of God!

Notice!

As Jesus strode slowly into the garden of Gethsemane, just before His execution, His thoughts tossed and turned within Him. He was seemingly tempted by His human nature to "forget the whole thing." His human nature may cried out, "WHY should you sacrifice YOUR life!" "Why should YOU suffer?" "What's in this for you?"

But Jesus never faltered. He prayed to the Father,

"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; NEVERTHELESS, NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS YOU WILL." (Matthew 26:39)

"... NEVERTHELESS NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS, BE DONE." (Luke 22:42)

Jesus had totally conquered the SELF. He COMPLETELY SURRENDERED His WILL to God. He had brought every thought into subjection to God. HE DID NOT SEEK HIS OWN WAY!

This COMPLETE surrender – this wholehearted submissiveness to God’s RIGHT WAYS – is the GOAL of YOUR REPENTANCE TO GOD!

## **THE EXPERIENCE OF REPENTANCE!**

EVERYONE WANTS a life full of satisfaction, interest, accomplishment and joy.

Yet most people are discontented, worried, often fearful, restless, bored, dissatisfied, with a sense of emptiness. Why?

The Eternal Creator PROVIDED for the kind of happy and abundant life we all want and seek – yet only very few ever experience it!

What is the reason so few have found the way of life which leads to happiness and success? Everyone COULD know! God has revealed the answer!

God set in motion LIVING LAWS TO PRODUCE HAPPINESS, peace, joy and abundance. These LAWS are the way to everything that everyone really craves and seeks. Yet nearly everyone rejects THIS WAY and seeks it in the opposite direction!

## **Humans Are Incomplete**

God created humankind INCOMPLETE. God formed MAN of the dust of the ground – of matter. Humans are material. But God is SPIRIT. Physical humans are not complete until their minds are united with the spiritual mind of God through the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit!

Unlike animals, humans were made “in the image of God” – so that the very Holy Spirit of God Himself can actually enter WITHIN a person – thus uniting with one’s mind and imparting the spiritual characteristics of God’s SPIRITUAL mind.

In the Garden of Eden God freely offered His Holy Spirit to Adam and Eve, which they rejected. And today God offers His Spirit to us through Christ to those He calls.

Thus, the very MIND of God – the divine LOVE of God – the divine nature of God – the FAITH of God – the POWER of God – the CHARACTER of God, all emanating from God, through His Holy Spirit, can come within one, as the gift of God’s love to those who will accept His calling!

Humans are not COMPLETE until they have this SPIRITUAL union with our Maker – this fellowship – this parent-child relationship. Why, then, do most people not have this priceless gift of the Holy Spirit which God actually yearns to bestow upon every person? Understand!

God knew that humans COULD NOT have perfection of character by instantaneous fiat creation alone. It requires time, knowledge, submissiveness, decision, a cooperative will, self-resistance, self-direction on one’s part – actually TEAMING UP WITH GOD ALMIGHTY! Perfection of character can come only through opportunity and experience – with a person’s consent and willingness, GOING the way God’s Spirit will LEAD one.

Therefore, God created mortal humans with human nature which will one day, lead nearly all humans to realize they should accept God’s ways. Humans need to come to the knowledge of their selfish rebellion against God’s right ways. All people must come to experience genuine REPENTANCE of their hostility – their resentment of true divine authority – and understanding their own wrong thinking and acting.

## **True Repentance Brings Happiness**

God will not give eternal life to any person who is not willing to accept His ways to live a happy, joyful, interesting, abundant and useful life. But we all have been seeking happiness at one time or the other, by running directly away from the cause of it. Humans have been reaping what we have sown – discontent, unhappiness, strife, violence, suffering, fear, death.

Before God will give His Holy Spirit which leads to happiness, people must meet God’s conditions. First, REPENTANCE, which is toward God the Father. Then, FAITH which is toward our Lord and acceptance of our Saviour Jesus Christ. These reconcile God to us. True repentance—experiencing a genuine abhorrence of sinful, rebellious self—fuming FROM hostility and disobedience, TO a loving Saviour and a loving Father in complete unconditional surrender and spirit of obedience—plus faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ—remove the great barrier that has cut us off from God. Thus, a necessary step on THE WAY toward real and everlasting happiness is a genuine, deep, and complete REPENTANCE. Only then is one ready for baptism and the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Notice the following from the Statement of Beliefs of

the Continuing Church of God:

### **FAITH, REPENTANCE, ACCEPTING OF JESUS, JUSTIFICATION, RECONCILIATION, AND BAPTISM**

Other than being drawn/called by God (John 6:44; Matthew 22:14; see also the booklet: *Is God Calling You?*), the first clear step in becoming a Christian is to hear (which can include reading as opposed to literal hearing) as “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Then one must believe in Jesus with all one’s heart “the Way” He is taught about in the word of God (Acts 8:37, 24:14). Thus, only those capable of developing faith from understanding the word of God can properly be considered to be baptized as truly Christian (though, young children of at least one Christian parent, however, are designated as “holy” per 1 Corinthians 7:14).

Accepting the message of Jesus leads to “repentance from dead works and of faith toward God” (Hebrews 6:1) which means to change our past ways of living that are contrary to God’s law (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11), baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), and the “laying on of hands” (Hebrews 6:2; cf. Acts 8:14-17) so “you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). God’s Holy Spirit is given to those who “obey Him” (Acts 5:32).

Christians are “justified by His blood” (Romans 5:9) and “reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:10).

REPENTANCE, itself, takes REAL ACTION – self-mortification – unconditional SURRENDER – complete GIVING IN – on YOUR part!

Perhaps you have now come to the point where you realize the great need of having God’s Spirit to CHANGE YOU. YOU now comprehend the EMPTINESS and FUTILITY of life without a living spiritual union – a personal FELLOWSHIP – with the true God, whose nature you now understand more fully.

This is a time of crisis in your life! Belief and baptism may seem to be easy conditions for you to meet. But NOT SO WITH REPENTANCE! Normally, your

own human nature and vanity will rebel against fully repenting.

So what does “REPENT” really mean? Let’s understand.

### **What Repentance Really Is!**

In the last few lessons we learned that God, the Creator of all things. All God created was good (Genesis 1:31), yet Adam and Eve rebelled.

God gave humans free will. By doing so, GOD set in motion an ability within the human mind to choose to be HOSTILE and DISOBEDIENT to God.

We tend to call it HUMAN NATURE!

Human nature, with its rebellious tendency, has been passed on down to all of us today, and is encouraged by Satan, who himself rebelled. Because of their rebellion Adam and Eve choose to partake of the FORBIDDEN tree of the knowledge of both good and EVIL (Genesis 2:17; 3:3,6).

Adam and Eve gave in to their EVIL PULLS and basically chose the way of SELFISHNESS, VANITY and REBELLIOUSNESS against authority. And that, sadly, is what we, their descendants, are doing today!

Well, “repentance” means simply that we have come to a full realization we have rebelled against our Maker – His Way and His righteous Law – that this is WRONG – terribly EVIL – SINFUL – that we have come to ABHOR OURSELVES for our self-willed, rebellious sinful past; that we are truly BROKEN UP about it and ready now, with God’s help, to BURY our old natures, to QUIT SINNING, quit rebelling, to surrender unconditionally, and to obey God with all our hearts – from here on and forever!

The dictionary definition, from The American College Dictionary, of repentance is:

“To feel self-reproach, compunction, or contrition for past conduct, to feel such sorrow for sin or fault as to be disposed to change one’s life for the better.”

The Bible definition means all of that AND MUCH MORE!

Jesus’ message included REAL REPENTANCE. But Christ really meant it. He meant to really repent – not just experience an emotional upset or disturbance. There is a “sorrow of this world” which is sheerly



human and physical – it is EMOTIONAL – but it leads to death. Do YOU know the difference between sheer human emotion, which would even lead some to sob and SHED TEARS as they “go down the aisle,” and GODLY SORROW which leads to real repentance? Jesus said, “Except you REPENT you shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5). In His parable of the one lost sheep, and the “ninety and nine,” Jesus said, “I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that REPENTS more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance!” (Luke 15:7).

## Going the Wrong Way

There is an old story about a basketball coach who was astounded. A player from his team had stolen the ball, but in his excitement he was headed toward the wrong basket!

“You’re going the wrong direction!” the coach shouted. “Stop! Turn around! Go the other way!” But to no avail. The player didn’t listen. He scored a goal, yet for the wrong team!

Just as this player was told to stop and turn around, God has told humans to stop and turn around spiritually, in the Bible doctrine of repentance.

There is another old story about a group of workers clearing trees in a forest for a building project. They were working diligently, and then a leader arrived and yelled out, “Stop! Wrong forest!” Whereafter someone responded with, “We cannot stop now, we are almost done.”

Many in the world feel that they cannot change because of tradition, family ties, work, etc.

What is repentance?

To a Christian, repentance is changing from going Satan’s way of the world (the ‘get’ way) to the way of God (the ‘give’ way).

Notice the following from *Bible Hub*:

The Original Word: μετανοέω

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: metanoéo

Phonetic Spelling: (met-an-o-eh’-o)

Short Definition: I repent, change my mind

Definition: I repent, change my mind, change the inner man (particularly with reference to acceptance of the will of God), repent.

Very few understand what real repentance is. Many think it is just being sorry for something. Yet, it is more than that. Repentance involves real change, not just sorrow.

Those who do not understand repentance tend to be doomed to continue in the wrong direction spiritually, and to ignore God’s plain commands that we should repent. Ignorance does not need to plague those willing to learn.

When we who are called are finally brought to real repentance, we should mean business. We are to be ready – in EVERY PHASE of our lives – to say: “YES, Lord ... YOUR will be done.”

In REAL repentance, we have become completely SICK AND TIRED of our OWN selfish ways – AS WELL AS THOSE OF THIS WORLD’S SOCIETY. We are truly SORRY for our mistakes and sins – and we are MOST WILLING AND READY, through God’s Spirit within us, to make a PERMANENT CHANGE. We must exercise the faith that God gives us (Ephesians 2:8).

We then should be fully ready to “turn around and go the other way” – ALL the way – GOD’S way!

Learning this great LESSON of our own helplessness, misery and inadequacy APART from God, helps lead us to understand the real PURPOSE of life!

Which is?

To be able to give love in a unique manner to make eternity better for ourselves and everyone else.

That is something the world has not yet realized. But to help all do so, God has permitted “THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD” to continue – with all of its trials, tests and frustrations.

God’s plan for you is to show love through the forgiveness of sins, even though we all deserve death. Furthermore, He will ultimately reveal His loving plan of salvation to all, to help you reach your potential, to give more to human beings than they can even imagine, and so that all will be able to show love to others throughout eternity.

Humans must learn that they NEED God – that we are INCOMPLETE and FRUSTRATED without a vital, personal fellowship with our Maker, or we will not have the type of faith we should have.

God, having taught us Christians this GREAT LESSON is this age, can then begin to FINISH His creation by placing within us His Holy Spirit – His very nature and CHARACTER – which will give us the spiritual POWER to overcome and hold down the selfish downward pulls of human nature. The Holy Spirit will also give us great joy and inward PEACE OF MIND.

Yes, you were born INCOMPLETE – in great NEED of personal contact with God through His Spirit. You need to face that fact squarely and – asking God’s guidance and help – take ACTION on it!

## The Turning Point

The time of initial repentance is the CRISIS in your life! It is the TURNING POINT in your entire destiny!

Do not underestimate the importance of this matter. Repentance spells the difference between success and oblivion! It is only when you have become willing to totally SURRENDER your stubborn will to God that He will grant you His Spirit. And ONLY through the power of God’s Spirit within you will you ever be able to KEEP your mind IN SUBJECTION to His will – to overcome SELFISHNESS, VANITY and SIN.

Later, when literally BORN of God AT THE RESURRECTION, YOU will never again sin, for the Holy Spirit – the perfect NATURE AND CHARACTER OF GOD – will always REMAIN in you (1 John 3:9).

Your WILLINGNESS IS the QUESTION! Your WILLINGNESS TO HELP build the kind of CHARACTER that God wants – through constant surrender now, with the aid of God’s Holy Spirit, to Him and His ways – is the MOST IMPORTANT question in all of life! Yet it is a question to which most people give very little thought.

Most people assume that God’s only purpose for us is that we go through a sentimental experience they call being “saved.” Then, at death, we are supposedly taken to “our reward” which is usually depicted as a “heaven” of idleness and ease, a “happy hunting ground,” a “mansion in the sky,” a “beatific vision” or whatever each particular group wishes to call it. The basic idea, though, is that we just bask in the light of God’s countenance and lie around all day. There is no need to exercise character – NO DECISIONS to make – NO RESPONSIBILITIES placed upon us – nothing whatever to do!

We just TAKE IT EASY, supposedly, and like the sun – as the songwriter says – we “roll around heaven all day.” How utterly ridiculous!

If, as many of these people believe, God’s only purpose is to get us “saved” – and if, as so many believe, all there is to getting “saved” is accepting the reality of Christ as Saviour and/or accepting certain ‘sacraments,’ then why is it that God does not INSTANTLY take each one of us to our “reward” as soon as we accept Christ and confess that we are sinners – AWAY from all the continuous trials, heartaches, and sufferings of this life?

## God’s Supreme Creation

The ANSWER, briefly stated, is that God created the human family for a very great purpose – a purpose that most professing Christians, and even most ministers, have missed entirely.

God Almighty is the Supreme Artist. You see His artistry in magnificent sunsets, beautiful landscapes, awe-inspiring mountains, in the star-studded sky. God’s work of artistry is CREATION. He is the Supreme Almighty Creator of all.

But now, in humankind, God has set His hand to produce the crowning pinnacle of His own works of creation. Yes, even higher than the angels. In humans, He is creating perfect, righteous, holy character! And THAT IS the highest, most lofty achievement that even the Supreme Almighty Creator can accomplish!

God’s PURPOSE in having brought you into this world – and in permitting you to live and breathe – is to create in and through you His own supreme masterpiece of creation!

It’s true that YOU, AS YOU NOW ARE, certainly are not very important – certainly are of very little consequence – so far as your own inherent ability and capacity is compared to the universe is concerned. Furthermore, you are full of faults, weaknesses, shortcomings. You have bad habits. You have sins – “secret sins” – that you have not yet mastered and overcome, which NO ONE knows anything about except just YOU – AND God!

Can you realize the sobering truth that it is the purpose of the Everlasting God to make out of you – sinful and unworthy and incapable though you have been – an immortal, spiritual and holy CHARACTER

SO pure, and noble, and righteous that ultimately the eternal God Himself can look upon you with loving pride as the SUPREME product of all His creative power through eternity? Can your mind grasp the awesome greatness – the solemn IMMENSITY of that truth? And it is truth! God HIMSELF will do this creating through His Holy Spirit. HE will do the work. He is the divine Sculptor.

## **Surrender Into God’s Capable Hands**

But this character will not be created in YOU UNLESS and UNTIL YOU, yourself, make the decision – and unless and until you simply HUNGER and THIRST for the pure, holy character of God to be BUILT into you – unless and until you, yourself, desire this mortal flesh and its cravings and desires and tempers eliminated – until you REPENT BITTERLY AND DEEPLY OF SIN, and exert your utmost effort to put it down and hold it under, crying out earnestly to God with a broken, contrite heart continuously, BELIEVING, TRUSTING Him to forgive you and to fill you with His love, His understanding and wisdom, His faith, His power – to simply take you into his capable hands and make of you what He purposes, and what you are UTTERLY INCAPABLE to make of yourself. Yes, you have your part in this too – but it is God who will impart to you His righteousness – His VERY OWN holy and righteous CHARACTER!

If you will REPENT, and come to God through Jesus Christ our Saviour, trusting in His precious shed blood for the remission of every sin you ever committed, trusting the risen, Ever-Living Christ as High Priest to come literally inside you, through His Holy Spirit, and to mold, fashion, shape your character – then you will see that the Creator is STILL CREATING, in you, the very highest work of all His works of creation! Yes, Christians are being CREATED in Jesus Christ “FOR GOOD WORKS” (Ephesians 2:10) – “CREATED in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24, KJV).

For this tremendous PURPOSE, YOU are made of mortal clay – made subject to pride, vanity, passions and tempers and desires of the flesh. Character is something which cannot be instantly created. It grows, and is developed through EXPERIENCES OF OVERCOMING – and these require time. It requires a lifetime, during which you must suffer temptations, encounter obstacles, endure tribulations, overcoming self.

But God promises you His POWER to draw on to help you. It isn’t REALLY your doing – it’s GOD’S doing! Your part is TO REPENT, surrender fully, wholly, unreservedly into His hands – seek Him, CRY OUT TO HIM, TRUST Him. And God even grants you the understanding and spiritual capacity to enable you to repent! But you have your part in it, of course – else no CHARACTER could be built!

All that you have gone through—and will go through—makes it so you will be able to give love in a unique way throughout eternity. YOUR experiences will help you help others. The experiences of others, will help others be able to better help you. This way, eternity will be better for you and all others who will change their direction in order to accept God’s ways.

## **Change Direction**

The English word repent is, of course, merely a translation from the original biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. The words from which “repent” is translated means to turn, to change direction.

That is consistent, also, with the following:

30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord God. “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord God. “Therefore turn and live!” (Ezekiel 18:30-32)

20 ... repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. (Acts 26:20)

To turn means to change direction.

Such a change in direction requires one to first see that one is going the wrong direction, stop going the wrong way and finally to resolve to go God’s way and obey God, with God’s help.

But a person cannot even see that he or she is going the wrong direction until God opens the person’s mind to see it.

This truth – that one cannot truly repent until God grants repentance – so strongly flies in the face of the

teachings of the Protestant world that many simply cannot accept it.

Nonetheless, the Bible clearly states that it is not our own will, but the “goodness of God” that “leads” us to repentance. Many judge otherwise, but notice what the Bible teaches:

1 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Romans 2:1-4)

Note that it is God’s goodness, not His despising of you, that leads us to repentance.

Now, back to Romans 2:

5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: 7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; (Romans 2:5-9)

So, do not think that you will get away with lack of repentance.

Do not resist repenting.

Have the living faith live God’s ways.

## **Trust God and Do Your Part**

A major reason God allows this present evil world to exist as it has been is so all should one day come to the realization that, apart from God, the ways of humans and their sins leads to misery and destruction. Nealy

all will one day realize that they desperately need God’s Spirit to overcome their carnal natures and develop God’s character.

This will happen 6,000 years after God put Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden

Why 6,000 years?

It would seem that God concluded that this would be enough time for humans to try many different ways of life that they thought was best – and multiple generations since Adam and Eve have had that opportunity. So, for thousands of years humans would later be able to better see that the statements in Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25, “There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death,” are correct.

Humans, swayed by human nature, Satan, and his demons, have followed the path of destruction – of polluting, perverting, destroying many things they have been allowed to handle and use and control.

Many people have perverted the sacred Word of God, polluted their own minds, dissipated their own bodies; have failed to train or have mistaught their children; have manifested resentment, envy, hatred toward neighbor, sought to get the best of their neighbors in a deal; tried to get more out of life than they have put in it, which is destruction rather than construction; perverted the human food supply; have turned scientific and technological developments into engines of destruction until now, unless God steps in, he would annihilate human life from the earth!

We shall have to WANT the righteousness of God with such fervour and burning desire that we are willing to FIGHT our own SELVES, to even SUFFER while striving to control and master ourselves – and finally to throw ourselves on God’s mercy, trusting in His power – the Holy Spirit – in order to overcome our natures and develop God’s character!

And so, to move toward the fulfillment of your purpose on earth is for YOU TO REPENT – repent of all that is wrong with you, including the wrong customs and practices of “this present EVIL world” which you have followed.

This lesson is expected to be continued in the next edition of this magazine.

# Christian Soldiers

Since World War II, the US Army has had an elite fighting force called the Rangers. The Rangers were called triple volunteers as most volunteered for the Army, all volunteered to become paratroopers, and all volunteered to be Rangers. Ranger training was tough as well as multi-faceted. Rangers were trained to use all types of weapons and to be able to fight in all types of situations. The Rangers were highly disciplined troops intended to be used to spear-head battles as well as go (and fight) behind enemy lines.



Being a Ranger was not easy. Rangers ran everywhere in training, often while carrying 30-90 lbs (14-41 kg) of gear. They often slept outside, even in the rain. Although they ate the same type of canned rations as the rest of the Army sometimes ate, since they were outside more, they had that type of food more often. Though diligent in training and in battle, Rangers had an extremely high casualty rate.

Rangers rarely surrendered. Sometime when surrounded by an adversary, they would simply fight through a spot in the lines and break through. Often this was successful — they were dead when it was not.

One time during the Korean war, a black/African-American unit of Rangers was surrounded and vastly outnumbered by the enemy. The Rangers were attacked all night. They had to be vigilant as not only were they being attacked from afar, many of the enemy tried to stealthfully enter their bunkers to destroy them. The Rangers killed so many of their adversaries that they had to move the dead bodies of the stealthful ones out of the way so they could continue fighting. The morning after that battle, a commander of non-Ranger unit came by with his troops. After seeing the tremendous number enemy dead, he told his troops, “See this is what happens when you do not panic,” with the implication being that the Rangers would have all been dead themselves

if they would not have resisted so hard nor endured the hardships of their training.

## What About Christians?

Somewhat like the Rangers, Christians are also to be an elite group. Jesus said, “narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it ... For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 7:14; 22:14). And like some Rangers in

battle, Jesus said, “he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Timothy 2:4-5). Christians must be separate from the world (James 1:27) and live according to God’s rules (1 John 2:3-5). An individual Christian who falls for “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).

Christians must be balanced:

“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27)

Christians must be disciplined.

## How?

Paul taught:

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ ... Be diligent to present yourself approved of God.” (2 Timothy 2:3,15)

But Paul acknowledged that our battles are different:

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, And being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ’s, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ’s, even so we are Christ’s.” (2 Corinthians 10:4-7)

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6:11-18)

It is amazing that carnal humans will voluntarily subject themselves to severe military discipline, severe athletic discipline, or other hardships for non-spiritual pursuits while some who claim to be Christians will not. Some professing Christians seem to forget that “the world is passing away ... but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17).

Are we who claim to be Christians so disciplined? Are we skilled in all the ‘weapons’ at our disposal? When Paul writes “above all taking the shield of faith” (Ephesians 6:16), do we remember that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans

10:17) and that “prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21) can help deal with the “unbelief” of those who claim to be believers (verse 20). Do we pray always? Do we fast regularly? Do we study the word of God regularly so we can use ‘the sword of the Spirit’?

## Other Differences

In addition to our weapons not being carnal, there are of course other differences. While many are taught to hate their enemies, Christians are taught to love theirs (Matthew 5:43-44).

Early Christians would not participate in carnal warfare, and that is an major difference between how we should act and how the Rangers are expected to act.

Christians do not do what the Rangers do when surrounded by enemies — you do not love your enemies by killing them. Jesus said, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men” (Matthew 10:16-17).

## Diligent Christian Soldiers Do Not Lose

Just like the Rangers, we often have had to face an enemy:

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him.” (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Unlike many of the Rangers, we do not have to become casualties, as Jesus said,

“Behold, I give you authority ... over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” (Luke 10:19)

Do we work to take our calling as seriously as elite soldiers?

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:10-11)

Love, endure, function as faithful Christian soldiers.

# The Miracles of Jesus - Part 6

## The Raising of Lazarus

Imagine knowing someone really famous! Jesus was famous because he spoke the truth about God and healed so many sick people. Imagine not just meeting him, but being his close friend! Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus were really good friends of Jesus. They were special to him. He often visited their house.

So, when Lazarus became sick, of course the first thing that Martha and Mary thought was to ask Jesus for help. Lazarus was really, really sick, but they knew that Jesus had the power of God in him, so would be able to heal their brother. They didn't doubt it one single bit. They sent word to where Jesus was teaching and expected that because he was their good friend, He would drop everything and rush over to make Lazarus well again. But He didn't come over straight away. God had a better plan!

Jesus waited two more days before He went to Bethany to Martha, Mary and Lazarus house. By the time he got there, Lazarus had already been dead for days! "If only you'd been here," said Mary, with tears running down her face, "we know you could have made him well."

Jesus went to Lazarus' grave. "Come out!" he commanded with a voice of great power. To everyone's great shock and dread, Lazarus stepped out of the tomb! He was alive! What an incredible miracle. Jesus showed that God had more power than anyone could have believed. Power to bring a man back to life from the dead!

Puzzle: Unjumble these words from the story.

edad	avile	armhat
ropew	hertrob	hale
ragev	livedeeb	girattsh
derfin	thingace	arest

Read the whole story in John 11.

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." ... Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. Then after this He said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ... Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

And He said, "Where have you laid him?" ... Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said

"Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

### Further study.

Why did Jesus wait until Lazarus died? Why would he let his dear friends suffer the sadness of grief and loss of their brother?

It was to glorify the Father and to show that the power of the Father was in the Son. (John 11:4,14, 42). Jesus would soon die Himself, and this was an absolute sure sign that death does not need to be the end; it was a

# Do Unconverted People KNOW You Are a Christian?

*Article originally published in the Good News magazine, November 1962, by the old Radio Church of God (and hence, is no longer copyrighted but now is in the public domain).*

**W**hat do your neighbors and relatives think of you? It is time to take a good look from their point of view as well as from God's, to see if you are a real Christian.

LOOK at yourself from your neighbor's point of view. Does he know that you are a true Christian — a disciple of the living Christ?

How can someone who does not know God's ways realize that you are really a servant of the most high God?

Does he recognize you as a real disciple of Christ because you obey God and keep His commandments, or because you tithe? Does your keeping of the Sabbath and the Holy Days convince him that you are a true Christian? Does your practice of customs that are different from most other people, or your refusal to celebrate pagan holidays, convince him?

Many have carelessly taken for granted that these things show the world that we are Christians. God recognizes us by these standards, but does your unconverted neighbor?

## What He Sees

The world does not recognize God's servants because of the keeping of the Sabbath. This is a sign between God and His people. By this sign we recognize God as the Creator. And by this sign He recognizes us. But

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*Continued from previous page -->>>*

foretaste of the resurrection which is accomplished through Jesus Himself! (John 11:25-27).

Life does not go the way we want or expect, sometimes our prayers seem to be unanswered. We have to go through trials that are hard. But everything is for our best! If we trust in our Loving Father, everything that happens is for His purpose to be fulfilled in our lives and for giving glory to the Living God.



*Shining Light (Pixabay)*

the world does not recognize us by this sign as the servants of God. Instead, this same sign convinces the world that we are crackpots or religious fanatics.

Our neighbors, our unconverted mates, our relatives, cannot know by these things that we really are servants and disciples of Christ.

It is time that you understand how others can know

*Continued on next page -->>>*

Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose."

As yet we don't always fully understand that purpose, but must trust according to the promises given in His word. We can use the lesson from this miracle as a true witness that His ways are the best.

Answers: dead — alive — Martha — power — brother — heal — grave — believed — straight — friend — teaching — tears



whether or not we really are Christians. Let us quit assuming! We need the facts, and the only place to obtain them is from God's Word.

Stop and think a minute. Could a carnal, unconverted, un-enlightened person know that you are a child of God because you keep the Sabbath? Of course not! He doesn't know for sure what day (if any) the Creator God has commanded us to keep.

Your neighbor will not even recognize your keeping of God's commandments as proof you are a Christian. He may think it is a "yoke of bondage" instead of evidence that you are a true Christian.

Some of you have thought that by doing certain of these things others would just know that you are a Christian. If so, you are mistaken. These things, alone, do not make you a Christian.

You may be only partly serving God, as the Pharisees were. They obeyed certain of God's commands such as paying tithes. And yet, they left very important things undone. They neglected the weightier — the more important matters of the law such as judgement and mercy.

Just what is the way that people will recognize us as Christ's disciples?

## How People Will Know

Let Jesus answer. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, IF YE HAVE LOVE ONE TO ANOTHER" (John 13:35).

Do you really have love for the brethren? Do people recognize that love in you with somewhat of amazement? Is it hard for them to understand why you have such love and consideration of other brethren in the Church?

Just what is meant by having love for the brethren? First understand that love is not, in any way, shape or form, what the world, influenced by Hollywood, thinks love is. Love is not lust. It is not getting, receiving, taking or obtaining. IT IS GIVING! Giving of the self in service, in helping, exhorting, encouraging. It is CONCERN for others. It is also affection for one another.

Do you have this kind of sincere love for the brethren? Is it being expressed by acts of kindness, consideration and help to others?

Do you have the kind of love that is recognized by the

brethren and by the outsider who may see that love expressed?

The people in the world do not in general have this deep love and respect. But God's true servants are different! There are no others in the world like them.

Are you different in this way? Do people recognize that you are different (in a good way), and that you really have compassion and love and kindness toward others, especially the brethren?

## "I've Never Seen Anyone Like Him Before!"

About twelve years ago I first heard the World Tomorrow broadcast and first heard of the Church of God. An acquaintance told me of a young man who was a ministerial assistant in the church, who had been sent to Portland, Oregon, to temporarily pastor the Church there. At that time the young man was not on full salary and was expected to augment his income by working on the side. He worked for this acquaintance of mine. The friend told me about this young man and I don't think I'll ever forget what he said about him.

He said that he had never seen anyone like this before in his whole life. The ministerial assistant was a very hard worker, very sincere, extremely dependable, devout, and he had consideration and kindness toward others. This man loved the brethren! Those of the world who came in close personal contact with him knew he was different from other people!

It may have been hard to analyze why this person was so wonderfully different, why he had such admirable and rare traits. A person might not know for sure that this man was a true Christian, since there are so many so-called Christians around, but he stood out as being very unusual and different from all the others who called themselves Christians.

The point is this. All of God's true servants should also be like this young man. People in the world are used to calloused, lustful, grasping, deceitful and hypocritical people. A true servant of God stands out like an oasis in the desert in such a world. He is different, "peculiar," or unusual among men (2 Peter 2:9).

Are you such an individual? You should be! You can be!

Even though your friends and relatives may disagree entirely with your religion, they should recognize that there is something about you different and better than all the others. That difference is caused by the Holy Spirit of God within you.

But, some of you have not been the right example to your unconverted relatives and neighbors. You have apparently thought that they would know you were a Christian, when they have not, because you have been a bad example, not showing proper love, affection, kindness, consideration and goodness in your own home. You have been cranky, and at times you have not controlled your temper when you should have been patient. You have been over-demanding of your unconverted mate and children. Under such circumstances, a person would think you are not a Christian. You are a reproach to God's Church and to the name of Christ who has bought and paid for you with His own life.

## **Our Relationship With Each Other is Through Christ**

If we keep the words of Christ, that is — obey them — we know we are His disciples. In this same way we recognize others as being His disciples or learners. But, the world does not recognize us by this means. We have come to recognize this as God's true Church through the words of Christ and through the signs and identification given by Christ. The world is not looking for these same signs or identifying marks. And yet, they do recognize certain traits that set us apart as different.

As a result of our relationship with Jesus Christ and the Father, we have received the Holy Spirit and are being changed from what we used to be to become more and more like Jesus Christ. It is through Him that we have fellowship with each other and receive the love we have for each other.

Jesus taught that He was the true vine and we are branches joined to Him. We are joined together and have fellowship with each other through Him (John 15:1-6). If we are joined to Him in love we will bring forth much fruit (verse 5).

What kind of fruit should Christian love in us produce? It should be the same kind of fruit that Jesus had, which came as a result of God's Spirit within Him, and

is an expression of God's love. We should continue in this same love (verse 9) and by having this same love we have His joy also (verse 11).

## **Do Others See These Fruits in You?**

Jesus said that if we are a good tree we would bring forth good fruit, and if a bad tree we would bring forth bad fruit. We are to know others by their fruit, and others know you by your fruits. If we have the love of Christ in us, we will produce the same fruits He produced.

We know an apple tree by the fruit it produces. We know a Christian by the fruit produced in his life. By the same means even the unconverted will recognize us by our fruits. They may not be able to evaluate our fruits to know why we have them, or how we received them, since they are cut off from God and do not understand God's ways. But even the unconverted recognize a rare quality when they see it.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). These are the fruits produced in one who truly loves others.

Let us examine these fruits and understand them clearly. These are things that we can see in our own lives (if we have them) and others can see them too!

The first fruit that is mentioned is love. We have already seen that love is outgoing, and giving rather than receiving. The whole theme of the Bible is this same love. God's love is shown to us in making known His plan of salvation and how we may obtain it. It also shows His love in giving Christ to the world as a sacrifice for sin.

The scriptures show us the way to eternal life. The way to this eternal life is to accept the love and sacrifice of Christ, and, in turn, to show our love and fidelity to God by obeying His commands. His commands and laws are summed up in the ten commandments. The first four tell us how to love God and the last six tell us how to love others.

Before we can have Christ's kind of love as mentioned here and elaborated upon in 1 Corinthians 13, we must begin to keep God's commandments (1 John 5:3), although the keeping of the commandments does not convince others we are Christ's disciples.

In addition to expressing our love by obedience to God, we also express it in affection, acts of kindness, and help to others.

Many people in the world have a kind of love, but it is not the deep down sincere love that the Bible talks about! It is a counterfeit kind of love.

The second fruit mentioned is joy. Have you ever noticed how much happiness and joy are expressed by the members of God's Church who are really growing spiritually? They have problems and trials too, and yet they are abundantly happy and joyful.

Do your neighbors and relatives find you happy and joyful, or are you sad, discouraged and unhappy? You should have more real deep-down joy in your own personal life than any of the unconverted people around you!

Closely related to joy is peace. Peace with God, peace with yourself, and peace with men. A worldly person can not have peace with God or himself! Even though others may hate and dislike you, you have no animosity or anger toward them.

Patience is a virtue that is almost entirely lacking in the world. We live in a fast society which is notoriously impatient. The more of God's Holy Spirit we have, the more patience we will have toward others.

The world is anything but gentle today, and yet that is another of the important and necessary fruits that we will have if we have God's Spirit. Jesus set us an example in all of these characteristics. He was a meek and humble person. We will also be meek if we are following His steps.

The world today wants to live without restraint. They want to live lives where there is no self-control. People do not want to be restrained by man or God. It seems that everyone wants to be unbridled and unrestrained. A person following God's ways wants to be restrained and controlled by his own mind, and also by God and His laws. A Christian wants to be master of his own body and not mastered by his lusts or carnal desires.

All of these traits are outwardly evident in many ways. Do your neighbors and relatives see these traits in you? If they do, they know that you are different from all of their other acquaintances. They may not realize why you are different, they may not realize that these are fruits of God's Spirit, but they will realize that you

are really different, and that you love others.

Are these fruits increasing in your life, or are the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:13-21) increasing? We are instructed by the Apostle Peter to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). These fruits are a part of the grace that Christ has. We must grow in these characteristics or we will lose what little of the Holy Spirit we may have and find ourselves in great tribulation in a few short years.

## **Stir Up God's Gift!**

The Apostle Paul gave Timothy instructions about God's Spirit that we should apply in our own lives. "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6).

The gift that Timothy received by the laying on of hands was the Holy Spirit which imparted the special attributes Timothy needed to be a faithful minister. If Timothy needed to "stir UP" that gift, we need to do so even more!

Just what does it mean to stir up this gift? The Greek expression used here is possibly better translated in some other versions. The RSV says "rekindle." It means literally to revive a fire, to kindle up a dormant fire, to revive, excite, stir up, or quicken.

A fire that is smouldering, or is about to go out, can be revived by adding oxygen such as by fanning, or by adding more fuel. It is imperative that we stir UP or rekindle the "fire" of God's Spirit within us. We need to keep this fire burning brightly. God has supplied the fire, but it is our job to go back daily for more fuel, by diligent prayer. And we need to keep the fire fanned, so that there will be sufficient oxygen to keep it going. We can fan the fire of God's Spirit by using, exercising the opportunities given to us in service and help to others. We can keep the fire burning by staying close to God in taking into our minds generous portions of His Word daily.

Paul also exhorted Timothy in his first letter about this same problem — enjoining him not to neglect the gift (1 Tim. 4:14). We also, even more than the zealous evangelist Timothy, need to be concerned and active in our exercising and using of God's Spirit. Otherwise, our neglect will in due time cause us to lose it entirely. The fire will die down and go out, unless we apply

ourselves!

These fruits of God's Holy Spirit — the fruits of love — are expressed in many ways that are apparent to others, whether they are converted or not. They are evident in our attitude toward others, both in and out of the Church. How we help the needy in the Church, the widows in their affliction, the sick and afflicted, are indications as to whether or not we have the love which is motivated by God's Spirit.

The lack of these fruits is often expressed in little things, such as whether or not we regularly attend available church social activities. In the church areas where such activities are scheduled for members, the same people usually come each time. They enjoy this additional opportunity to be with the brethren and to express love for the brethren and to have Christian fellowship. Others who could be are never there. They have transportation, they are not working, nor are they sick. They just do not have the love for the brethren that Christ said his disciples would have.

Many people in the Church have shown that they loved the brethren by helping a poor widow paint her house, or possibly making other needed repairs to her home. God sees such good works and sometimes other people see them.

Christian life is one of service to God, to the brethren, and to the world. Each person has ample opportunity to help in many ways, no matter what his occupation, sex, age, or abilities may be. The problem is that many people, lacking love, are looking for excuses to keep from serving and helping others, rather than looking for opportunities to be of service!

We all need to apply ourselves more diligently in showing and expressing love for others.

We must do our part!

We cannot wait for God to do everything for us. After we do our part, God will supply what we lack or cannot do. If we have love for others, we cannot sit at home in our easy chair and have kind thoughts about others and then do nothing about it. Love is active and expressive.

Too many people in God's Church are not stirring up the Spirit; instead, they "quench," or put out, the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). They quench it by not acting when they know they should act in expressing love and kindness to others.

## God's People Are Different

Christ stated that we are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). Salt gives a loaf of bread an agreeable flavor — makes it desirable. There are no others on this round earth who are the salt except God's people. God's people are the salt because they are different from all other people. If we as God's people are not different, if we have lost our salty flavor, then what use are we, but to be destroyed?

We are the light of the earth if Christ lives in us (Matthew 5:14). THERE IS NO OTHER LIGHT! If our light is not shining brightly in this darkened and cursed world, by our good deeds, then where is there any light?

## Be SEEN Not HEARD

If we are the light of the world, the people will see it, even though they may not comprehend it now, or recognize why, now; but later they will remember that we were different, that there were no others like us. They will then remember that in addition to our living example of love, we did obey the living God. They will realize that our "fruits" came from our relationship with God and because we had God's Holy Spirit. They will then cry out to God in repentance and receive the same Holy Spirit that we have received.

We must let our light shine. Our light is our good works (Matthew 5:16), that light is SEEN of men.

By this way people may know that we are Christ's disciples and that we are true Christians. There is no other way now for the world and for our unconverted friends and relatives to know.

Don't falsely assume that Sabbath-keeping, discipline in the home, obedience, or rejection of pagan customs are signs to the unbeliever. Let us have love and kindness that bring forth GOOD WORKS which others can see as Christian attributes in our daily lives.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

*Editor's note: While in times of persecution we will need to be more discrete, yes, Christians should be diligent and live differently enough from the world, that we will be a proper example.*



**Q.** Why did Jesus say in, Matthew 24:20, “And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.” I understand about not fleeing in the winter, but why the Sabbath comment?

**A.** While knowing WHY God does many things is not always clearly seen, there are some reasons we can consider. Jesus is clearly warning His future disciples to pray this — and this is the last thing Jesus says to pray about before He mentions the start of the Great Tribulation in the next verse.

Since this is prayer admonition is tied to a happening (fleeing) immediately before the start of the Great Tribulation, this shows that the Sabbath was intended to be kept after Jesus’ resurrection and throughout the church age.

Now some “theologians” have claimed that this passage in Matthew is intended for Jews, but is that reasonable?

Jesus was speaking to His disciples, those that intended to follow Him and look for His return.

It makes no sense to conclude that He was speaking to Jews practicing Judaism in the future, because those who reject Christ, such as most modern Jews, would have no reason to wish to heed any such admonitions from Jesus.

One reason that Jesus spoke what He did looks to be because He knew that His true followers would always keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

As to why else Jesus may have said this, it would seem that Jesus wanted His people to be properly rested

before they flee, plus have received the spiritual food from sermons and other messages on the Sabbath to be better prepared spiritually to flee.

And as far as the winter goes, it was the position of the old Worldwide Church of God that this fleeing would likely be near the time of Passover, which is in the early Spring. The Greek expression translated above as “winter” refers to a rainy season. For ease of travel, dry weather is normally much easier.

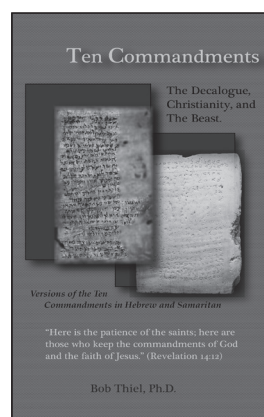
Jesus came so we could have life and have it more abundantly per John 10:10. Our flight not on the Sabbath or the winter will make fleeing better for us.

So, yes, we Christians are to pray for both.

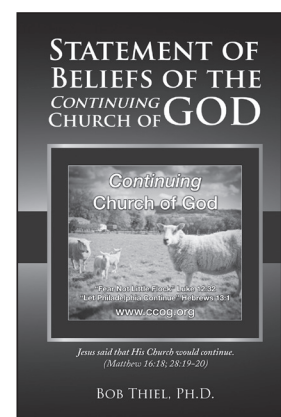
While the Great Tribulation will not start before 2026, it will be before the end of this century, and almost assuredly within the next decade.

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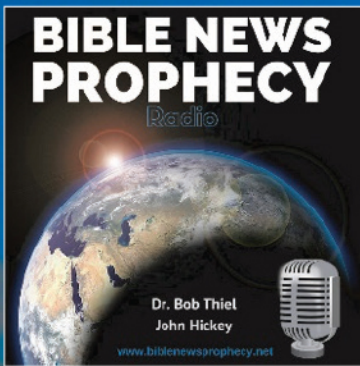
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Ten Commandments



Statement of Beliefs of the Continuing Church of God



# Fulfilling Matthew 24:14 and Matthew 28:19-20



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The Continuing Church of God also uses books, personal visits, daily electronic newsletters, and weekly letters to the brethren to support Matthew 24:14, Romans 11:25, and Matthew 28:19-20.