

"For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound,
who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

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This monthly religious journal is published for the benefit of the
Church of God universally. It is our supreme purpose to reach the
world for Christ through the printed page. Our burden is to reveal
the truth of God's Word to all mankind, to expose sin and error,
war against apostasy, and to eradicate the longstanding
traditions of men that have no biblical foundations.

Brother Roger L. Decker Editor
Workers Too Numerous to Mention

THE CHURCH OF GOD BELIEVES IN:

- A personal God (John 4:24)
- A divine Christ (John 1:1, 14)
- An infallibly inspired Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- Salvation from sin (Matt. 1:21)
- The new birth (John 3:3, 5-7)
- A holy life (Luke 1:73-75; Titus 2:12)
- Sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23)
- Unity of God's people (John 17:21, Eph. 4)
- Divine, physical healing (James 5:14-16)
- The ordinances (Matt. 28:19-20; John 13;
1 Cor. 11:23, 34)
- Eternal life (Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:43)
- The Trinity (1 John 5:7, 8)

**SOME SPIRITUAL FACTS
PERTAINING TO THE CHURCH**

- Jesus organized it (Matt. 16:18)
- On a good foundation (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:11)
- Christ governs it (Eph. 1:22-23; Isa. 9:6)
- God admits members (1 Cor. 12:13-18)
- Sin puts you out of it (Rom. 11:22; Ex. 32:33)
- The saved only are members (John 15:2-6)
- Membership is offered to all (Rev. 22:17)
- Final rewards (Rev. 20:12-15; 21:3-4; 22:14)
- Bible name of the Church (Acts 20:28;
Gal. 1:13; John 17:11)

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Guest Editorial

*"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you
rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in
heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."*

Matthew 11:28-29

SOUL REST

Deep in the heart of every person is an awareness that he or she is missing something in his or her life. Life just seemingly is not complete. That genuine fulfillment, happiness, contentment, and soul rest simply is not present. Instead, there is a deep void that always leaves one feeling empty and incomplete. Seldom does one ever recognize this vacancy as a lack of having God in his life. Without Him as the center of life, one's soul is merely existing.

Only God can bring the soul rest that the heart cries out for. Sad to say, too many continue through life seeking and searching but never find the way to fill the void. This explains why so many turn to the beggarly elements of life, such as movies, beer gardens, dance floors, and other places of worldly amusement and entertainment. They are seeking something to satisfy their hungering souls. Dear reader, that emptiness in your life can never be filled by anything or anyone but the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because so many people lack understanding of how to obtain what they are longing for, they wander in darkness. They never find peace and rest, nor do they ever become acquainted with the Savior and His pardoning love. They are unable to pillow their heads at night with the assurance that all is well between their souls and God. Great multitudes go on this way throughout life, never finding the fulfillment there is in possessing Christ in their hearts. Sad to say, these precious souls come to the end of life and face

eternity, lost and without God. Satan wants nothing more than to blind the minds of men and women to the reality and the necessity of finding salvation and the soul rest that it brings to every true believer.

Hearing the Gospel and heeding the call of God is man's only hope of spiritual survival. In Isaiah 55:1-2 we read: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

Another thing that keeps men from finding soul rest is the fact that they waste their time and energy on things that will not bring satisfying results. Too often people are so wrapped up in making money and having material things with little or no consideration given to their eternal welfare. In Luke 12:15 Jesus said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." Covetousness will blind the mind and rob the soul of real peace and rest. There are those who seemingly are always chasing rainbows. They are never satisfied to be where they are nor content with what they have. Their minds are always thinking things would be better if they could be somewhere else and doing something

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Isaiah 28:14 Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem.

15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under false-

hood have we hid ourselves:

16 Therefore [or because of this] thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste [the word haste here should be translated ashamed].

17 Judgment also will I lay to the

line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.

18 And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.



The Christmas Holiday

Brother Roger L. Decker

Sweeping Away the Refuge of Lies

The Prophet said that hail would sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters would overflow the hiding place. What did he mean when he used the word *hail*? Deuteronomy 32:1-4 tells us: "Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the

name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." Here the Scripture says that doctrine is as rain.

Isaiah 28:9 states, "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts." Hail is rain in a solid state. What was the Prophet talking about when he stated that hail would sweep away the refuge of lies? He

was speaking of solid Truth. Solid Truth will still sweep away the refuge of lies. You cannot refute Truth.

John 8:30-32 reads: "As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Discipleship starts with believing, and then one must continue in the faith. Also, discipleship continues with knowing the Truth, and the Truth sets you free.

In Revelation, Chapter 13, you

will find that the Apostle John wrote about a beast rising from the sea. He was speaking of nothing more than a humanistic religion rising up out of the sea, and the sea represents people. Verse 4 lets us know that the beast received its power from the dragon, or the pagan Roman Empire. Verse 5 says, "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies." Verse 6 tells us that the beast blasphemed God, His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.

Verses 7-8 read: "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints [notice that the Scripture does not say that he made saints but that he made war with the saints]. . . . And all that dwell upon the earth [in other words, all who are earthly, or who do not have an experience that came down from Heaven] shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Revelation, Chapter 13, is speaking of Roman Catholicism, which got its power from the pagan Roman Empire. It is an earthly religion, but remember that "the waters shall overflow the hiding place."

Uncovering Every False Way

In this message I want you to study the Truth concerning some teachings that came out of Roman Catholicism. Jesus said in John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The Prophet Isaiah said that the waters would overflow the hiding places. The Word of God will still uncover every false way, or every false teaching. Again, Revelation 13:8 reads, "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Thank God for those who did not worship the beast. Some did not worship him, and their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

We want to look at a practice

that was a carryover from Roman Catholicism, or beast worship. Right up through the Dark Ages to our day, there are some practices that came out of that beastly, humanistic religion, which got its power from the pagan Roman Empire. Those carryovers are practiced yet today in our land, and they are exalted by men.

This month we are entering the season called Christmas. I want to speak to you concerning the pagan customs that surround this holiday. I am not trying to take away your joy or your gifts or to throw a wet blanket, so to speak, on what you believe. However, I am going to proclaim the Truth. Now, I realize that most of Christendom today would not even take the time to study this, but the Word of God says you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free. How are you going to know the Truth except through a preacher?

Contrary to popular belief, Christmas is not a Christian holiday. Certainly, there are Christians who partake of it who do not have light and understanding. They are walking in all the light they know and truly worshiping God from the heart. I am not saying that they are not Christians.

Matthew 1:21 says, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS [and this is supposedly what this season is all about]: for he shall save his people from their sins." People like to bring up the part of this Scripture that says, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS," but they seem to forget about the rest of the verse, which reads, "for he shall save his people from their sins." This Scripture alone lets us know that the primary mission of Jesus Christ was to save His people from their sins.

What is taking place today? We have a Christless world trying to rejoice in a Savior. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to

destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

In verses 21-23 Jesus said: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." If you study whom Jesus was addressing when He said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils?" you will see that He was speaking to religious people who had a form of godliness but denied the power thereof. The world will not say those things.

"Love Not the World"

A Christless world cannot rejoice and celebrate the birth of a Savior. The world is against Christ, not for Him. James said in James 4:4 that "the world is enmity with [or against] God." The world is not for Christ. In John 7:6-7 Jesus said: "My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth [why], because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil."

First John 2:15-17 states: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." You cannot truly love God and have the peace of God and the joy of the Lord unless you possess the Spirit of God. These things only come from

the Spirit of God.

Today people out in the world are trying to rejoice in a Savior, yet they are still living in sin. True love and true rejoicing come from the hearts of those who possess the same Spirit Jesus possessed. Solid doctrine will cause you to grow up spiritually. Hebrews 5:14 lets you know that strong meat belongs to those who are of full age. If I were to preach this message in certain places, no doubt, the lights would go out and the people would walk out, but I still believe there are many people who love God. The Gospel message is fair, but we need to know the Truth. We need to know what came out of that beast in the Revelation, which came from the people; it was a humanistic religion. John said that all those who dwelled on the earth worshiped, or followed, that beast with the exception of those whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Real praise and real joy stem from the condition of the heart.

"Try the Spirits"

The Apostle John said in 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." John said to try the spirits. How can we try the spirits? How can we know when something is not of God? We know when it does not line up with the Word of God, or the principles and the teachings of God's Word.

Let us take a Scripture and see how it lines up with the spirit that is motivating the tradition of Christmas. Luke 16:14-15 reads: "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Luke said "that which is highly esteemed among men is abomina-

tion in the sight of God." This Scripture is a good balance in which to weigh things. If the millions who are living in the ungodliness and corruption of this world can rejoice in Christmas and highly esteem it, then it is an abomination in the sight of God.

Christmas is celebrated in almost every nation of the world, even by those who claim to be antichrist. The tradition of Christmas is elevated in their sight; it is a marvelous occasion to them. Most of the people of the world follow after that beast yet today, and it is even getting around that which calls itself the Church of God. Many pastors who used to herald the Truth have backed away from it. Why? They have done so because of the people, and also because they have it in their own hearts.

John said to try the spirits to see whether they are of God. Let us put the Word of God alongside the festival of Christmas. That is fair enough. We are to be weighed in the sight of God by the Word of God. It is a true balance in which to weigh things. Again, John said to "try the spirits." The devil deceived people when he convinced many that Christmas is Christian. The very name sounds Christian, but it has nothing to do with Christ.

People believe that when they enter into the Christmas season, they are entering a Christian celebration, but nothing is Christian about it; it is just a festival. Where did it come from? It came from Roman Catholicism, and they got it from the pagans. On December 25 the pagans worshiped the sun god, and Roman Catholicism changed it to the Son of God. The word *Christmas* came from two words: Christ and mass, but Christ does not have anything to do with mass.

When Was Christ Born?

Any good commentary states that people do not know when Christ was born. Deuteronomy 29:29 tells you, "The secret things belong

unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." God has hidden the time of Christ's birth from us. He does not want us to celebrate His birth. Why? His birth would be useless without His death, burial, and Resurrection. His death, burial, and Resurrection was the message of the morning-time church.

The Apostles did not put emphasis on His birth, but they did emphasize His death, burial, and Resurrection. You will find this mentioned throughout the New Testament teachings. The Apostles spoke of Jesus Christ being crucified and raised up the third day. This same Jesus is both Lord and Savior. Although commentators and Bible scholars do not know the date and time of Jesus' birth, most of them will agree that it was not December 25, and the Word of God lines up with this thought. Someone may ask, "What difference does it make?" It is the difference between Truth and error.

Luke 2:1-11 says: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, unto Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the

Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

The Scripture lets us know that the angel announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds who were abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. In Palestine the heat during the day can be hot, but the cold of the night from December through February is very piercing. Therefore, it was not customary for shepherds to watch their flocks in the open fields any later than the middle of October. Commentators state this. Those who have been in that country will tell you the same thing.

Rightly Divide the Word

Another reason we know that the birth of Christ was not December 25 is that every man, woman, and child had to go to their own city to be taxed. Some people had long journeys, and the middle of winter was not the proper time to carry out business of this nature. Travel was not the same in the winter as in other months. In Matthew 24:20 what did Jesus say when He was speaking of the abomination of desolation that was to come upon old Jerusalem? "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day." Why? Travel in the winter would have been restricted; it was not a good time to travel.

The shepherds were in an open field, and people were traveling to be taxed. Though we do not know the exact day that Jesus was born, we can know the season. We know that Jesus was crucified in the spring of the year, at the time of the Passover. John 18:39 says, "But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?" The Crucifixion

was at the time of the Passover. We also know that Jesus' ministry lasted approximately three and one-half years. If you would back that up, you will find that the beginning of His ministry was in the fall of the year.

In Luke 3:23, when Jesus was baptized with the Holy Ghost, we read, "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." Numbers 4:1-3 reads: "And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers, From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation."

Under the old Law we find that thirty years of age was the recognized age of a minister or for one to serve. If Jesus was thirty years of age in the fall, then thirty years before that would have been His birthday. We do not know the exact month or the exact day, but we can know the season, and the season was not the winter. By rightly dividing the Word of Truth, we know that He was born in the fall of the year. Also, it was the logical time of the year for the Feast of the Tabernacles of Jerusalem. After the harvests, they had the Feast of the Tabernacles. Exodus 23:16 states, "And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field."

Luke 2:7 tells us that "there was no room for them in the inn." Why was that? Well, there have been a lot of reasons preached concerning why there was no room in the inn, but those who have commented on this subject tell us that Jerusalem's population went from 120,000 to 2,000,000. The population increased not only in Jerusalem but also in surrounding towns. Those Jews kept

all the feast days. That was the reason there was such a crowd on the Day of Pentecost. God timed it just right for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. You can read about it in Acts, Chapter 2. Jews from every nation were gathered in. Three thousand souls were converted on the Day of Pentecost.

Everything at that time of the year was completely filled up. Commentators agree that all the inns were completely filled for the Feast of the Tabernacles whenever those Jews gathered in. Though we cannot pinpoint the exact time of Christ's birth, we do have reason to believe it was in the fall of the year more than any other time.

What Is the Origin of the December 25 Festival?

December 25 is not in the Word of God, but it had to come from somewhere. Why is that the time when there is a great commotion going on in our world? If it did not come from the Bible, where did it come from? December 25 was the birthday of the sun god. It was the shortest day of the year. There was a great feast celebrating light over darkness. Men found it easy to change it from pagan to Christian, since Christ was considered the light of life. If you want to trace it back further into history, you will find that Noah had a great-grandson whose name was Nimrod, who was a very evil person. He was so evil that he married his own mother.

Nimrod's mother was known as a Babylonian queen of heaven, and Nimrod became the son of Baal, the sun god. Nimrod was the founder of the old Babylonian kingdom, which was to hold God's people in bondage. When was his birthday? It was on December 25. In tracing December 25 back, you will find that the religious world got the festival from Roman Catholics, which got it from the pagans, which originally started in Babylon.

You may ask, "What about the Christmas tree? Where did it come

from?" An old Babylonian fable has it that Semiramis, the mother of Tammuz claimed that overnight an evergreen tree sprang up from a dead tree stump. The dead tree stump supposedly symbolized her dead husband Nimrod. The new evergreen tree symbolized that Nimrod had come to life again in the person of Tammuz. The idea spread and developed to the extent that various nations all had their legend about sacred trees.

Many nations have sacred trees. To the Druids, the oak was sacred. To the Egyptians, the palm tree was sacred. In Rome the people decorated fir trees with red berries during the Saturnalia, a feast to Saturn, the god which was supposed to reign during the Golden Age. During that feast, work stopped, war was never declared, schools were closed, and gifts were given. To the Scandinavians, the fir tree was sacred to their god Odin. The green tree has long been associated with idolatry, heathenism, and false worship.

The Truth About Pagan Customs

Jeremiah 10:1-6 states: "Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might."

The very principle of this text of Scripture lines up with what we see today. The Lord warned His people

to learn not the way of the heathen. He said the customs of the people are vain. You cannot liken anything to Christ; to do so is idolatry. Exodus 20:4 reads, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

Before I was saved and came to the knowledge of the Truth, I can remember as a boy taking an ax and heading up into the woods and going over on property that did not belong to us to cut down one of their better-looking trees. I would chop it down, drag it down the hill, and then work hard to get it to stand upright.

Often the tree leaned over a little, and I would prop it up; then we decorated it with lights and the finest of tinsels. After we finished, we would sit back and marvel at the tree. There it was, oh, so pretty. We could not wait until people would come to our house and look at our tree. Of course, they did not realize that I had stolen the tree.

The Truth will set you free. Many individuals will be hurrying and scurrying around this month, trying to get their Christmas trees. Some people wait until the last minute and pay outrageous prices for them, because they think, "We've got to get a tree!" I thank God for the Truth. I do not have to get a tree. The tree did not set me free; the Truth did!

People are in such bondage today! Often the radio stations put programs on the air during the Christmas holiday to instruct people concerning how to cope with the stress of the holiday. Jesus already told us how to cope with stress in Matthew 11:28 when He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You can bring your stress to Christ, and He will help you cope with it.

What about all those pretty lights? They really do not look so pretty when you know the Truth.

Where did they come from? Well, again, we can trace them back to the pagans. They used lights and open fires, and they placed great emphasis on them. They thought the fire warmed the sun and drove away evil spirits. How about the candles? They were also used by pagans. They gave them as gifts during the Saturnalia.

How about the mistletoe? All the Christmas parties out in the world have mistletoes. To many people, it would not be a party without a mistletoe. Legend has it that the mistletoe was supposed to have a miraculous, healing power. It was a pagan custom. The custom of kissing under the mistletoe came from an old, lustful spirit and an old pagan feast of ungodliness and reveling. It is a socially acceptable way to release an old, lustful passion within the hearts of unsaved people, all done in observance of Christmas, or supposedly to celebrate Jesus' birthday.

Someone may say, "Everybody does it." No, everybody does not do it, "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14). Again, verse 13 states, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."

At this time of the year, many offices hang up mistletoes. Many times during this time of the year, marriages breakup because often people get carried away with their drinking, partying, and carrying on, all under the guise of Jesus' birthday.

Many companies have parties for all the salaried personnel. Often they have free alcoholic beverages for an hour, and after a meal, they have dancing. Many people stay all night at these events because they become too intoxicated to drive home.

The World's Greatest Gift Giver

What about Santa Claus, or jolly old Saint Nick? Well, he is called the

world's greatest gift giver, and he has taken the place of Jesus Christ in many homes. Second Corinthians 9:15 says, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Children are told, "Be good or Santa Claus won't bring you anything." They never express any thought of being good for Jesus Christ. The children believe that Santa will give them gifts. Well, Jesus will give you something that will help you to be good. What Santa supposedly gives you is not going to help you to be good.

Santa Claus is a lie that is propagated to children. Many people do not want to hear the truth about it because it shows that they have told a lie. When some children grow up and learn the truth, they will also wonder if what they have been told about Jesus is the truth.

Where did the story of Santa Claus come from? Saint Nicholas was a Bishop of Mara, honored by the Greeks and the Latins on December 6. He secretly bestowed gifts on three daughters of a needy person. This Roman Catholic observance was eventually brought into the Catholic Church and connected with Christmas. The story of Santa Claus coming down the chimney stems from an old Norse belief that the Goddess Hearthus appeared in a fireplace and brought good luck to the home.

What about the custom of exchanging gifts? Some people feel that everybody must receive a gift. When you go into the stores, they have the Christmas music turned up loudly (that is to get you in the buying mood), and cash registers are ringing up sales everywhere. Everyone must get a gift, that is everyone except Jesus, yet it is supposedly His birthday! What is He getting? What kind of a present should we give Jesus? Romans 12:1 tells us, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Exchanging gifts at this time of the year had its roots back in the old

pagan festivals held during the month of December. It is a product of heathenism. This season many will go deeply in debt. Many people on welfare call for monetary assistance at this time of the year because they take their welfare checks and buy Christmas gifts instead of paying their rent and utilities.

A Money-Maker for Merchants and Loan Companies

During this time of year many people will end up in financial bondage. Many people work overtime or get a second job at the beginning of the year to pay for what they brought on credit during the Christmas season. They feel that they must have all the fineries that go with Christmas, so they go deeply in debt when they cannot afford it. They spend money out of obligation to buy for relatives whom they hardly know.

Loan companies get rich from people spending money they do not have so they can buy Christmas presents for everyone on their gift list. The loan companies make it sound appealing. They say, "Just sign here. It makes no difference if you have filed for bankruptcy in the past or if you have been denied credit. We will take care of you. You might have to pay a 25 percent interest rate, but don't worry about it now."

The wise men brought gifts to Jesus because it was the custom that whenever anyone approached a king, he was to bring gifts. The Queen of Sheba brought gifts when she went before Solomon. Second Chronicles 9:9 states, "And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices great abundance, and precious stones: neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon." This custom is still practiced in the East. People never approach the presence of kings, magistrates, or those with great personage without gifts.

I want you to think for just a

minute. If December 25 were Jesus' birthday, why would we get gifts for everyone else, yet Jesus does not receive anything? If someone in your family has a birthday, for whom do you buy the gifts? If it is your mother's birthday, do you buy a gift for your father? You may say, "That is ridiculous." So is this custom. What could you possibly give Jesus? You could give Him a consecrated life.

Prices at this time of the year are elevated at least 25 percent. If you watch the paper after Christmas when they have to get rid of the surplus, you will see how much they lower the prices. Often at this time of the year the work of God suffers. Why? People get so far in debt that they cannot even get their minds elevated to the needs of the mission field or a brother who is out of work. Some people get so far in debt that they cannot even afford to help their brother because they do not have anything left. It is all taken up on themselves.

Some people get so caught up in the spirit of the season that they cannot settle down to serve God. Everybody is in a hurry. People have the saying, "Tis the season to be jolly," but I do not see too much jolliness. On the other hand, when you really get Christ in your heart, you can have joy the whole year through.

Christmastime is a money-maker for the merchants, and the buying season gets longer each year. Now it starts long before Thanksgiving. I heard someone on a radio program complaining because the season is so long. It gets longer every year. Well, when it comes to making money, the merchants want to start early.

The largest group of people who profit from celebrating Jesus' birthday are those who do not even believe in the Messiah: the Jews. Yet they will decorate and do everything they can think of to increase Christmas sales. They will sing around the cash register and have a jolly good old time.

"They That Are Christ's Have Crucified the Flesh"

When I first heard the truth about Christmas, I rejoiced in the message because it set me free. I am not an old Scrooge. I believe in buying things. I have bought things for my children right along. I always believe in buying things for my children as they need it. In no way am I saying that whoever participates in Christmas is a heathen or is unsaved. I have simply told you where the custom originated. It is a carry-over from the beast that the Apostle John wrote about in Revelation, Chapter 13, which is Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholics got it from the pagans, and the pagans got the customs from the old Babylonian Empire.

I am not saying that you have to do this or that in order to be a Christian. I am just telling you the Truth. I am sure that many people partake of this custom out of a pure heart. They do not know the truth. You need to walk in what you know as God directs you. I have told you the Truth, and I leave the message with you.

Galatians 5:22-24 reads: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Christmas is a fleshly tradition; it glorifies the flesh. If people would get really close to God and not get caught up with the spirit that is in the world, they would see for themselves that Christ is not in any part of the Christmas festivities. Verses 25-26 tell us: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."

You can get caught up in Christmas and other worldly events. There is something about seeing the man standing in front of the store ringing the bell, the snow falling, the lights blinking, and the songs play-

ing. These things can have a great pull on you, especially if you get a little lean in your soul. People would not have much of a problem with getting involved in Christmas and other worldly events if they would really get on fire for God.

Now, you should not let your good be evil spoken of. In other words, you should not try to condemn others who celebrate these customs. You need to use godly wisdom and point people to Christ. Many people do not know the Truth. As a Christian, you need to stand for Truth, but you need to stand in the right way.

The Prophet Isaiah said in verse 17 of our Scripture text that "hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." What you do with the message is between you and God.

He is not hard to get along with. God is not a hard taskmaster. Jesus said in John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Christmas was not practiced by the morning-time church. It did not become a holiday until approximately three or four centuries later when the falling away took place. It came up from the beast. Remember, the beast got its power from the old Roman Empire, paganism.

God's people still rejoice in the Truth. I preached the message with a heart of love. Let God direct you. He will be faithful to your soul. If you get really close to God, a lot of these things will not trouble you as they bother other people at this time of the year.

(Cassette C-2495E)

How Wonderful!

He answered all my prayer abundantly,
And crowned the work that to His feet I brought,
With blessing more than I had asked or thought,
A blessing undisguised, and fair, and free.
I stood amazed, and whispered, "Can it be
That He hath granted all the boon I sought?
How wonderful that He for me hath wrought!
How wonderful that He hath answered me!"
O faithless heart! He said that He would hear
And answer thy poor prayer, and He hath heard
And proved His promise. Wherefore didst thou fear?
Why marvel that thy Lord hath kept His Word?
More wonderful that He does not fail to bless
Expectant faith and prayer with good success!

Selected

Jesus Is Absolutely Necessary



Brother C. H. Dickerson

Abide in Him

Jesus made it quite clear that without Him you can do nothing. He said that it is in Him that we live and move and have our being. Also, Jesus let us know that when spiritual contact is broken with Him, one becomes spiritually dead and absolutely helpless. As far as eternal things are concerned, without Him you can do nothing.

With this thought in mind, I want you to realize that breaking contact with God is easy to do if you fail to read the Bible and pray as you ought, if you fail to assemble with the saints, if you fail to measure to God's Word, or if you refuse pastoral authority. Any of

these things can break your contact with God, and then your peace and joy will be gone. Next, your testimony will dry up, and the services will become boring. When that happens, a person usually drops out of church activities, and eventually one stops attending the worship services altogether. Friend, if you get to that place, you will be hard to reach, if you ever can be reached.

You need to realize that Jesus is absolutely necessary. The vine is the source from which life flows into the branch. Bearing fruit necessitates that the branch be grafted into the vine. Only by allowing the pruning and the cultivating process, through the preaching of the Word, can you

remain alive spiritually. The Prophet Jeremiah said to break up the fallow ground. This is the reason God's Word must be preached and the reason it is necessary that you assemble yourself with God's people. A child of God must be pruned, or dug around.

In John, Chapter 15, Jesus talked about the vine. Unless a grapevine is pruned, it is only a matter of time until there is not much fruit on it. Also, if you plant a garden, unless you dig around the plants they will not produce as they should. The same is true spiritually. This is the reason it is so essential that you assemble yourself with the saints and listen to a man of God preach God's eternal Truth. My friend, you need

to allow God's Word to prune you and dig around you so that you can bring forth much fruit.

Jesus is indispensable, because He said in John 15:5, "Without me ye can do nothing." To live for God, you must abide in Him, and then He will abide in you. My friend, to abide in Him, you must measure to the Word of God. You must get in the Word of God and let it become a part of you. He will abide in you when you measure to God's Word and do what the Word tells you to do. This means that Christ must be the main consideration in your life; He must come ahead of everything and anyone else.

The Need of Consecration

In the world you can see the spirit of rebellion on every side. The same spirit tries to work on the saints of God. You can see rebellion in the schools, in the work force, and in the penitentiaries. Many people rebel against pastoral authority. They feel that they do not need a pastor, and they refuse to submit. People in the world are looking for high positions, worldly wealth, and great prestige. These things are not sin, but there is something much more important, and that is eternal things.

The Word of God speaks of the rich fool who had lots of material goods but had no place to store them. In essence, he said, "I have no place to store my goods. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and then I will take care of my soul." However, God called him a fool because he put material things ahead of Him. My friend, God has not changed His mind today. God still calls one a fool who puts material things ahead of serving Him. The most foolish thing a person can do is to put other things ahead of the things of God.

Today we see many half-hearted souls who do not put their hearts into serving God. Many who claim to be Christians are worldly minded. My friend, you definitely need to

face the reality that the Word of God speaks of. Peter let us know that God requires wholehearted devotion. In fact, Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." He said to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." In other words, he was saying that Christ must be the prime tenant in your heart. He must come ahead of everything else—your finances, your companion, your children, your grandchildren, and your brother or sister.

God is looking for consecrated individuals. He wants to show Himself strong. He has a message to deliver to this lost and dying world. This world is in deplorable condition. I do not think Sodom and Gomorrah could have been any worse than what we are seeing today in our world. God is looking for individuals who are sold out to Him, to show this world something better than what they are living. God has provided the plan of salvation. Sinner friend, God can save you and turn your life around. He can sanctify you and keep you free from sin. No matter what your environment is, God can keep you.

Is Your Heart Perfect Toward the Lord?

Second Chronicles 16:9 states, "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars." The Lord is letting us know that His eyes are looking for people whom He can move into and rule over. Christian friend, He wants you to go out and show the world the perfect plan of salvation. God has a law of sowing and reaping. Our nation is reaping today because people have failed to serve Him.

We are living in a world where

so many people are religious. God wants His people to show this lost and dying world that there is more to serving Him than just nominal religion. He wants you to show others that He has keeping power. God is real; He is not dead. God wants you to show others what He can do. A change takes place when one gets saved. The plan of salvation is much more than saying, "I'm a Christian" and putting your name on a church book. When one gets saved, God changes that person and makes him or her a new creature.

Down through time, many have drifted away from truly following Christ and, as a result, followed man-made religions instead of the true salvation of Christ. Matthew 17:3-4 reads: "And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." Verse 8 says, "And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." Notice that they saw no man but Jesus.

We are living in a world where the devil uses many things to try to draw away our attention, to lure us away from the right track. In Revelation, Chapter 17, you can read that John saw a harlot woman, or false, man-made churches that were ruled by men. She was decked with gold and precious stones. The Scripture says when John saw her, he wondered with great admiration (verse 6). In other words, he saw something outstanding; it was something for the flesh to desire. Then, in verse 7, John said the angel (or the messenger) spoke to him and said, "Wherefore didst thou marvel?"

I want you to realize that the devil is still putting on quite a show yet today. Some places have big church buildings that cost millions of dollars, and thousands of people attend. If you do not know God's eternal Truth, you might still marvel at such places. This church amal-

gamation is taking in everything and everybody to war against the saints. There has never been a time when we have seen the eighth beast forming as it is today. What is the purpose of it? It wants to move in on the saints of God and take away our freedom. Certainly these false churches call themselves "religion."

How Can We Know What Truth Is?

John told us exactly how we could know what Truth is. We are living in a time when we have religion on every side, yet the crime rate is getting worse. We are living in a time when men stand behind pulpits and declare salvation, yet they tell people, "You can't live above sin." Well, let us see what the Word of God says about it.

When John came back from the Isle of Patmos, he wrote three Books. He wrote 1 John (containing five chapters). He got right to the point and told the people exactly the way it was. He told them clearly that whenever people claim to be preachers or saints of God and say a person cannot live above sin, they are of the devil. John came right out and said that whoever sins is of the devil. He wrote in 1 John 3:8-10: "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest [made obvious, or made visible], and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

John wrote in verses 17-19: "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

And hereby we know that we are of the truth." In verse 24 he stated, "And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us."

John wrote in 1 John 4:2, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." What was John saying? Everyone who is born of God is changed; he is a new creation. Because he is a new creation, old things are passed away and all things are new. They confess it, or they show that they are children of God.

In verse 6 John said, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." When people refuse to hear God's eternal Truth, John said we know whether they are of God or whether they are not of God. You can read of some people in the Word who had double eyes. He let us know that your eyes have to be singular. In other words, you must have your eyes focused on either God or the world. You cannot eye both at the same time. It is recorded in the Word of God that some people had double vision, and they erred from the Truth.

Consider Judas. He was trying to eye Christ and money. Demas' eyes were on the world. At one time, Peter was prejudiced and could not be told anything. Matthew 6:22 states, "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." I thank God for those who will preach God's eternal Truth. Certainly, as a pastor, I want to have many people come in, but I would rather have quality than quantity.

How Can You Maintain This Christian Life?

God's eternal Truth will separate the wheat from the chaff. When people measure to God's Truth, we will have quality. We might not

have quantity, but I would rather see people sing and testify in the Spirit. I would rather see people praising God than to see a house full of deadbeats. Thank God, the Truth will set you free. Obeying the Truth is a decision that we each have to make.

Getting saved is a blessed event, but it is equally important to stay saved. We eat bread to nourish the outward man in order to keep alive, and it takes the same spiritually. No one can stay alive spiritually unless he feeds the inward man. Getting saved is wonderful, but one must maintain that experience.

Jesus said in John 6:35, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." He said in verses 50-51, 53-54: "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus was simply stating that you must have a daily diet of God's eternal Word. This is not just sitting down and reading for an hour or two. You must study and meditate on God's Word. Also, you must pray and seek His divine guidance daily if you are going to maintain your salvation. Just as food maintains the physical body, the Word of God maintains the spiritual body. To keep the inner man alive, you have to hear God's Word where the Truth is preached in its fullness, eat God's Word, and study God's Word.

Not many places preach the full Gospel, and there are very few camp meetings over the land today where you can see the Spirit of God working in a mighty way. My friend, if

you partake of God's Word, it will keep you alive. If you do not partake of it, you will die, spiritually speaking. When you accept the Word, it gives you life. Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." This Scripture will do away with "sin-more-or-less every day" religion.

What was Jesus talking about? He was not talking about the firmament darkness, but the darkness of sin. When you follow Christ, you do not sin anymore, but you have the Light of life. There is a Light guiding you. When you truly get saved, my friend, the sin business is over. You cannot sin and still have that Light guiding you. In other words, you cannot sin and have the Spirit of God leading you; it is impossible. If people are sinning, they are in darkness. The light dispels darkness.

"We Ought to Lay Down Our Lives for the Brethren"

Jesus sacrificed Himself to give us the basis for our acquaintance with God. He said in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Peter also said that Jesus bought us by His blood. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:18-19: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation [or conduct] received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." He also said in 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

When Jesus hung on the Cross, it satisfied God. We read in Isaiah 53:11, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." Why? Because the

price was paid; the debt of sin was paid. The plan of salvation was put in reach of every man. There is no excuse for anyone not being saved. When you hear the Truth and the Spirit of God guides you, God wants you to come to Truth, or come to the light. He wants you to be sanctified and to lay down your life for the brethren. God saved you to give you a work to do. There is a great work to do in this vast world of sin.

John said in 1 John 3:16, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Your life needs to be spent with one thing in mind, and that is to lead souls to Jesus Christ. When you go to work, you need to sow some seeds so that you might lead some soul to Christ. He wants you to lay down your life for others.

The harder you work for God, the bigger the payday will be. This is what it is all about to make Heaven your home. It is not merely because you went to an altar of prayer. God said He would reward every man according to his work. If you get saved and then sit down and do nothing, my friend, you will not have a reward. On the other hand, if you spend your life working for God, sowing seed and winning souls for God, saying little things to encourage others and give them a smile, He will reward you for everything you do. Every individual will be rewarded according to his own works.

The Foundation of God Is Sure

You must keep the commandments that God has given. There are basically two commandments. First, He said to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and soul. Second, He said to love your neighbor as yourself. The foundation upon which people are saved stands sure. Paul taught Timothy this in 2 Timothy 2:19 when he said, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The

Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity [sin or unrighteousness]." In other words, Paul was simply letting us know this: God set the standard before the foundation of the world, and it has never changed; furthermore, it never will change.

Hebrews 12:28 tells us God's kingdom cannot be moved: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Only one thing will make you a saint, and that is meeting God's standard and getting your sins washed away. You must be cleansed inwardly. God is never going to change the standard for you or me or anyone else. It is the same standard for all of us.

In our lifetime we have seen many new developments, and our world is ever changing. We have modern ways to travel, quicker ways to cook our food, and automatic washing machines to wash our clothes. Nevertheless, the foundation of God stands sure. God does not change because things are modern. Down through the years, people have tried to modernize God's plan, but it will not work.

God will not stand for His plan to be modernized. He ordained it before the foundation of the world. If the world were to last another two thousand years, the standard would still be the same.

You may change and modernize, but remember one thing: the foundation of God stands sure. We have a kingdom that cannot be moved, and God has set the bounds. God set the standard for us to live by, not Hollywood or Paris or New York. What is the standard that God has set for us to live by? It is holiness, and it has never changed. You cannot have one sin in your heart and still be holy. You cannot willfully do something that you know is wrong and still be holy. You cannot follow after the world and still be holy. You must make a choice. God

has never changed.

In 1 Samuel, Chapter 6, you can read about some people who failed to follow God's plan explicitly concerning the ark of the Lord, and the Lord smote more than fifty thousand men because of it. Today you will not find a lot of literal dead bodies laying around, but when people try to change God's plan, you are going to find a lot of dead souls.

Coming Christ's Way

Christ is the means of access to this spiritual life. Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The only way to life is through Christ. In John 10:9 Jesus said, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." There is only one way to enter the church, only one way to enter into eternal life, and only one way to make Heaven your home, and that is by coming Christ's way. In other words, you must obey God's eternal Word.

Everything in the kingdom began, is carried on, and ends with Christ. He said in John 15:5, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." Anytime something is severed from the vine, it dies. Jesus said in Revelation 21:6, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." Without Him nothing is made. In Colossians 1:16-18 Paul said: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

God must have the preeminence in all things. He must come ahead of everything else in your life. This is what is defeating many parents today, because they are giving in to their children. I repeat, God still has the same standard. People may not

like it, but it is the only thing that will cleanse you and make you pure and holy; then, my friend, you must live God's standard every day of your life. It is a passport to Heaven. If you do not live it, then Christ will depart from you.

Jesus said in Revelation 22:16b, "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." Christ must be your all in all. It is necessary for Him to have preeminence in your life; therefore, you have to give him first place in your heart and life. Nothing can be put ahead of Him if you want to make Heaven your eternal home.

One Thing Is Needful

Do you know what you need to do? You have to make room for Christ in your life. My friend, without His having first place in your life, you absolutely cannot survive spiritually. We read in Romans 8:32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Christ will freely give you all you need to be successful in this Christian life. He will give you all the grace you need and all the light you need. He will walk with you and talk with you, if you will serve Him.

You may say, "Well, I live in a difficult environment." God said He would freely give you all things. He has all the grace you need, and He will load you daily with benefits if you will call on Him. He wants you to live so that you will glorify Him.

In Romans 4:19-21 the writer, speaking of Abraham, when God spoke to him and said He was going to give him a son, said: "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." My friend,

God wants you to live for Him, believe Him, and trust Him. You should not doubt the things that God has said. If God tells you to do something, He will take you through it, my friend. If you do not stagger at what God has said, He will give you the power to go through it.

Jesus said in Luke 10:42, "But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." In Psalm 27:4 David said, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life." You cannot be in God's kingdom unless you are a pure vessel. God wants you in His kingdom, and you cannot enter it unless you are born of the Spirit; then every day you must put forth effort to stay holy so that you can live in God's house. I can be in the church every day. I am not talking about the building; I am talking about His kingdom.

It does not make any difference how much of this world's goods you have accumulated or how many automobiles you have in the driveway, the only thing that will count when you draw your last breath is what you have done for Jesus Christ. That is what will matter when you stand before the judgment bar of God. Many people will be speechless if they do not do what God would have them to do now.

Friend, Jesus said one thing is needful. Are you making excuses for why you are not serving God? Why are you not going all the way with God? Why are you not selling out to God completely? He will give you all things so that you can live in God's house. You can be in His kingdom every day of the week if you will obey Him. Then when you draw your last breath, He will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter in." You ought to settle it with God. You do not know what the next year holds for you. Friend, how do you stand before God?

(Cassette C-3178E)

Acts 20:20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,

21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course

with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own

blood.

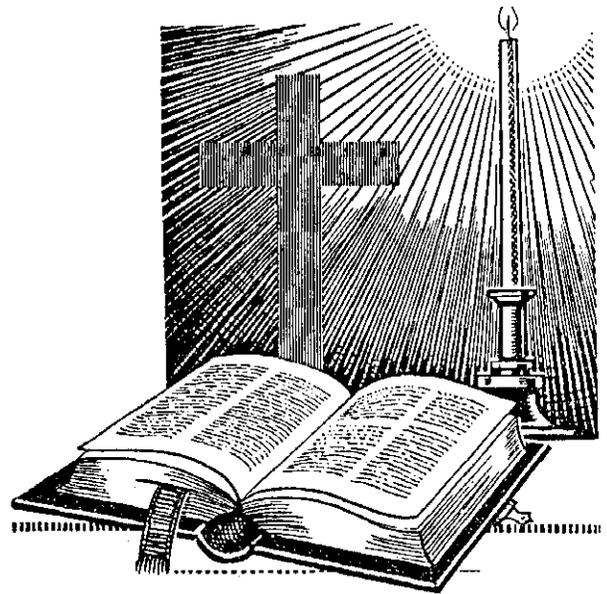
29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

The Inheritance of God's Church



Brother James Lovingood

"An Inheritance Among All Them Which Are Sanctified"

The Apostle Paul set some things forth in reference to the church at Ephesus. He called the elders together and addressed them concerning his ministry and told how he had lived before them. In verse 20 of the Scripture text he said, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you." We are living in a time when there is much letting

down, giving in, and watering down the Gospel in so many places. It takes the Word of God, all the counsel of God, to make the church and to keep the church what God has ordained her to be.

I want you to take a closer look at verse 32 of our Scripture text, which says, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which

are sanctified." Paul placed more emphasis on the Word of God than anything else. He said it "is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Christian friend, the Spirit of God began a sanctifying work on you before you came to Him when He began to call you and set you apart. Notice that it is God who sets us apart and separates us from the world. Paul said in Galatians 1:15 that it was God who

separated him from his mother's womb. Just as God separated you from your mother's womb, He separated you from the world.

First John 2:15-17 tells us: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away." When did it pass away for you? It passed away when you came to God through Jesus Christ. You were born of His Spirit and set apart and separated from the world. God saved you and delivered you from those things that had taken you down toward a devil's hell.

The Bible lets us know that after Noah preached the Word of God for more than one hundred years, God saved him and his house. Noah moved with fear. Once a preacher said to me, "Do you know how God saved Noah from the world? He drowned the world." When God saved you, the world passed away. The world is made up of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It is not of the Father. First John 2:17 tells you, "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." From day to day, you can live your life in the will of God.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 5:1-2: "Therefore being justified by faith [one cannot get into God's church without faith in His Word and faith in the shed blood of Jesus], we have peace with God [we are justified by faith] through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

The Grace of God Brings Salvation

In Ephesians 2:8 we read, "For by grace are ye saved through faith." You need to realize that grace is

more than just unmerited favor of God. Jesus is grace, yesterday and today. Grace is the strength of Christ in you. In 2 Corinthians, Chapter 12, Paul spoke of a thorn in the flesh, and he asked God to remove it. He did get an answer through prayer, but he did not receive the answer he was asking for. However, God reassured him by saying, "My grace is sufficient." It is by the grace of God that you can lay hold of the good things of God and live holy day by day.

Paul wrote in Titus 2:11-12: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men [or brings salvation to all men], Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly [responsibly], righteously, and godly, in this present world." Today—right now—you should be living godly and righteously, taking on the responsibility that God intends for you. We should be submissive to God in every way. We should submit to His will and submit to one another. By the grace of God, we realize the goodness of God and what we have come into and what He has given us.

Second Peter 1:2-4 tells us: "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

When we came into this world, God gave us a human nature, but that nature was not a sinful nature. Sometimes we may wonder why children disobey. It is because they are in the flesh, but they have not come to the age of accountability. When a child comes to the age of accountability and goes down the broad road of sin, his nature is cor-

rupted. Therefore, it is necessary for God to save him and deliver him from the power of darkness and translate him into the kingdom of His dear Son. Salvation is necessary for one to become a partaker of His divine nature.

You may ask, "What does *divine nature* mean?" One characteristic of God is holiness, and when one becomes a partaker of His divine nature, he becomes holy in character. I want you to notice something about nature. A cow gets up on her back feet first, because she has something back there to protect. A horse gets up on its front feet first. The elephant gets up on all four feet at the same time to support its great weight. Why? God gave each species a certain nature. Just as it is natural for a cow to "moo" and a dog to "bark," it is natural for the child of God to live holy, because he is a partaker of God's divine nature. Paul said in Galatians 1:4, ". . . that he might deliver us from this present evil world." If you are a child of God, you are a partaker of His holiness.

An Inheritance Through Obedience

I want you to notice some things to which God's people have become heirs. First Corinthians 12:12 says, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." Paul asked a question in Chapter 1 of this same book. He asked, "Is Christ divided?" Christ is not divided! His body is one. The church is a universal church, and the saints of God make up the assembly of it. I want you to notice that God's church is one body. Paul went on to say in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body . . . and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

In Acts, Chapter 2, when the disciples gathered at Pentecost, they tarried in the Upper Room, as the Lord had instructed them to do.

However, when the Holy Ghost came and filled them, the Holy Spirit gave them boldness. Peter began to preach to the Jews and tell them in Acts 2:32, "This Jesus [that you have taken and crucified] hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." When Peter finished preaching, the people said in verse 37, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them in verse 38, "Repent, and be baptized."

Everyone who is saved has come by one Spirit into one body. However, not everything that calls itself the church is God's church. No, His church lives by the divine nature whereof she is a partaker. God's divine nature causes His people to live holy and righteously every day, not just on Sunday, but seven days a week. We are members one of another, and we are to support, strengthen, and pray for one another. If we will be obedient to God, we will grow and be what God wants us to be: a holy city set on a hill that cannot be moved.

David reminisced about the city of God in Psalm 48:2 when he said, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, . . . the city of the great king." God's church is exalted above the hills. You lift up the church by accepting His Word, by loving others better than yourself, and by living the Word of God.

Isaiah said in Isaiah 2:2, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it." He was talking about something that is in the top of the mountains. Have you ever known anything to flow uphill? We have been lifted out of the quagmire of sin and lifted up to a heavenly place. We have inherited some things in salvation; therefore, we need to lay hold of them and lift them up in our living every day so that others will not be confused about what the church is.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit are we all

baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The Jews were God's people, and they had inherited the land of Canaan. As Joshua led the people into Canaan, by the power of God, they took the city of Jericho. The walls fell by their obedience to the Word of God. We have an inheritance through obedience to God's Word, but we will not have any more of the Gospel or any more of His strength than we live in our daily lives.

Rejecting the Inheritance

Matthew 3:2 lets us know that John the Baptist came forth preaching, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Sadducees and the Pharisees came down to his baptism, and John asked them in verse 7, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" They went there partially out of curiosity, to see what was going on, but the lesson was that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Toward the end of Jesus' ministry, there came an end to the old Jewish law, and soon afterward there came an end to the old city of Jerusalem. You can read about the fall of it in the Book of Matthew. They had come through some wonderful things, and God was once in their midst. When the children of Israel came through the wilderness, God was with them. The evidence was a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God wanted them to know that He could handle every problem.

God will not always remove your problems, but He can surely help you handle them and give you the grace to get through them and travel on. If you will be faithful and stay with His Word through the trials that come your way, when you come out the other side, you will be better equipped to face life and to help others in their troubles and comfort them.

In Matthew, Chapter 23, you can

read of how the Jews rejected Jesus. When He rode into Jerusalem, they laid their garments and palm leaves before Him. Many people thought He was going into Jerusalem to sit on David's literal throne. However, He did not come to be a civil Savior; He came as a spiritual Savior. You see, we have a far worse enemy than any civil foe. We have a spiritual foe, and it is sin. Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem, because the Jews rejected Him.

In John, Chapter 11, as Jesus was called to Lazarus' tomb, He stood and wept because of their unbelief. Jesus prophesied to those people concerning the destruction of Jerusalem forty years before it came to pass and told them what would happen, simply because they rejected Him. When Jesus came out of the temple that day, He said in Matthew 24:2, "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Forty years after the prophecy that Jesus foretold concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, Titus came along with the Syrian army and besieged the city for three months, and then the city was laid to waste. The historian Josephus stated that more than 100,000 people were thrown outside the city. In the Book of Deuteronomy, a prophecy was made that the Jews would eat their own flesh. Jesus wept over them forty years before this happened.

In verses 19-20 Jesus, speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, said: "And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day." Why? A terrible time was coming. They had rejected their inheritance when they turned down the Savior. They turned down Jesus, the Water of Life.

Joint Heirs With Jesus

Ephesians 4:24 says, "And that ye put on the new man, which after

God is created in righteousness and true holiness." The reason we can live holy is that God created holiness in us. He created us anew. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." This new creature is created in righteousness and true holiness. It is not through any power of our own that we live this way, but it is through obedience to the Word of God. He keeps us holy when He dwells within us.

Notice what Paul said in Ephesians 4:1-4: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."

One thing the saints of God have is unity. Psalm 133:1 states, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Paul said in Romans 8:17, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." We are enjoying something that God has given us, something that many people believe is only in the future. While they are waiting for it, we are enjoying it now. We are dwelling in a heavenly place. He has lifted us up from the quagmire of sin to a heavenly place.

Revelation 21:1 reads, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." The old Law constituted the old heaven and earth, but it passed away. Jesus fulfilled it, and all those Old Testament ordinances were nailed to the Cross, and a new heaven and a new earth came forth: the Church of the Living God. We do not perform rituals and ceremonies anymore. God saved and delivered us with a heavenly calling, and we are living in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Psalm 132:13 states, "For the

Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation." Zion is His dwelling place forever. Some people cannot see that God was in Christ when He came down to reconcile the world to Himself. To be in the body of Christ, people need to let God set them in the body as it pleases Him. You cannot join the church or sign a form to get into the church. It takes God Himself, by His Spirit, to place you in the body of Christ, and then you are one in Him.

Ephesians 4:6 tells us there is "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." To whom was the writer speaking when he said, "in you all?" He was speaking to the Church of God. God does not put His name anywhere else. When we receive Christ, we bear His image and the Father's name.

Ephesians 4:3 lets us know that we must endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Verse 8 tells us that when Jesus "ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men." What were these gifts? Verses 11-12 state: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying [or the building up] of the body of Christ." This is what Christ gave to the church.

The Unity of the Faith

We all are at different levels in knowledge of the Word of God, but we each must walk in the light that God shines upon our path. That is the only way that He will shine more light on our path. He is the Father of light. James 1:17 tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Sometimes people get in the church and think, "Well, I'm in. There is no need now for me to put forth much effort." On the contrary, we are to live our lives

so that we have a definite influence on the lives of other people.

We only come in possession of this experience by studying the Word, by living the Word, and by listening to godly pastors and teachers that God has set in the body. Jeremiah 3:15 tells us, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

Romans 10:17 reads, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Faith works by love when we lay hold of these truths. Ephesians 4:13 tells us, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [complete, whole, mature] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." God allows the perfecting of the newborn babes of the church, and the elder part of the church dangles them on her knees. In 1 Corinthians 13:11 Paul said, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." It is by the Word that we gain knowledge of the will of God for our lives and begin to come into the unity of the faith.

We each live by the measure of faith and grace that God has given us, and as we do, we grow in grace and in knowledge. That was the instruction of the Apostle Peter when he said in 2 Peter 3:18a, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Ephesians 4:14 says, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, [there are so many places where people are confused and tossed to and fro] and carried about with every wind of doctrine [the winds of doctrine are contrary to sound doctrine], by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." That is their purpose: they lie in wait to deceive. The purpose of coming into the unity of the faith is so that we will know what the Word of God teaches and what the doctrine of the

church is. We are what we are by the grace of God and by the doctrine that we live.

Our Daily Living

There are Scriptures in the Word of God to instruct us so that we can be what God wants us to be and so that we can fulfill the responsibilities that He has set before us. We read in Titus 2:1-3: "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine [that which makes wholesome, healthy, spiritual men and women in the Lord]: That the aged men be sober [very responsible], grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things."

If only more mothers and grandmothers would once again read the Bible to their children and have prayer in the home. People fuss and feud about prayer being taken out of the schools. It was given of God that prayer and the good things of God should be taught in the home. It is good and wonderful that some places allow prayer in their schools; nevertheless, God ordained that people have prayer in the home. Verse 4 reads, "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children." It is not hard for a wife to submit to a husband who loves her.

In Ephesians, Chapter 5, Paul likened the church to the husband and wife relationship. Verses 22-24 read: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is a saviour of the body [it is only as you abide in Him that you have salvation] Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing." Husband, your wife is a part of you. God ordained marriage, and in Ephesians 5:51 Paul wrote, ". . . they two shall be one flesh." God

caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam, and He took a rib from his side and made the first woman, who became the first mother. Jesus, the second Adam, hung on the Cross and a Roman soldier pierced his side, and forthwith came blood and water. That was the birthplace of the Church of God. He is the Savior of the body.

You cannot have biblical unity without Christ in the midst and without Christ being exalted in your daily living. It takes time to pray and to study the Bible and to be what God would have you to be. God has given us a fellowship in this. In Acts, Chapter 2, you can read that on the Day of Pentecost, great things happened. Souls were saved, and the Word of God and the Holy Spirit worked mightily among the disciples. Verse 42 tells us, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." That is the formula to be what God wants us to be and to enjoy this inheritance.

Verse 43 states, "And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." It was Christ working in them, the hope of glory. Notice that the Apostle Paul instructed the older women and the younger women in Titus 2:5, "To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed." The Bible lets us know that it is the home front where this experience is lived out, and then we carry it out in our daily living.

Are You Adorning the Doctrine?

In Titus 2:6-10 the Apostle Paul wrote: "Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity; [The church is sincere and careful to reverence God, His Word, and the body of Christ. She is holy, and she is the only one of her mother.]

Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

As the church, we adorn the doctrine and make it beautiful as we live it out. The doctrine distinguishes the true church from everything else that calls itself the church. It is the doctrine that we abide by and live, and it is a part of the inheritance that God has given the saints. We must adorn the doctrine of God in all things, in every area of our lives. He has given us a wonderful inheritance among the saints. Child of God, you experience much of it when you come together with the saints and hear the wonderful songs of Zion, the testimonies, and the prayers of the saints. This is something that we did not have before we were saved. What we had instead was a life of sin, depression, grief, and sorrow. You may say, "Well, preacher, we have sorrow now." I do not have any sorrow over the old life of sin. I thank God that I have an inheritance in Christ.

In Revelation 21:2-3 John wrote: "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven [that is where our experience comes from], prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." We have an inheritance of God. Church of God, God is our God, and we are His people. We have what Heaven contains. We have been lifted up to heavenly places, and we can enjoy a foretaste of that which is to come.

Verse 4 reads, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death,

neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Saint, he was talking about the tears and the sorrow we had over the old life that we lived in sin and that He saved us from. We could not get away from it no matter how hard we tried. We could not lift ourselves above sin, but thank God, He lifted us and saved us to an inheritance among the saints. Now we can enjoy this great salvation. One day when our frail bodies are laid to rest, our souls will depart and go to a far better place, where there will be no sorrow, no troubles, and no heartaches. Thank God!

I feel good down in my soul because He has given me a place among the saints, and the wonderful thing about it is, there is room for everyone in this city! Sinner friend, if you will surrender by the grace of God, He will lift you to a place you have never experienced, and the former things will pass away.

That old covenant passed away

for the Jew, and those who accepted Jesus were saved, and God brought them right over into the church. Jesus wept over those who rejected Him. In this New Testament dispensation, God has a new Jerusalem, the city of the Living God. Now everyone who is saved is a spiritual Jew. There is neither male nor female; we all are one with the sons of God in the city of the Living God.

Jesus said in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." In Matthew 11:28-29 Jesus said: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls." In too many places people are trying to prop themselves up with religion, but they need to be saved from sin. Again, 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

I did not know anything about

the Church of God when God saved me. I came from a family of eight, and every one of us was in a denominational church, but God saw fit to lead me to His wonderful people, the Church of the Living God, the church that He has lifted up, exalted, and brought into being.

In Ephesians, Chapter 3, the Apostle Paul spoke about the family of God in Heaven and on earth. We are still on earth, and we will be here until God calls us home. We are a part of the family of God in Heaven, and one day He is going to move us up to Heaven.

Dear one, you need to live for God and enjoy the good things of God. If you will receive Him, He will save you. You are influencing others, whether you are living holy or unholy. One thing they will not bury when they lay your body in the grave is the influence you have had on others.

(Cassette C-5289E)

It is important to speak to men about God, but it is more important to speak to God about men.

[Guest Editorial—continued from page 2]
more for physical gain.

Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." He came to bring an awakening to the hearts of those who are lacking soul rest. God loves the souls of all men and women everywhere. He is grieved by the way people neglect the most important possession they have, which is their never-dying souls. Dear reader, God does not want you to go on struggling through life void of soul rest. He wants you to see that the emptiness in your soul cannot be filled by obtaining this world's goods or by partaking of its fleshly pleasures. God's desire is that you recognize the need of seeking Him for forgiveness of your sins.

He has no pleasure in seeing souls continue on in a lost condition. Second Peter 3:9 informs us that He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." If you will permit the Lord to have His way in your life, He will give real peace and rest to your soul and mind.

Some may feel there is no hope of their ever finding this peace and rest to their souls. They think they have gone too far in sin, beyond the point of no return. Others feel that they have tried before and failed and there is no use to try again. Friend, regardless of what depth you have gone into sin, no matter how many times you have tried unsuccessfully to be a Christian, let me encourage you to

forsake all and come to the One who is able to save and help you. Matthew 12:20 tells us, "A bruised reed shall he not break." Christ is the only One who can bring rest to the soul of man. He is ready to help you if you will come humbly to Him and meet the conditions necessary for repentance.

Dear reader, the decision is left in your hands. Be assured that full pardon and the soul rest you are longing for is awaiting you. You must make the choice to come to Christ. You need to lay aside all your false hopes, ambitions, ideas, and thoughts and leave them at Jesus' feet; then you will find this blessed rest.

Selected

Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand,

and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and

experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Knowing About Tribulation



Brother Allen Polston

The Necessary Ingredients for Success in Your Christian Life

The Bible gives us insight into the fact that knowledge of spiritual things is very valuable. Many people are rejecting the knowledge of God; nevertheless, it does not take away from the fact that God and the things of God can be very profitable to you spiritually. Knowledge is a necessary ingredient for a successful journey with God through life and into the portals of Heaven when this life is over.

In Ephesians, Chapter 1, we find a record of the Apostle Paul and his

concern for those who had gotten saved in Ephesus. In verses 15-19 he said: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to

us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power."

The Apostle Paul was a great vessel that God used in times gone by. We read often in his writings, which God anointed and sent through him. In verse 18 he wrote ". . . that ye may know." You need to know, friend. The Christian life is filled with learning and gaining understanding and growing in the things of God. It never has to be boring, and it never has to be lacking in joy. It can be a rich, fulfilling life as you learn and grow and gain more knowledge and understanding of God. There are many things for

you to learn and know.

Sometimes the devil tries to make the Christian life seem as if it would be boring, but I can tell you from experience that it is far from being that kind of existence. Satan tells young people and other age groups that they would be missing out on a lot of fun if they were to live the Christian life. Friend, the devil is a liar and the father of lies. He says things that are not true because his ultimate desire is to cause you to lose your soul when this life is over.

There is learning and knowledge to gain throughout one's life for God that can continually enhance each of our lives. You know, there are some things that we stand for that may not be spelled out in black and white, but the principles of God's Word bring understanding to us. You need to be careful of anything that will jeopardize your gaining knowledge of God. If you fail to grow and gain knowledge and understanding, you will begin to stagnate; then you will begin to go the wrong direction.

Beware, Lest You Be Led Astray

Being lax in attending the house of God can really jeopardize your soul and cause your learning and gaining to be hindered. Friend, it should be the desire of your heart to be at the house of worship when the services are taking place. When the Word of God is going forth and the saints have gathered together to worship God, you should not forsake assembling together with God's people to worship Him. You have to be careful. The devil will always have other things to offer you. This world is filled with opportunities that will draw you away from God.

If you are not careful, worldly entertainment can cause your knowledge and growth in the things of God to be hindered. Movies and books and games can greatly hinder your learning and spiritual growth. We are living in a time when it seems that people want to be con-

stantly entertained. They always want something to captivate their minds. The Bible says it is more blessed to give than to receive. It is more blessed to give of yourself to the things of God than it is to sit down to entertainment. If you are not careful, you will end up allowing the enemy of your soul to do a work upon you. It is joyful to give of yourself to the work of God.

Jesus gave of Himself entirely. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that "for the joy that was set before him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame." Friend, Jesus got right into the work of God. He knew it was joyful and blessed. You need to remember that, because the world will tell you, "This is what you need to get involved in." On the contrary, you need to get more involved in the work of God and really pray and study and read the Bible and labor for souls. You need to try to build up the work of God as much as you possibly can. Great satisfaction, great joy, and great blessings can be found in giving yourself for the work of God.

Jeremiah 3:15 says, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." God has ordained a way for you to grow in knowledge and understanding, and it is through a pastor. God calls a pastor to feed the people with knowledge and understanding and gives us the ability to grow.

Some situations are not easy to understand, and some Scriptures in the Bible are not easy to understand. Some things are difficult, and we wonder about their purpose, but through the knowledge that we can gain from God's Word, we can begin to put into perspective the things that we face in this time world. We can begin to understand what God is conveying as we grow in the things of God.

Peter said this very thing, that sometimes things are not easy to understand. Second Peter 3:15-16 reads: "And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation;

even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." You have to be careful that you do not twist the Scriptures and interpret them in the wrong way. It could mean your destruction.

Peter went on to say in verses 17-18: "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." God wants you to grow. If you have a pastor who is feeding you with knowledge and who is living a holy life for God, you are blessed. You need to labor and live your life in a way that is pleasing to God. You ought to grow in grace and in knowledge and really give of yourself in the work of God.

There are many places where you cannot grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, because they do not preach Christ. In many places their purpose is to promote a political agenda or to socialize for personal gain. I thank God for the fellowship, but the Christian life is more than fellowship. We need to hear the Word of God. It is more than just a time to get together and enjoy ourselves. The Lord Jesus Christ needs to be preached so we can grow in the knowledge and the grace that God has for us.

The Key of Knowledge

According to the Scripture, knowledge is a key. Jesus said in Luke 11:52, "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." Knowledge is a key,

and we all know what keys can do: they can give us the ability to gain access. When Jesus was talking about the church that He would build, He said in Matthew 16:19, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. . . ." Jesus said He would give us the keys, or in other words, the knowledge.

Friend, we can gain true and accurate knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven, not false doctrines or man's foolish notions. Oh, how sweet it is to have the knowledge of God and knowledge of the things of God, things that just mystify other people. Many people have no clue concerning what God can give to people where the Word of God is being preached. Jesus went on to say in verse 19, ". . . and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Friend, the knowledge and the understanding that God can give you concerning the Word can loose you from the things the devil tries to bring against you. When you do not understand a situation and you are unsure what is happening, it is difficult to cope. The knowledge that God has can reveal things and give you an understanding; then you can bind the devil and lock him out of your life in that area through the power of God. When John received a vision of the church, the Bible says that he was carried away in the Spirit. This was not any old spirit, but he was carried away in the Spirit of God. We must have the Word of God and the Spirit of God so that we can understand and have the knowledge we need.

Without knowledge we would certainly be destroyed. The Book of Hosea says these very things that I am telling you. In Hosea 4:6 we read, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."

People can be destroyed because of a lack of knowledge concerning the things of God. How is it that people are destroyed for lack of knowledge? Well, with the knowledge of God, or with the understanding of God's way and His will, when people face difficult situations, they can make the right decisions and the right choices. On the other hand, without the knowledge of God, people may follow family or the crowd. They are liable to look around and see what religion is doing and go that direction without the knowledge of God.

Friend, when you have the knowledge of God, then you can make the right decisions. This is the reason you need to be careful, that in little or much, you do not begin to reject the knowledge of God. The way you conduct yourself can determine whether you are rejecting or accepting the knowledge of God. You see, God gives each of us time, and He has given us His precious Word.

Rejecting the Knowledge of God

You can leave the house of worship and carry your Bible under your arm and never open it until the next time you go to the house of God. Friend, that is rejecting the knowledge of God. According to Jeremiah, the pastor is the one who feeds you with knowledge and understanding, but it is your responsibility to take that home and study to be approved unto God. Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

You cannot just walk away from the house of God and toss the Bible aside without rejecting the knowledge of God, so you have to be careful. It is important how you live your life each and every day. It is important what you do when you go home from work, and it is important what is in your house and what is not. Friend, you are choosing

whether or not to embrace the knowledge of God. Hosea said that God's people are destroyed because of a lack of knowledge.

The things you learn in your personal devotions and Bible study could be very instrumental in helping you to make the right decision the next time you face a difficult situation. You are going to face some hard situations where you will have to make decisions, and that is where you need the knowledge of God. Therefore, you must be careful not to reject the knowledge of God. Godly knowledge is something you must work to obtain, and you must guard it or the devil will steal it from you.

In the Scripture text we find in verse 1 the description of a blessed condition. Oh, how blessed it is to have peace in your soul! How wonderful it is to be able to pillow your head at night and know that things are fine with God! It is wonderful to know that your sins have been forgiven and that you are in good standing with Almighty God.

The Apostle Paul stated in verse 1 of the Scripture text, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." What a blessing and a rest it is to have peace! It is wonderful to know the peace of God.

Isaiah said in Isaiah 57:20 that those who live wickedly are "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." When the sea is troubled, the waves are roaring and crashing and going back and forth. Isaiah said the wicked are "like the troubled sea," always disturbed. Just when you think there is a little moment of peace, something comes along with the wicked. The wickedness comes around and begins to work.

Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 57:21, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Friend, if you are still living wickedly, you are void of the peace of God that you could be experiencing and void of knowing that all things are in good order and in

good standing in your life. Rather than to continue in an unrestful state, you would be much better to repent and place faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Being Justified By Faith

The Apostle Paul said in Romans 5:1 that by faith we can be justified. By faith in God, justification comes about. What is justification? It is the way to describe a clean, clear record that God can give to each one who will put faith in Him. One who is justified is no longer responsible for the wrong that he had committed; he has no condemnation, no guilt, and no fear. Justification is a wonderful experience, when Almighty God forgives you of sin, or the wrong that you have done in your life. There is no other way to get free from sin, but God can set you free. What a blessed condition to be justified in the sight of God.

No wonder the writer said "being justified by faith, we have peace with God," because there is nothing between the soul and the Savior so that His blessed face may be seen. Justification gives you a clear line of communication and takes away everything that once hindered you from seeing the smiling face of God. Justification by faith is a blessed experience.

How can you get such a blessed experience? It comes by faith in God. First, to receive this experience, God's Spirit has to deal with your heart. He has to do the calling. If God does not call you, there will be no salvation. God deals with you in His time and on His terms, and that is when you need to respond. If you ever exhaust His mercy and harden your heart in such a way that you no longer can feel the call of God, salvation is an impossibility. God's Spirit has to call you.

I am glad that God is very merciful. I was approximately ten or eleven years old when God first began to speak to my heart, but not until the age of twenty-one did I

give my life to Him. I am very thankful that He was so merciful to me. Friend, you have no guarantee of how long God will call upon your heart. There is no guarantee of how long God will have mercy on you. He is not obligated beyond His initial dealing with your heart and soul. He owes you nothing, and you have nothing coming unless He gives you mercy.

Friend, God's voice is important, and in order to be saved and to escape the damnation of eternal fire and hell, when He speaks to you, you need to accept His invitation. Whether you are a sinner, lost without God, or a religious professor, when God speaks to you, He is extending an invitation to you so that you might do something about your condition.

Yield to God

God speaks through His Word, and as the Word of God goes forth, the Spirit of God is at work and begins to speak to hearts so that they might have opportunity to really weigh it out and respond. You can be justified by placing faith in Jesus Christ.

Friend, you have a decision to make. Will you allow God's voice to inspire faith in your life or will you labor to dismiss it from your mind and go on as you are, unprepared to meet God? You never know what lies ahead of you. You may never have another opportunity to ask God into your heart and life. Many have made the wrong choice, and it was to their own eternal destruction. They allowed the devil to convince them to delay getting saved just a little longer, for some time down the road. Dear one, you need to respond to God when He speaks to you.

According to Hebrews 4:12, the Word of God is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." As the Word goes forth, it is able to cut down everything and get to the root of the problem and say, "This is

what you need to do." It is a discernment of the thoughts and the intents of the heart.

When God speaks to you, that is a privilege. You ought to consider it an honor when He pays you a visit and deals with your heart. You should thank God that He has not cast you aside to die lost. Friend, when God speaks to you personally, you ought to at least weigh the thing out rather than to try to dismiss what He is saying. Many do that and harden their hearts to their own destruction.

Friend, this is very serious. This could be something you look back on as one of the most blessed times of your life or it could be something that haunts you in eternity because you failed to make the right decision. The very fact that God Almighty is speaking to you is proof that He wants to deliver you and set you free from the bondage of sin.

I can remember as a young boy growing up sitting in the church services in the back. Another young man and I always sat together. So many times as the man of God was preaching the message, we would look at pictures and do whatever we could to distract our minds from the message. My friend had a watch that had a game on it, we would play that game as much as we could to try to close our minds to what God was speaking to us. Both of us were lost and on our way to a devil's hell. We were being deceived by Satan into thinking that we needed to stay in sin a little longer.

What a terrible work of destruction the devil is doing to precious souls. He is causing men and women to turn away from receiving the grace of God and convincing them to go on in sin, maybe never to have another opportunity. I say again, when God speaks, you ought to take advantage of that opportunity and yield yourself to Him.

Again, the Apostle Paul said in verse 1 of the Scripture text, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." By faith, when God

speaks to you, let that persuade you that He wants to save you. That ought to sound an alarm in your soul. God wants you to be persuaded. If you will yield yourself to Him, friend, that is all it will take. You will not have to wean yourself off this and that. You will not have to figure out some way to alter this and that. If you will turn from your sin, the work will be done. God's power will be there, the glory will be poured in, and He will deliver you and set you free.

Friend, I could not have gotten saved on my own, and neither could you. It is not possible for man to save himself. Many people are trying to do that in religion by joining a church or by voting in one another, but it is not possible. It requires God to speak to you, and then you must become persuaded that God wants you to be brought into the church. God does not waste time and do things in vain. If He speaks to you, that is proof that He wants to save you.

Follow the Example of Abraham

In Romans, Chapter 4, you can read about how God came down and spoke to Abraham of old, and there He gave Abraham an opportunity that He gives many yet today. Abraham was faced with a choice: he could believe God or shun Him. Abraham could have done whatever he wanted to do, and so can you. God will not force you to do anything. He will not make you serve Him. He leaves that decision up to you. Speaking of Abraham, Romans 4:19 says, "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead." We need not be weak in faith.

When God speaks to you, that is proof that He will do His part if you will do yours. His side of the covenant is ready to be fulfilled. Your debt has been paid in full, if only you will do your part. As God spoke to Abraham, no doubt his faith was inspired. When Abraham was an old man, God told him that

he was going to have a son and become the father of many nations. Abraham could have said, "Well, now, wait a minute. I know God is speaking to me, but I am an old man, and I don't think it can happen as God is saying." Abraham could have made many excuses and disbelieved God, but he did not do that. The Bible says that he was not weak in faith; he believed God.

Friend, you ought to follow the example of Abraham. You can be saved and set free from sin, if only you will be willing and obedient. The faith that God wants to inspire in you is a wonderful thing, it can come to a rich man or a poor man. It can come to a man from any nation, any background, and any educational level. This wonderful experience can come to you, and you can taste of it now.

Not only does salvation bring peace and justification, but also it supplies you with grace. Many songwriters have tried to describe it, yet they have come short of being able to tell it all. This faith that brings peace and justification can give grace to you. The grace of God gives you an ability that you did not have before, an ability that comes from God, an ability that is special. It is grace that enables you to stand.

To be able to stand on your feet physically, certain things have to be in order as God ordained them to be. You must have strength in your legs, your feet, and your ankles to be able to stand up. So it is in spiritual matters. To stand for that which is right and to stand against that which is wrong, you need strength and grace, especially when you look around and see that most of the world is disobeying God. When you are on the job and everyone around you is living ungodly, it takes strength and grace, but God can supply you with the grace to stand for what is right and stand against what is wrong.

I thank God for grace to stand when faced with certain situations or decisions. You do not have to

yield to temptation. That is a wonderful privilege of serving God. I thank God for the grace to stand for what is right! When you come to the conclusion that something is right and that it is of God, the grace of God can enable you to stand, regardless of what others are doing. This faith brings peace with God, and by faith we have access to this grace wherein we stand for the right and stand against the wrong.

"Rejoice in Hope of the Glory of God"

As saints of God, we can stand and rejoice. What does it mean to rejoice? It means to be happy, to be joyful, to be glad, and you can be if you are filled with the goodness of God. The enemy will try to cause you to feel that the way is too difficult, so you need to tap into some grace, grace to stand and rejoice. What do we have to rejoice about? We can "rejoice in hope of the glory of God," because we are "joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). That is something to rejoice about! We can rejoice, we can stand, and we can have peace. What a wonderful experience!

In the Scripture text Paul went on to say in verse 3 that "we glory in tribulations also." Even in our tribulations we can glory; we can still have joy. This is not to say that we go around looking to bring about tribulation. It will come on its own; we do not have to seek it. When it does come, however, this faith that I have been talking about can give you access and ability so that you can still have joy in your heart. You do not have to allow tribulations and problems to reign over you. You can reign over them by the power and the grace that God gives to you.

We do not glory in tribulations because they are pleasant, because certainly they are not. Tribulations are difficult and sometimes painful. Often we do not know what the end result will be. Nevertheless, Paul said in verses 3-5 of the Scripture text: "And not only so, but we glory

in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed."

Friend, you can be joyful even in the hardest times of life because you know something special about those times that you are going through. You know something that others do not know and cannot experience if they are unsaved. You can know that what God has allowed to come in the tribulation is working something good in your life, as hard as it may be during those times. I thank God for that knowledge. It can cause me to have joy even when there is no reason to have joy, because I know that God is at work and that He will have the final say. No one has power over God. He has the final say in *every* situation. He has a plan in mind, and that can cause you to be joyful even in adversity.

Gaining Experience Through Tribulation

What is God working when He allows tribulation? He is bringing about patience and the ability to be content. Generally speaking, when you come up against something difficult, immediately you start to look for an escape route. It is natural to try to avoid any further interaction with pain and suffering. However, when you search and search and no escape route appears to be available, it begins to work patience in your life. You begin to feel a little more content, even though you are dealing with something that is uncomfortable.

Patience produces experience. As you realize that there is no quick way out of your situation and God allows it to linger, you begin to experience something that you did not experience before. You realize that

God is just the same yesterday, today, and forever. Whether you are in the midst of a trial or not, God is the same. It is one thing to say, "God will take you through every situation of life," but it is another thing to say it when you have been through some of those situations.

Patience works experience that you otherwise would not have. I am glad to be discovering more and more that God is just the same today. Thank God, He has not changed. When situations around us change, He is still the same, and He is still in control. He is still almighty and all powerful; He is God.

Experience brings hope. Thank God, nothing can change Him, and He will help you. Experience brings about a greater hope in your life than ever before. Situations of life and struggles cannot overcome God. The experience we gain can only prove that He is God in the valley and on the mountaintop, and that builds hope in your life; then you will be more convinced than ever before that God is real, that He is working in your behalf, and that He can take you all the way through to Glory. This experience builds your hope, and "hope maketh not ashamed." This causes us to be ready to go out and testify and tell the world that there is a God, that there is a Savior in Zion, and that there is One who can help them with all the needs in their lives.

Prior to gaining experience through tribulation, you might have been a little reluctant to tell certain ones about God. However, after you have been through a little fire and the tribulation has worked patience, and the patience has worked experience, and the experience has increased your hope, you are ready to talk about God to those to whom you were a little shy in speaking. You will be saying, "Let me tell you

about this Friend of mine. He is a wonderful Friend! You need to serve God." I have found God to be true in every phase of my life, when things were going well and when things were not going well.

Knowing a little about tribulation can be a help to you. It helps to know that in your situation, as uncomfortable as it may feel, there is a purpose that God has for you. Christian friend, God wants you to be a soul winner. He wants you to reach out to the lost world. Even after you work with people and pray for them, many will reject God, but thank God, a few people are going to say, "That's what I want. That's what I have been looking for! That's what my soul has been crying out for." They will press through everything that is pressing against them, make their way to an altar of prayer, repent, and yield themselves completely to God. The Bible tells us that many are called but few are chosen. God has to have vessels through whom He can work to call the many lost souls of this old world.

God allows tribulations and different kinds of problems to come your way because He is working a divine plan through all of that. He is working to make you a better witness. He wants you to be a better light to the world than ever before, so that through you some poor soul might get a glimpse of Jesus.

God wants you to shed a lot of the worldly things to clear the way so people will not see the flesh exalted, but so they will see Christ. They need to get a little glimpse of Christ, because many are called but few are chosen. Dear one, softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling. Won't you allow Him to inspire your faith so that you can repent of your sins? God bless you.

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Announcements

Kenya, Africa

Brother David Stegmeier, Brother Jeremy Boyd, and Brother Jan Romine will be leaving December 1 to attend a convention and revival meetings in Kenya and will be returning December 13. Two services a day will be held during the convention. For further information contact: Brother Roger L. Decker, 83 Decrow Ave., Newark, OH 43055. Telephone: 740-344-2543 or 1-888-730-0461.

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