

THE CHURCH OF GOD



LESSON NO. 12

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CHURCH OF GOD

BIBLE

CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

LESSON NO. 12

CHRISTIANITY IS A WAY OF LIFE

Christianity is indeed a WAY of life. There is no more well-established fact in all the Bible. But WHAT, specifically, is that way, and HOW may we successfully live it?

The book of Acts is the history of the early New Testament Church of God. It covers the major events in briefest summary form. This book attests to the fact that to live a Christian life is to live a certain way—to do certain things—to conform to certain standards.

One of the early Christians was a man named Apollos. He was an excellent speaker and well-versed in the Old Testament Scriptures. He preached boldly. However, Apollos was in need of more understanding. A dedicated couple in the Church of God gave him further instruction.

Notice the account in Acts 18:26: "...whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (emphasis ours throughout lesson). Real Christianity, as described in the Bible, is a "way" of life—God's way!

ROOTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Royalty, heads of state and other government officials in the Apostle Paul's day recognized Christianity as a distinct lifestyle. Paul, under house arrest, defended his way of life—the *Christian way*—before Felix, the procurator of Judea. Notice Felix's reaction to Paul's words: "And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of *that way*, he deferred them [put off any immediate action]" (Acts 24:22).

Earlier, Paul had explained to Felix: "But this I confess unto thee, that after *the way* which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets [which are part of what is now called the Old Testament]" (verse 14).

A vital point to understand is this: The Christian way of life has its roots in the Old Testament. It is established on the Ten Commandments, as well as the other laws of God, which are based on principles of the "basic ten."

God's way of life is the sensible way to live. God's Word gives practical directions for successfully managing finances, building and beautifying marriages and even maintaining good health. Simply stated, God's Law is the way to all the *good things* in life—to peace, happiness and ultimately an eternal life of satisfying accomplishment!

GOD'S GREAT LAW THE STANDARD

God's purpose for us is that we become like He is—that we develop His perfect spiritual character, which can be summed up in the one word *love*. Since God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), His

Spirit-begotten children should be growing in His love.

The Bible defines godly love for us. John, often referred to as the "apostle of love," wrote: "For this is the love of God, that *we keep his commandments*. And his commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3, RSV).

The Apostle James referred to the Ten Commandments as the royal law of liberty (Jas. 2:8-12). That is because they free those who keep them from the bondage of the hurtful ways of this world. The Ten Commandments reveal the great love God has for His children.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus Christ told His disciples: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). God's love and His Law are in perfect agreement. They do not oppose each other, as some erroneously believe. As Jesus plainly stated, "If ye love me, *keep my commandments*" (John 14:15).

THE "TEST" COMMANDMENT

Many who claim to be Christians profess to keep the Ten Commandments. However, most do not want to keep God's seventh-day Sabbath.

Few realize that observing the Sabbath day is a major sign identifying a true Christian. The Bible shows that the Fourth Commandment is the *test* commandment! The keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is an indication to God of one's serious commitment to live by *every* word of God.

We learned in our previous studies that God defines a Christian as one whom He has begotten by His Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9-11). The Apostle Peter pointed out something most vital about those to whom God gives His Spirit. Notice what he said in Acts 5:32: "And we are witnesses to these things [Jesus Christ as Savior], and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who *obey him*" (RSV).

An obedient attitude is one of the qualities God looks for in a potential member of His Family. He inspired Isaiah to write: "...to this man will I look, even to him that is poor [humble] and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2).

A true Christian will be striving to keep all of God's commandments—including the fourth!

The seventh-day Sabbath is a memorial reminding us every week that God is Creator, Ruler and Sustainer of the universe. It also points to Christ's coming rule in the Millennium, when mankind will experience "rest" from war, poverty, fear and suffering.

Keeping the Sabbath sometimes involves considerable faith. It is not always easy to obey God in this society. But the blessings are many to those who have the courage and faith to obey God and keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

SPECIAL ANNUAL DAYS

Just as the commandment against adultery includes, in principle, prohibition of all forms of illicit sex, the Fourth Commandment includes other special God-ordained days. These are *seven annual* festivals, which include special Holy Days or Sabbaths of rest. These annual observances detail the working out of God's great Master Plan for man. The reason the Christian-professing world does not really understand man's awesome potential and God's plan of salvation is because the churches do not keep the days God says are *holy* to Him!

The weekly and annual Sabbaths are special *times* God has set apart for us for physical rest and spiritual worship. In a sense, we give these portions of time back to God. As we do, He grants us greater understanding of His way, even as we are rejuvenated physically and spiritually on these days.

OBEDIENCE AND OVERCOMING

Although the true Christian strives to keep all the laws of God, he still sins occasionally. He does not want to sin, but sometimes does when caught off guard, overwhelmed by habit, temptation or circumstances.

The Christian life, as revealed in the Bible, is one of overcoming and growing spiritually *toward* the spiritual maturity and perfection of Christ. Through our previous studies, we learned that this perfection will not be fully achieved until the resurrection of the dead in Christ. In the meantime, God expects Spirit-begotten Christians to be developing more and more of the Character of Christ as they learn to follow His way of life.

But overcoming and conquering sin is impossible by human strength alone. It must be accomplished in partnership with God through the faith of Christ, which is a gift from God through His Holy Spirit. God promises to give us His Spirit and this faith upon repentance and baptism.

Although Christians sometimes stumble spiritually and sin, our loving and *most merciful* heavenly Father is ready and willing to forgive and restore us to the right path of overcoming and growing—if we acknowledge our sins and ask His forgiveness.

How beautiful, encouraging and rewarding is the way of God!

Let's learn more about the details of what the *Christian way of life* is all about.

WHAT IS A REAL CHRISTIAN

What is a *real* Christian? Could you give the Bible definition?

Jesus described the very basis of real Christianity in what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, chapters 5-7). This "sermon" actually started out as a private lesson for His disciples (students or learners). Jesus pointed out those characteristics which would clearly identify His true followers.

Before we focus on several of these Christian characteristics, you should first read all of Matthew 5, 6 and 7.

1. What did Jesus say about the "poor in spirit"? Matt. 5:3. Did He mean that they would be lacking the Spirit of God? Rom. 8:9; Luke 11:13.

COMMENT: No, Jesus was not suggesting that they would lack God's Spirit. Rather, He went on to show that those who are truly *humble* will be blessed because they will be in God's Kingdom.

2. What will the meek inherit? Matt. 5:5. Was Jesus meek? Matt. 11:29. Will a Christian exhibit the characteristic of meekness in the way he conducts his daily life? Eph. 4:1-2.

COMMENT: There is a difference between being meek and being weak. Jesus was meek, but not weak! He endured abuse and injury with patience and without resentment.

A meek person will not try to justify himself when he is wrong. Neither does he feel superior to others. He will not try to get even with others, nor try to get revenge.

3. What will a true follower of Christ—a Christian—be "thirsting" for? Matt. 5:6. What is the Bible definition of righteousness? Ps. 119:172.

COMMENT: To "hunger and thirst" for righteousness is to be deeply motivated to obey God—to keep His laws, which He gave to us in loving concern for our own good.

Those who are truly hungering and thirsting for righteousness will be studying God's Word for true understanding. They will be willing to *change* when they see they've been wrong, admitting their wrong beliefs, their mistakes and their sins. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God" (II Tim. 2:15), wrote Paul to Timothy. "Prove all things" (I Thess. 5:21), Paul said to the Thessalonians.

4. Who did Paul say are justified before God—the *hearers* or the *doers* of God's Law? Rom. 2:13. Did Paul make it plain that even though the unmerited pardon of our sins is by the *grace* of God through faith in Christ's sacrifice, a Christian is nevertheless required to keep God's Law? Read

Romans 3:31 and all of chapter 6.

5. Who did Jesus say will enter the Kingdom of God? Matt. 7:21. What did the Apostle Paul plainly say was *most important* for a Christian to be doing? I Cor. 7:19.

COMMENT: Notice that in order to enter God's Kingdom, there is DOING required—not just the confession of Christ as our Savior. God is also very much concerned about our spiritual “works” after we become Christians. He makes it plain that we cannot enter the Kingdom of God just by thinking Christ has done it all for us.

6. Unless one has the love of God, can he really be a Christian? Read and summarize I Corinthians 13:1-8, 13 (the word “charity” in the King James Version means godly love). What are we if we lack the love of God? Verse 2.

7. Will God's love, which He imparts through His Spirit, lead one to keep the Ten Commandments—all ten of them Rom. 13:8-10. In what way did God inspire John to confirm Paul's statement—what is the Bible definition of God's love? I John 5:2-3. How is God's love perfected in a Christian? I John 2:5.

A CHRISTIAN “WALKS” WITH GOD

1. Is a real Christian one who strives to follow Christ—to imitate His example—to “walk” with Him? I Pet. 2:21; I John 2:6.

2. Who is one of the first men in the Bible who “walked” with God? Gen. 5:22-24. What else are we told about Enoch? Heb. 11:5, last part. Will he be in the first resurrection? Heb. 11:13, 39-40.

3. What other great patriarch walked with God in the antediluvian world? Gen. 6:9. Did Noah find grace in God's sight? Verse 8. Was Noah clearly a faithful and righteous man who pleased God? Heb. 11:7.

What was God's command to Abraham? Gen. 17:1. Why could it be said that he did indeed walk with God? Gen. 26:5; Heb. 11:8-10.

5. Was God also Abraham's *friend* and companion? II Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Jas. 2:23. Did God talk with Abraham as a close friend would? Read Genesis 18:17-33. (Recall from your previous studies that the “LORD” of the Old Testament was in reality the member of the God Family who later became Jesus Christ).

6. Did God also talk with Moses as with a close friend? Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:7-8; Deut. 34:10.

7. How can we become Jesus Christ's friends? John 15:14-15.

COMMENT: True friends walk together and talk together freely, without fear or embarrassment. They think much alike, and are in agreement, or else they are not real friends (Amos 3:3).

8. Did God specifically command His Church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38)—the ancient nation of Israel—to walk in His ways; that is, to keep His laws? Deut. 5:32-33; 8:6; 10:12-13; 11:22; 13:4; 26:17; 28:9.

9. Did God promise to walk with them if they would walk with Him? Lev. 26:3, 12. Would He greatly bless them if they walked with Him? Read verses 4-11.

10. But if the people of Israel chose to walk *contrary* to God—refused to walk in His ways—what did God say would happen to them? Read and summarize Leviticus 26:14-39.

COMMENT: To “walk with God” clearly means to keep His commandments and laws, and to do those things that are pleasing in His sight (Lev. 26:1-3; I John 3:22). It is the only way to be a real Christian!

11. What will a real Christian's attitude be toward the sinning society around him? I John 2:15-17; I Pet. 4:1-4; Rev. 18:4. What will he be striving to live by? Matt. 4:4.

COMMENT: A real Christian will no longer be able to conscientiously follow all the customs and practices of the society around him. Where he formerly “went along with the crowd,” thoughtlessly participating in various social activities and business practices, he will now begin to question his lifestyle. He will begin asking: “What is God's will? How does God say I should

live?" He will begin saying, with Christ: "Nevertheless not *my* will, but *thine*, be done." And he will begin to diligently search the Word of God to learn the will of God, and *follow* it.

Of course, God's people must live in this world (John 17:15-16). And while striving to fully obey God—not being conformed to this world's ways (Rom. 12:1-2)—they should strive to "...live peaceably with all men" (verse 18). If a Christian has to disagree because of a biblical teaching, he does so without being disagreeable or self-righteous about it.

12. What further responsibility do Christians have toward the world? Matt. 5:14-16.

COMMENT: While not "of the world" in the sense that Christ meant in John 17:16, those men and women of God who have the Holy Spirit and a knowledge of God's truth and abundant way of life have a responsibility to be bright "lights" in the world. God's people should be exhibiting the "fruit," or characteristics, of God's Holy Spirit in their daily lives. They should be *reaching out* with friendliness and with a helping hand toward their neighbors and those they come in contact with every day. People not yet called of God will be encouraged as they see a little of the mind and character of God in action through the living example set by individual Christians.

13. What steps has a Christian already taken to be recognized by God as one of His children? Acts 2:38. What has God bestowed upon him as a free and unearned gift because of his obedience? Same verse and Acts 5:32. ("Holy Ghost" is an archaic rendering in the King James Version. It should be translated "Holy Spirit").

COMMENT: A Christian has been conquered by God. His carnal, antagonistic attitude toward God (Rom. 8:7-8) is broken. He has come to realize he has sinned against God, having broken His holy, righteous Law (I John 3:4). Therefore he cried out to God and asked His forgiveness for those sins through the sacrifice of Christ, and for a lifting of the death penalty, which every sin incurs (Rom. 6:23). Then he obeyed the command to be baptized, indicating to God his deep sincerity.

As a result of his repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands, he was given the Spirit of the Father, becoming a Spirit-begotten child of God. It was then that he became a TRUE Christian!

14. Can one be a true Christian without having the Spirit of God? Rom. 8:9-10.

15. What does God call the person who claims to "know" Christ, but refuses to *walk* in His ways—refuses to keep His commandments? I John 2:4. What will a real Christian actually be doing? Verses 3, 5-6.

COMMENT: A Christian has sincerely repented of his sins and is striving, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, to LIVE by his Savior's teachings. He is seeking to do God's will in every aspect of his life as it is revealed in the Bible. And he is becoming a recipient of the happiness and blessings that come from being obedient to God!

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Jesus Christ preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. He proclaimed: "...repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Over and over again the Bible teaches repentance from *sin*, which is the breaking of God's great spiritual Law (I John 3:4), summed up in ten great universal principles—the Ten Commandments.

As we have already learned in our study of the Bible, repentance is the first step toward salvation. Before God will forgive us of our sins, we must repent of (turn from) breaking His law. "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). Now let's review several vital facts about the Ten Commandments, and see how they apply to the Christian way of life.

1. Are all ten of God's commandments conveniently listed for us in the Bible? Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21.

2. Since neither listing is numbered in the text, how do we know that there are ten commandments? Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4.

3. Did the patriarch Abraham—the “father” of the faithful (Rom. 4:16)—think it was important to keep God’s commandments? Gen. 26:5. What was David’s attitude toward keeping God’s Law? Read and summarize all of Psalm 119!

COMMENT: Both Abraham and David were commandment keepers. They had great respect for God’s Law. That is one of the reasons they will both hold very responsible positions in the future government of God on earth.

David wrote: “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97). David’s daily habit was to ponder and study God’s Law. It was a lamp to his feet and a light to his path (verse 105). His keeping of God’s commandments made him wiser than his enemies (verse 98). Throughout this Psalm, David declared how he loved God’s Law and used it as a guide in his life.

4. Did Jesus Christ keep the Ten Commandments? John 15:10. Did He teach others to keep them? Matt. 19:16-19.

COMMENT: These verses in Matthew 19 clearly show that Jesus specifically meant the Ten Commandments. He knew that God’s ten-point Law would bring peace, fulfillment and joy to any individual or nation that would choose to keep it.

5. Does the Bible show that the Church Jesus built would today be teaching obedience to, and literally be keeping, the Ten Commandments, and other instructions of Christ? Rev. 12:17; 14:12. (Chapter 12 of Revelation personifies God’s Church as a woman.)

6. Is the Law of God *holy, just and good*? Rom. 7:12. Does peace of mind come from keeping the Ten Commandments? Ps. 119:165.

COMMENT: No one who consistently breaks God’s Law can have real peace of mind. He will have fears and frustrations, as well as a guilty conscience. But the person who keeps God’s Law has a clear conscience. He is at *peace* with God, with himself and with his neighbor. He has “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7).

The Law of God is the way to peace, happiness and joy. It is one of God’s greatest gifts to mankind. It was given to make man happy, to lead him into the full, abundant life, and to lead him into eternal life. All the evil in the world has been caused by the breaking of God’s great Law.

7. How did Jesus expand the keeping of the Ten Commandments? Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28. Did John understand this principle? I John 3:15. Did Paul understand the spiritual aspects of God’s Law? Rom. 7:14.

COMMENT: Jesus came *not* to do away with the Ten Commandments (Matt. 5:17). Rather, He came to teach and show by example how to live by the *spiritual intent* of God’s Law.

In Old Testament times God required only physical obedience from His “church”. In other words, obedience only in the *letter*. This was because the Old Testament Church of God—the ancient nation of Israel—was not given the Holy Spirit to help them keep the *spiritual intent* of the Ten Commandments. But in New Testament times, God has made His Holy Spirit available to those whom He calls. He desires that His Spirit-begotten children follow Him in keeping the spiritual intent—the *fullness*—of His Law.

To be sure His disciples throughout the ages understood this new, “magnified” (Isa. 42:21) way of lawkeeping, Jesus singled out the commandments forbidding murder and adultery as vivid examples. He taught that now we are not only to abstain from the physical acts of murder and adultery, but we are also to avoid hatred and sexual lust in our *thoughts* as well.

Hatred against another human being is the *spirit* of murder. Sexual lust is the *spirit* of adultery. Christ showed how God’s commandments apply to our innermost thoughts and attitudes. Let’s notice how we can keep the spiritual intent of God’s Law, albeit still imperfectly because we are not yet born of God.

8. How did Christ summarize the great Ten Commandment Law of God? Matt. 22:36-40. What is the basic characteristic of God’s nature and character? I John 4:8, 16.

COMMENT: The Ten Commandments are expressions of the divine love of God because they reflect the very character of God, which is summarized by the word *love*. This love, as we learned in the previous lesson, is not just another form of human love, but the *divine love* that

comes directly from God through the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Since God is love, Jesus showed that the whole spiritual intent and purpose of God's Law is *love*. The first four of the Ten Commandments show us how to love God, while the last six show us how to love our neighbor—all fellow human beings.

9. If we possess and exercise God's Spirit, will the love of God that it imparts enable us to "fulfill"—to *keep*—God's spiritual Law? Rom. 5:5; 13:10.

COMMENT: The divine love of God imparted to converted Christians by the Holy Spirit is expressed within the bounds of God's Law—the Ten Commandments. It is manifested first of all in adoration and worship of God and literal obedience to Him; and then in outgoing concern, compassion, kindness and service toward fellow human beings.

The love of God enables us to *fulfill* the spirit of the Law. As the Apostle Paul explained: "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10, RSV). (More about how God helps us keep His spiritual Law will be covered later in this lesson.)

10. Could there be any truth in the widespread belief that love fulfills the Law of God in such a way that the keeping of the Law is no longer necessary? I John 5:2-3; John 14:15; 15:9-10; II John 5-6.

COMMENT: The Apostle John emphasized the importance of love. But *never* did he or any other writer of Scripture say that love put away, superseded or destroyed the Law of God. John, who was a close friend, disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ, made it plain that one who truly has the love of God will be *keeping* the commandments of God.

11. Is it possible to "earn" one's salvation through obedience to God? Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9. And yet, can anyone enter God's Kingdom as a lawbreaker? Matt. 7:21; 19:17-19.

COMMENT: You cannot "earn" your salvation by keeping either the Ten Commandments or any other law of God. Eternal life is clearly a *gift* from God! No one could earn immortality in 10,000 lifetimes of keeping the Ten Commandments!

But neither can you enter into eternal life as a lawbreaker! (Rom. 6:23). Jesus Christ plainly and emphatically stated that Christians are to strive to keep the Ten Commandments with their whole beings and with His spiritual help through the Holy Spirit, trusting Him to mercifully apply His sacrifice on their behalf when and where they fall short, and as they repent (I John 1:7-9).

"REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY"

Most professing Christians believe that Sunday has replaced the seventh-day Sabbath. Somehow they have come to assume that they can keep the Fourth Commandment by observing Sunday. Others feel that it is not necessary to keep any specific day as a Sabbath. They believe every day is a "spiritual" Sabbath.

Let's look directly into the Word of God for the truth about this key commandment.

1. When, how and by whom was the Sabbath "made"? Gen. 2:1-3; Mark 2:28.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ is the "Lord" of the Sabbath because *He* made it! (Recall from our past studies that Christ is the "LORD" God of the Old Testament, through whom God created all things.)

Christ created the Sabbath by the act of *resting* on the seventh day of what is commonly called creation week. He blessed and sacrificed the Sabbath—put His divine favor upon and set apart for a special use and purpose a 24-hour period of time that was to occur once every seven days.

2. For whom did Jesus say the Sabbath was made? Mark 2:27.

COMMENT: "The Sabbath was made for man," declared Jesus. It was made the day after man was created. The Sabbath was set apart at Creation for the benefit of *all* mankind. (Since Adam was the first man, he was the representative of the whole human race which has

descended from him.)

3. How did Christ intend the Sabbath to serve our needs? Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15.

COMMENT: Notice that God made the seventh day of the week *holy*—and He commands us to *keep* it that way. The Sabbath, then, is *holy time*. And it was made to be a great blessing for all humanity.

The word “Sabbath” means “rest” in the original Hebrew. Simple physical rest and mental relaxation after a week of hard work are obvious reasons for the Sabbath. But the true purpose of the Sabbath goes far beyond resting from our work on this day. This is because the seventh-day Sabbath is inextricably interwoven into God’s transcendent purpose for creating man.

Human beings desperately need this period of time in which to have *spiritual* contact with God. Time in which to think more about God and to worship Him in private prayer, personal Bible study and in fellowship with others.

4. Was the observance of the Sabbath day to be a special “sign” of identification between God and His people Israel? Ex. 31:13-17.

COMMENT: A quick review of a portion of Israel’s history is in order at this point. Recall that the Israelites had been slaves of the Egyptians. While in Egypt, the Israelites were forbidden to worship the true God. They were forced to work seven days a week. As time passed, they forgot the knowledge of the true Sabbath day, which they had received from their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

After God miraculously delivered the Israelites from the hands of their cruel taskmasters, He revealed the *exact* seventh day to them by supplying a double portion of manna on the sixth day of the week (Friday) and withholding manna on the seventh day (Saturday), and commanding them to rest on that day (Ex. 16:22-30). (Recall also that the miracle of the manna continued for their entire 40-year sojourn in the wilderness—verse 35). After revealing the true Sabbath day, God codified the Sabbath commandment at Mount Sinai by including it as one of the ten great commandments, which He wrote on two tables of stone.

In order that the Israelites would especially *remember* that the eternal God is the Creator, Sustainer and Supreme Ruler over all His creation, God singled out Sabbath observance as the one great “sign” by which they could always be reminded of who He is, and *who they were*.

Many other nations had laws that paralleled some of the laws of God. Some had fairly strict moral laws, usually criminal (e.g., against murder and stealing). But none had a law requiring them to keep the Creator’s seventh-day Sabbath. Therefore it was the one law of God that would make Israel *stand out* from all the other nations.

God *doubly* commanded Sabbath observance by making it a *separate* covenant with His people Israel. (The Sabbath was already one of the Ten Commandments, which God gave to Moses shortly before the Old Covenant was ratified.) Sabbath observance was to be an everlasting covenant (Ex. 31:16), and would *identify* the people of God.

Likewise today, the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is one of the signs that helps to *identify* those who are God’s people today.

5. Does the Bible plainly reveal that a real Christian is one who has become a *spiritual* Israelite—one of Abraham’s “seed” through Jesus Christ? Gal. 3:28-29; Rom. 4:16; Eph. 2:11-13, 19.

COMMENT: God made the special Sabbath covenant with Abraham’s physical “seed”—the nation of Israel. It was to be obeyed throughout their generations. Today, all Spirit-begotten Christians have become Abraham’s *spiritual* “seed” through faith in Christ, and are therefore under the same obligation to keep the Sabbath day!

6. Did Jesus Christ keep the Sabbath? Luke 4:16, 31.

COMMENT: Jesus regularly attended religious services on the Sabbath “as his custom was.” Thus He fulfilled His own command to meet for worship services every Sabbath day (Lev. 23:3). This is the day He would obviously observe, because He is the One who originally made the Sabbath and ordained that it be kept holy!

7. Is there biblical evidence that the early New Testament Church also observed the Sabbath?

Acts 13:14-15, 42-44; 14:1; 17:1-2; 18:1-11.

8. Was it Paul's "manner" (Acts 17:2), even as it was Christ's "custom" (Luke 4:16), to keep the Sabbath because Paul felt like it, or because *Jesus Christ* dwelt in him? Gal. 2:20. Does Christ's remain the same forever? Heb. 13:8.

COMMENT: It is quite plain that the Apostle Paul observed the seventh-day Sabbath. And if Christ lives His life in us today through the Holy Spirit as He did in Paul, then we will also be keeping the *same day Jesus and Paul kept!* (I Cor. 11:1).

9. What are all Christians warned in Hebrews 3:8-13? Was rebellion, especially *Sabbath breaking*, the reason God prevented an entire generation of ancient Israelites from entering His "rest"? Ezek. 20:12-13, 15-16.

COMMENT: Because Israel had become rebellious and polluted God's Sabbaths, God did not allow the generation of adults that came out of Egypt to enter the Promised Land—a symbolic type of the Kingdom of God. The Israelites under Moses were headed toward the *Promised Land*, even as God's Spirit-begotten people today are aiming at the goal of entering *God's Kingdom*.

The word "rest" in Hebrews 3:11 is translated from the Greek *katapausin*, which is defined as "rest" or "place of rest". As used in this verse, it denoted for ancient Israel "rest" from their wanderings in the wilderness by entering the Promised Land. This is a TYPE of the Christian's *spiritual rest*—being *born* as immortal Sons of God into the KINGDOM OF GOD!

10. Was it primarily because of their *unbelief* that the Israelites disobeyed, and therefore were prevented from entering God's "rest" for them—the land of Canaan? Heb. 3:19; 4:1-2.

COMMENT: Because the Israelites did not believe God, and therefore lacked faith in Him, they "hardened their hearts." They profaned God's Sabbaths even though He had made Sabbath keeping the very *test of their obedience* ("that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no" - Ex. 16:4). Therefore God said of that generation, "They shall not enter into my rest" (Heb. 3:11).

And none of that generation, except faithful Joshua and Caleb, entered the Promised Land. But the next generation born during the 40 years in the wilderness, and those under 20 years of age at the Exodus, did enter with those two men. God had promised this land to Abraham for his descendants and, whether or not the Israelites obeyed, God was bound to keep His promise.

Notice that before the second generation of Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, Joshua said to the men of three tribes: "The LORD your God hath *given you REST*, and hath given you this land" (Josh. 1:13).

11. But if New Testament Christians believe and obey God, may they enter *their* "rest"—*eternal life* in God's Kingdom? Heb. 4:3, first nine words, and verse 11.

COMMENT: The result is very clear: Real belief produces obedience! If a person truly believes God's Word, he will be keeping the Sabbath!

12. Will true believers be keeping God's weekly Sabbath day as a foreshadow of their future "rest" in God's Kingdom? Heb. 4:9.

COMMENT: The vital meaning of this verse has been obscured by the King James rendering of the word "rest". Everywhere else in chapters 3 and 4 of the epistle to the Hebrews, the English word "rest" is translated from the Greek word *katapausin*. However, in verse 9 of chapter 4, "rest" is translated from the Greek *sabbatismos*, meaning literally (as most Bible margins show) the *keeping of a Sabbath*.

So, because of the future "rest" (*katapausin*)—the Kingdom of God that spiritual Israel is to enter—there remains for them a *sabbatismos*, the keeping of the Sabbath day. This means that Christians will enter the future "rest" of God's Kingdom even as they *now* keep the weekly Sabbath, which is a type that pictures it!

Most English translations of the Bible have correctly translated Hebrews 4:9. Even the *margin* of the King James Version renders it: "There remaineth therefore a *keeping of a sabbath* to the people of God." The Revised Standard Version translates it: "So then, there remains a sabbath

rest for the people of God." The Jerusalem Bible states: "There must still be, therefore, a place of rest reserved for God's people, the *seventh-day rest*".

13. What further encouragement are Christians given about entering God's eternal "rest"? Heb. 4:10-11. Where may they go for the help—the faith—needed to obey God? Verses 14-16.

COMMENT: Notice how the Revised Standard Version renders verses 10-11: "For whoever enters God's rest [the Kingdom of God] *also ceases from his labors* as God did from his [on the seventh day following the six working days of creation]. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience [as ancient Israel did]."

God's seventh-day Sabbath is not to be treated lightly, for the Sabbath is both a *memorial* and a *foreshadow*. It is a memorial of God's creation and a foreshadow of the coming eternal "rest" that Spirit-begotten Christians will enter when *born* into God's eternal Family.

14. Did God command the entire nation of Israel to assemble ("convoke") on the Sabbath? Lev. 23:3; Num. 28:25. What are New Testament Christians admonished regarding the assembling of themselves? Heb. 10:25.

COMMENT: As early New Testament Christians assembled together every Sabbath day, likewise God's Church in this age also assembles for worship services on God's holy Sabbaths. The Church of God has congregations all over the world. Every Sabbath, God's people meet to receive spiritual instruction and inspiration from the Word of God as expounded by the ministry of His Church (Eph. 4:11-13).

THE SEVEN ANNUAL FESTIVALS

God has a *Master Plan* by which He is accomplishing His awesome purpose for mankind. And His Son, Jesus Christ, plays the central role in God's little-understood plan for man. This plan is outlined by seven annual festivals, which Christians are to observe for a vital purpose.

Just as the weekly Sabbath pictures the Christian's goal of entering into eternal "rest" as a glorified, Spirit-born member of God's Family, the seven annual festivals reveal the step-by-step details of the *working out* of God's plan for man. Not only does each festival vividly picture a great event in God's plan, but the yearly observance of these days by God's people further impresses the knowledge and significance of God's plan on their minds, and continually *reminds* them of their part in it.

It was not until the days of Moses that God began to reveal His plan for working out His purpose for mankind. God formally introduced these festivals through Moses to His nation Israel—His "church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38).

Since throughout most of human history man has been close to the soil in providing his sustenance, God used the yearly agricultural harvests of the Promised Land (now occupied by the state of Israel) as symbolic types of His *spiritual harvests* of human beings.

The ancient Israelites did not understand the spiritual meaning of these annual festivals of God. But God's Spirit-begotten children can!

Today, we can understand from the teachings of Christ and the apostles that God intends the spring festivals to picture to His Church repeatedly year by year the fact that all of those He has called to become His Spirit-begotten children before Christ's Second Coming are only the "firstfruits"—only the relatively *small beginning* of His great spiritual harvest of human beings into His immortal Family. Later, as pictured by the festivals of the much larger autumn harvest season, God will call the *rest of humanity* to salvation!

In the 23rd chapter of Leviticus, we find a summary of God's annual festivals. The first three festivals, beginning with the Passover, are primarily *memorials* of the first part of God's plan. They picture the "firstfruits" of God's spiritual harvest. The last four festivals *look forward* to the future and show how God will reap the latter great autumn spiritual harvest of *thousands of millions* of people.

As we begin this study of God's annual festivals to learn what they signify for Christians today,

let's notice a few facts from history.

Most Bible commentators and scholars agree that the many passing references to these annual festivals in the New Testament indicate that their observance in the early Church was known, accepted—even *taken for granted*. Most importantly, Christ and the Church of God *customarily* kept the annual festivals: "In the early Christian church the propriety of celebrating the festivals together with the whole of the Jewish people was never questioned, so that it needed no special mention" (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, p. 628).

However, it is obvious from a study of the New Testament that God's annual festivals took on a new significance in the apostolic Church of God. Jesus' teaching and example gave new understanding about the meaning of these days and how they are to be observed.

Notice what *The Encyclopedia Britannica* says about the early New Testament Church of God keeping the biblical festivals in a new and different way: "The sanctity of special times [current religious festivals such as Easter and Christmas] was an idea absent from the minds of the first Christians....[who] *continued* to observe the Jewish festivals [of Lev. 23], though *in a new spirit*, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed" (vol. 8, p. 828, 11th edition, emphasis ours).

1. Who does the Bible say originated these annual festivals, in addition to the weekly Sabbath? Lev. 23:1-4.

COMMENT: Notice that these are *not* the "feasts of the Jews" or "feasts of Moses," as some have thought—they are *God's own feasts* which He gave to His people to keep year by year.

2. Did God specifically say that His annual feasts were to be observed *in addition* to the weekly Sabbath? Lev. 23:37-38.

3. What is the first festival to be observed each year? Lev. 23:5. When did God institute the very first Passover? Ex. 12:1-14.

COMMENT: The Passover pictures the beginning of God's great Master Plan for the salvation of mankind. It *pictured in advance* the sacrifice—the crucifixion and death—of Jesus Christ ("out passover lamb"—I Cor. 5:7; I Pet. 1:19) for the sins of mankind. After His death, the Passover became a *memorial* of Christ's suffering and sacrifice.

4. What *new* way of observing the New Testament Passover did Jesus institute as He kept the Passover with His disciples shortly before His death? Luke 22:8, 15-20.

COMMENT: While instituting the new symbols of unleavened bread and wine, picturing His broken body for our physical healing (I Pet. 2:24), and His shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins, Jesus gave a command, "This *DO* in *remembrance of me*" (Luke 22:19). The Passover is a memorial of Christ's sacrifice for our sins, which He wants Christians to especially remember every year.

5. What completely new ceremony did Jesus also institute in connection with this New Testament Passover observance? Read John 13:1-17, especially verses 14-15.

COMMENT: On the occasion of His "last supper," Jesus left a very significant example for His disciples to follow. Notice that this ceremony of washing His disciples' feet had nothing whatsoever to do with the Old Testament observance of the Passover. It was then being instituted for the very *first time* by Jesus Christ. He was taking this last-minute opportunity to institute an observance that His disciples in all ages were to keep annually from that time forward!

Footwashing depicts the attitude of *humility* and *service* to others which Christ always exhibited, and which He desires that each Christian strive to imitate (verses 16-17).

6. What festival occurs on the day after the Passover? Lev. 23:6-8; Ex. 12:15-20.

7. Are the first and seventh days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread *holy* Days on which the people are to assemble themselves, much the same as they would on a weekly Sabbath day? Ex. 12:16; Lev. 23:3.

COMMENT: At this point it would be well to distinguish between God's annual festivals,

or feasts, and His annual Holy Days or Sabbaths. God's Master Plan includes *seven* annual festivals. Two of these, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles, are seven days long. There are also *seven* annual Holy Days which are Sabbaths of rest from regular work. Each of these Holy Days occurs on, or during, a festival (the Feast of Unleavened Bread has two). But the Passover, the first of the festivals, is *not* a Holy Day or Sabbath.

8. Did New Testament Christians ever observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread? I Cor. 5:7-8. What is the obvious meaning of this festival? Verses 1-2, 6-7.

COMMENT: A study of these verses in I Corinthians 5 shows that the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which the Corinthian Christians were observing, pictures the *putting away of sin*. Leavening is a biblical type or symbol for sin (verse 8) because sin, like the leavening used in bread to make it rise, can not only cause a person to become *puffed up* with vanity (verses 2, 6), but can also spread throughout a group of people.

Paul commanded the Church of God at Corinth to put out of their fellowship the person who was *openly* sinning (verse 1). Paul urged decisive action because, as he reminded them, "...a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (verse 6). Permitting sin to openly continue unabated before all the congregation would, in time, influence others to gradually let down and begin slipping back into former sins. Sin would *spread* into the lives of other Christians by the example of one sinner, just as certainly as a little leavening in bread dough eventually causes the whole loaf to rise—to become puffed up!

We learned that the Passover is to remind us that Jesus paid a tremendous price so our sins could be forgiven. He offered something more valuable than anything we could even collectively offer—the sacrifice of His perfect, sinless life.

Then the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately follows the Passover, reminds us that we must strive to *put all sins OUT of our lives*. This festival pictures putting the leaven of sin away from us, and our renewed resolve to live in harmony with God's Law henceforth. Thus we are to rededicate our lives to continual spiritual growth—overcoming the remaining leaven of sin in our lives, and the sins that all Christians occasionally commit.

9. What is the next annual festival that God ordained? Lev. 23:15-17; Num. 28:26. Was this a Holy Day of rest on which the people were to assemble? Lev. 23:21; Num. 28:26.

10. What name was given in the New Testament to the festival of "Firstfruits"? Acts 2:1.

COMMENT: *Pentecost* is a Greek word meaning "fiftieth [day]." This is the only annual Sabbath whose date must be determined by counting. The first New Testament Pentecost occurred on a Sunday, the fiftieth day after Christ's resurrection.

11. What is the vital meaning of the festival of Pentecost (or "Firstfruits") for New Testament Christians? Acts 1:4-5; 2:38. Are Spirit-begotten Christians the "firstfruits" of God's great Master Plan? Jas. 1:18; Rom. 8:23.

COMMENT: The festival of Pentecost is now a *memorial* that pictures the sending of the Holy Spirit from God to beget repentant believers in Christ whom God calls before Christ's Second Coming. The Pentecost of A.D. 31 therefore marked the beginning of the New Testament Church. It was on this day that God began to make the Holy Spirit available to those whom He calls to be a part of His Church.

It was on this Pentecost that the "firstfruits" of God's small spiritual "spring harvest" began to be put into His Church. These new Christians were begotten by the Spirit of power that would help them to overcome and grow spiritually, thus preparing them to be born into God's Family at Christ's Second Coming.

God knows that for us to be thoroughly and successfully "unleavening" our lives, our human willpower and abilities are not enough. We need the supernatural power of His Holy Spirit to help us overcome. This is the third step in God's Master Plan, which is intended to help each one of us succeed in fulfilling God's glorious purpose for our lives.

12. What is the next festival and annual Sabbath of the seven that God revealed? Lev. 23:22-24.

COMMENT: The Feast of Trumpets primarily depicts the triumphant return of Jesus Christ

to set up the Kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 11:15). You will remember that the *first resurrection* occurs at the Second Coming of Christ, which is announced by the tremendous blast of a trumpet (I Thess. 4:16-17; I Cor. 15:52).

13. Does the overall meaning of the Feast of Trumpets encompass even more than the actual Second Coming of Christ? Rev. 8:1-2, 6; 10:7.

COMMENT: Notice that it is the Feast of Trumpets, plural (Lev. 23:24), *not* the "Feast of the Last Trump." When the ancient Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they became accustomed to the blowing of trumpets for many purposes; the calling of assemblies, the signal to march or halt, "officer's call," or *as a warning*. Much like the use of bugles in the military today, ancient Israel came to recognize trumpet sounds as having specific meanings.

There is a parallel between trumpets sounding alarms of warning in ancient Israel and the function of the Church of God today (Isa. 58:1). There is also a relationship between the angelic trumpet blasts signaling the imminent return of Jesus Christ, and the continual warning and witness being given by God's Church today as it prepares the way for the return of Christ. The successive angelic trumpet blasts and accompanying catastrophic events on a worldwide scale just prior to Christ's return will serve as *final warnings* to a heedless, sin-ravaged world!

14. What annual Sabbath follows only nine days after the Feast of Trumpets? Lev. 23:26-32; 16:2-34, especially verses 29-31 of chapter 16. Also notice Revelation 20:1-3 in connection with Leviticus 16:21-22.

COMMENT: The rituals required of the Old Testament Levitical ministry on the Day of Atonement are described in great detail in the 16th chapter of Leviticus. The live goat, upon which all the sins of Israel were to be confessed and which was led into the desolate wilderness, represents the devil, upon whom the guilt of all the sins of mankind will be laid by Jesus Christ after He returns.

Satan, who is called the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4), and is described as the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2), being the father of sin (John 8:42-44), will be restrained by Christ from further deceiving and leading the masses of mankind into sin. No longer will he be able to "broadcast" his attitudes of vanity, lust and greed into people's minds.

At the devil's "chaining" (Rev. 20:1-3), the symbolism of Leviticus 16 will have become reality. The minds of men, formerly deceived by Satan and his demon cohorts, will not at last be opened by the Spirit of God, and all humanity will be able to accept and receive forgiveness of their sins through Christ. For the first time, they will be able to understand God's Master Plan of salvation for them. Then, and only then, will mankind "at one" with Christ and the Father, as symbolized by the Day of *At-one*-ment.

15. How are we to observe the Day of Atonement? Lev. 23:32.

COMMENT: The Day of Atonement is perhaps the most unusual Holy Day because of what God expects us to do during this 24-hour period. It is the one day on which God has commanded us to *fast*—to "afflict our souls" or bodies. (For biblical proof that afflicting one's soul means to fast, compare the following passages: Ps. 35:13; 69:10; Isa. 58:3; Ezra 8:21.)

Fasting on the Day of Atonement means denying oneself food and water for 24 hours—from sunset to sunset (or evening to evening - Lev. 23:32). Fasting is *not* penance—*not* a hunger strike to try to get one's way with God. A Christian is to fast in order to humble himself and to draw closer to God and His righteous way (Isa. 58:6-11).

Thus fasting on the Day of Atonement is a vivid reminder of the state of mind necessary for salvation—of the humility, the godly sorrow, the earnest seeking for God's way—a condition to which this world will have been brought by the catastrophic events culminating in the return of Jesus Christ.

16. What important seven-day festival follows the Day of Atonement? Lev. 23:33-35; Deut. 16:13.

COMMENT: The Feast of Tabernacles was also called the Feast of Ingathering (Ex. 23:16; 34:22) because this seven-day festival celebrated the summer and early autumn

harvest. The whole nation observed this feast after the main harvest had been gathered in (Lev. 23:39).

17. Did Jesus keep the Feast of Tabernacles? John 7:2, 8-11, 14. Did everyone know that Jesus always kept God's feasts and therefore naturally expected Him to be in Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles? Verse 11.

COMMENT: Because of continually mounting persecution, Jesus wisely chose not to travel *openly* in Judea (verse 1). However, verses 1-10 show that He did risk His life to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Even though He went secretly, He openly taught in the temple during the middle of the Feast (verse 14).

18. What is the divinely set theme for the yearly observance of the Feast of Tabernacles? Deut. 16:14-15. (Notice the words "surely rejoice." Other translations, such as the Revised Standard Version, render this "be altogether joyful.") Does God intend for everyone—regardless of age, social class or economic level—to *rejoice* in this feast? Read verse 14 once again.

19. Does God intend for a man and his family to rejoice at the Feast of Tabernacles? Deut. 16:14; 12:5, 7, 12. Are they to live in "booths"—temporary dwellings (corresponding to motel and hotel rooms, lodges, etc.)—at the place designated for the observance of this feast? Lev. 23:42, 40.

COMMENT: The Feast of Tabernacles is full of spiritual meaning for Christians today. The Feast pictures the wonderful World Tomorrow under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ—1,000 years of peace, prosperity and *joy* for the multiple thousands of millions of people who will live in this utopian age. It is during the Millennium that the great "autumn harvest" of human lives will begin to be gathered into the Kingdom of God—*born again* as divine members of the Family of God.

Just think of it! Satan will have been disposed at Christ's return. Then *1,000 years* of peace and prosperity will follow. Those who are the "firstfruits" of God's spiritual harvest—*first born* into God's Family and co-inheritors with Jesus Christ—will join Him in ruling the earth. They will be given the opportunity of bringing saving knowledge to every human then alive and to those born during the Millennium.

Over and over God tells us that the Feast of Tabernacles is a time of exceedingly great rejoicing. For ancient Israel it was a time of rejoicing because the abundant harvest was taken in just before the Feast. But in the Millennium, the happiness, joy and prosperity pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles will exist *worldwide* under the enlightened rule of Jesus Christ. Obedience to God through the keeping of His Law and following His revealed way of life will make the World Tomorrow a literal utopia!

God's great autumn festival gives His Spirit-begotten children a special time and setting in which to think about His purpose for life and how to attain it. The Feast of Tabernacles is intended to separate and free them from the routine cares of the world. Living in temporary dwellings for an entire week away from their jobs, they *picture* by their observance of these seven days the universal freedom and peace that will exist in the Millennium.

The Feast of Tabernacles as observed today is actually a tiny, but happy, foretaste of the joyful World Tomorrow when the Spirit of God will be available to *every* human. These are days of concentrated teaching by God's ministers—days of continuous, genuine Christian fellowship. Christians at the Feast demonstrate now, by the way they live together *in harmony*, what this entire sin-sick, unhappy world *could and will be like!*

Members of God's Church enthusiastically look forward to observing the Feast of Tabernacles every autumn at one of dozens of festival sites throughout the world. Between services, members participate in various exciting, fun-filled Church-sponsored activities for young and old alike, as well as sight-seeing and other special attractions unique to each site. The sincere concern and fellowship, the spiritual nourishment and just plain good fun whets one's appetite for the next year's Feast, making the ordinary "vacations" of the past seem humdrum by comparison!

20. But does the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles mark the end of God's plan for humanity?

Is it God's will that all who have ever lived come to the knowledge of salvation? II Pet. 3:9; I Tim. 2:4.

COMMENT: Thus far we have seen how those who have been privileged to be called of God through the ages, especially from the First Coming of Christ to the end of the Millennium, fit into God's marvelous Master Plan. But what about the billions of people from the time of Adam down to our time (including, perhaps, most of your loved ones) who have not been called of God—who have never had an opportunity to know and really understand God's truth?

Billions have never even heard the name of Christ. Are they doomed to eternal death, without even having had a chance to hear the truth? Would this be fair of a *loving* God?

Can you imagine a merciful and just God condemning innocent little children—some who died before they could either walk or talk—to remain dead for all eternity without the knowledge of God's way of life without being given the opportunity to life forever?

God has, in absolute fairness, planned for everyone who has ever lived to receive an opportunity for salvation. Just as the week is not complete without the Sabbath day, so God's Master Plan is not complete without God's *seventh* annual festival and Holy Day.

In the Bible, the number seven signifies completion and perfection. Without the knowledge of this seventh annual Holy day, you can't understand the completion of God's Master Plan—that God's mercy to mankind extends even *beyond* the Millennium!

In order to understand this final phase—the windup—of God's plan, we must understand the last of God's annual Holy Days, picturing the *last great judgment*.

21. Was there an "eighth day" of worship held immediately after the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles? Lev. 23:34-36. Is it the final festival—the final annual Sabbath of rest? Verse 39.

COMMENT: The last annual Sabbath is observed immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles. But because of its close proximity to this seven-day feast, it was associated with the Feast of Tabernacles and was called the "eighth day." This Festival came to be known among Christians as "the *last day*, that *great day of the feast*" (John 7:37).

22. Revelation chapter 20 holds the key to the meaning of the "Last Great Day." As we already know, verses 4-6 speak of the resurrected saints ruling with Jesus Christ on earth for 1,000 years. But exactly what is said in the first sentence of verse 5?

COMMENT: These are not "the dead in Christ," but simply the *dead*—those billions who are *not* Christ's, who have never been called of God, most of whom have never even heard the name of Jesus Christ.

Note that the first part of verse 5 in the King James Version is in reality a parenthetical expression. Here's how it should read: "(But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.) This is the first resurrection."

The sentence, "This is the first resurrection," refers to the resurrection of the righteous dead in Christ just *before* the 1,000-year period begins. "But", John makes clear, "the rest of the dead"—those who never had a chance to understand God's truth—would not come up in a resurrection "*until the thousand years were finished.*" This resurrection, which occurs after the 1,000 years are finished, is the *second* resurrection.

23. How does John further elaborate on the second resurrection? Rev. 20:11-12. How are these people judged? Verse 12.

COMMENT: The Greek word translated "books" in Revelation 20:12 is *biblia*, and it is from this word that we derive our English word "bible." The "books" that are opened are the *books of the Bible!* Through God's Holy Spirit, they will be opened to the understanding of the billions of people who have *never yet* heard the name of Christ or been able to understand the *true* message of God's Word—those who have never before been able to participate in God's Master Plan of salvation.

24. How long will their period of judgment last? Isa. 65:20.

COMMENT: This verse in Isaiah apparently refers to this judgment period, suggesting that those resurrected then will live for 100 years, regardless of how old they were when they died.

25. Where else in the Bible is this second resurrection described? Ezek. 37:1-14. Are these dead clearly raised to physical human life requiring the breath of life to sustain their physical existence? Verses 5-10.

26. What is God's promise to these resurrected people? Verses 13-14. Is this the same outpouring of God's Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ spoke about on the "last great day" of the Feast? John 7:37-39.

27. How did Jesus refer to this special "day" or period of judgment for people who have yet to hear and understand the wonderful message of salvation? Matt. 11:20-24; 12:41-42.

COMMENT: Christ mentioned the people of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom, Nineveh in Jonah's time and the Queen of the South (the Queen of Sheba). All of these examples of people who lived in *different* generations are compared to the citizens living in the cities and towns of Jesus' generation, the vast majority of whom did not understand or believe His message. Jesus tells us that they *all* are to be resurrected with the generation that lived during His time!

Jesus gave enough examples of generations of people living at different times in history to prove that most of humanity will be alive, *together*, at the same time on this earth. There will be pre-Flood men and women, all 12 tribes of Israel, those who lived during the Middle Ages, and everyone living even now who will not have had the opportunity to come to Christ simply because they were *not called by God* to receive their opportunity for salvation during their first lifetime. (See John 6:44, 65). This group includes all people of all times everywhere on this earth, *except*, of course, those who will be in the first resurrection of the dead.

Since the ancient peoples described in the book of Matthew would have repented if Christ had personally come to them in their day, they will most surely repent when resurrected into a world that He had already ruled for a thousand years—a world dominated by joy, peace, prosperity and well-being.

This vast resurrection to mortal life opens their *period of judgment*—not sentencing. (Sentencing is merely the final act in the process of judgment). A decision must be rendered based on how each individual responds to the Word of God. (This *same* judgment is now upon Christians who have been begotten by God's Holy Spirit—I Pet. 4:17.) And since every individual will be given an opportunity for salvation, each will in effect be rendering his own verdict by the choices he or she makes during this period of judgment.

But if you become a Spirit-begotten Christian in this age, and if you remain faithful unto death, you will be privileged to partake of a "better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35) at Christ's Second Coming. It's better simply because those resurrected in the first resurrection will be resurrected as spirit beings—not mortal human beings. Also, those in the first resurrection will receive a *greater reward* than those who will live during the last judgment period, or even those who will live during the Millennium! (More about your potential reward a little later in this lesson.)

We have seen that all of God's annual festivals are built around the annual harvest seasons of the Promised Land into which God led ancient Israel. But it is the *spiritual* harvest that God is interested in! Old Testament Israel was reminded of their dependence upon, and relationship to, Almighty God by this seasonal cycle of harvest festivals. Today, God's faithful New Testament Christians can receive the vital *life-saving knowledge* of God's Master Plan for His spiritual harvest by observing these SAME DAYS!

What one wants to remember, he must review regularly. AS Spirit-begotten Christians observe each annual festival in its season, they are reminded of God's Master Plan for the salvation of all mankind, and their *individual* part in it. God's annual festivals give one the opportunity to "act out," in a sense, the plan by which God is accomplishing His purpose for mankind.

Through the years, God's Church has grown in the understanding of the spiritual meaning of these annual festivals. Unlike the holidays commonly celebrated by the world, which picture no real purpose of plan for human existence, God's annual festivals reveal the full scope and meaning of His great purpose and plan for mankind.

In this lesson, we learned that God's annual festivals not only teach us His Master Plan of

salvation, they point us directly to our Savior Jesus Christ. He is our *Passover* (I Cor. 5:7). It is by "putting on" Christ that we put sin out of our lives, as pictured by the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*.

Christ is the first of the "firstfruits, and it was 50 days after His resurrection that He sent the Holy Spirit on the day of *Pentecost*. The Holy Spirit was sent to spiritually beget those whom the Father would call, thus enabling them to fulfill His law, successfully overcome sin in their lives and grow spiritually.

It is Christ who is going to intervene in world affairs (pictured by the *Feast of Trumpets*), resurrect His firstfruits, and become King of kings, putting down the despotic rule of Satan, the archdeceiver, as pictured by the *Day of Atonement*. With the influence of the devil and his demons gone, all mankind will have the opportunity to become "at one" with Christ through repentance, baptism and the receipt of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is coming to set up the government of God in the Millennium, making this earth a veritable utopia—pictured by the *Feast of Tabernacles*. Billions will be born into the Family of God during this golden age. God's people today are representatives of the soon-coming, world-ruling Kingdom of God.

Finally, Christ will make salvation available to everyone who ever lived, but never heard or understood the truth, in the last great step in God's plan—the *Last Great Day*, picturing the last judgment period.

God's Church understands and teaches the precious truth concerning His purpose and plan for mankind. Around the world, God's true Church—composed of converted, Spirit-begotten children of God—is faithfully observing *all* of God's festivals every year!

THE CHRISTIAN FIGHT!

The Word of God tells us that all who will follow the Christian way of life will have to face three deadly enemies, each of which tends to *discourage* us from overcoming sin and developing the character of God.

These deadly foes can come between us and God—separating us from Him. They tend to put wedges into our minds that can grow, gradually separating us from the guidance and power of God's Holy Spirit and the faith of Jesus Christ—*IF we allow them to*.

God says these deadly enemies *must* be defeated and He tells us *how* to do it!

1. Does Paul show there is effort involved in living the Christian life—that eternal life is worth *fighting* for so as not to let it slip from one's grasp? I Tim. 6:12; 1:18-19. Whose "soldier" was Timothy? II Tim. 2:3-4.

2. Did Paul *steadfastly* follow God's way of life—did he know, shortly before his death, that he had *WON* the Christian fight? II Tim. 4:6-8.

3. Is the Christian's warfare against physical armies? Or is it a *spiritual* warfare? II Cor. 10:3-4. Just what is a Christian to fight against? Verse 5.

COMMENT: The first enemy in the Christian's daily warfare is his human nature with its ungodly characteristics (Gal. 5:19-21). Our nature causes us to rationalize deceitfully (Jer. 17:9). It entices us to *sin*—to break God's spiritual Law—thus cutting us off from Him. Our nature can destroy us spiritually, unless we *resist* its wrong impulses that lead to sin.

4. What is the second deadly enemy of all Christians? Gal. 1:4. What should a Christian's attitude be toward the world's social order with its glitter, glamour, status-seeking and alluring appeal? I John 2:15-17.

COMMENT: The Apostle John was referring to the society of this world, so much of which is built on and motivated by vanity, self-centeredness, lust and greed. Because most people are spiritually deceived (Rev. 12:9), they don't understand how so many of the world's ways could be wrong in God's sight. Nevertheless, this world's ways do bombard Christians continually with temptations that can lead them away from following Christ!

5. Should Christians strive to avoid the evil that is in the world? II Cor. 6:14-18; Rev. 18:4.

Does this mean that they should move away from populated areas? John 17:15-18. Notice especially the first part of verse 15.

COMMENT: Christ's prayer in the seventeenth chapter of the book of John shows that God does not expect Christians to move to the mountains or deserts to escape the world's distractions! Rather, they should strive to be separate *spiritually* and refuse to participate in the ways of the world that are defined as *sin* in the Bible

From earliest childhood we began conforming to the customs and practice which we learned from the teachings and examples of others. We merely accepted, without question, most of the practices and lifestyles of the society around us. But as we learn about God's way, we are to conscientiously apply ourselves to our new life in Christ. "Be not conformed to this world," said Paul, "but be ye transformed by the *renewing of your mind*, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

Unless we cease from conforming to those ways of this world which are contrary to God's will, we will not grow in the character of Christ or overcome spiritually. The many snares in the world could be compared to an obstacle course which challenges and strengthens a good soldier in training. Christians must learn to hurdle those obstacles.

6. Do people always appreciate the person who tries to live according to God's Law? I Pet. 4:3-4; John 15:18-20; 16:33. How should a Christian respond to those who might be antagonistic toward his life in Christ? Matt. 5:43-47; Rom. 12:20-21.

COMMENT: God does not want us to hate the people in the world whom He has not chosen to call at this time, even though some may persecute and ridicule us for following God's way. They are potential Sons of God, and we are instructed to *love* them! God *will* eventually *open* their minds and show them His glorious truth so they can become Christians too, as is depicted by the last step in God's Master Plan.

7. What, or who, is the third great enemy of every Christian? I Pet. 5:8-9. Is Satan the devil *ultimately* responsible for inspiring all the evil in this world? II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3. As the invisible ruler of this world, has he indeed deceived the *whole* world? Rev. 12:9.

COMMENT: Satan the devil, formerly known as the archangel Lucifer (Isa. 14:12), the great cherub who was originally created perfect in his ways (Ezek. 28:14-17), became perverted in his thinking and thus developed his satanic nature, which he has "broadcasted" to humanity ever since Adam and Eve. As we learned in Lesson 9, humans have unsuspectingly *acquired* Satan's nature, which we call "human nature." Notice how Paul described this natural state of mind: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

But once the Holy Spirit of God is added to a person's mind, he then has access to the spiritual power to *resist* the attitudes of self-centeredness, lust, greed, vanity, jealousy, envy, resentment, competition, strife, bitterness and hate that are spiritually broadcasted to the mind by Satan.

No person is compelled to obey these impulses from Satan. The devil has no power to *force* anyone to think or do wrong. But the unsuspecting automatically do so without realizing what is taking place in their minds. Most people just drift along, responding to emotions and impulses that often find expression in "works of the flesh" and vain pursuits (Gal. 5:19-21).

Thus Satan, the "god of this world," the "prince of the power of the air," is actually working "in" (Eph. 2:2) the minds of unsuspecting people all over the world. That is why it is "this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4), and why it is so thoroughly deceived today!

8. After your begetting by God's Holy Spirit, which makes you a Christian, the devil will continue to try to deceive you, to lead you away from Christ and His way. What did Paul warn the Corinthian Christians? II Cor. 11:2-4, 13-15. Did some Christians in Paul's day begin to fall victim to the devil's promptings and the deceptions of his false ministers once again? Gal. 1:6-8; 3:1.

COMMENT: Conversion does *not* shield us from Satan's "wavelength." He continues to broadcast the attitudes of his nature to our minds in an attempt to spiritually overthrow us. When Jesus spoke of overcoming, He referred to overcoming Satan's way, which is contrary to God's

way.

Those who have turned from Satan's way are fighting to OVERCOME his subtle urgings, and are striving to remain true to God's way—the way of God's government. They are *the ones Satan hates*. He is especially interested in destroying them! But with God's protection and restraining power over Satan, which He promises to give us if we remain close to Him, we can overcome!

Before Jesus Christ could qualify to restore the government of God and rule all nations, He had to withstand Satan's most severe temptations. That supreme struggle is recorded in the fourth chapter of Matthew. Notice how the devil attempted to deceive and influence Jesus Christ to sin against God.

9. When Jesus was extremely hungry, how did the devil appeal both to human vanity and hunger? Matt. 4:1-3. And to the human desire for prestige, glory and power? Verses 5-9. What were Jesus' immediate responses? Verses 4, 7, 10. What was the outcome of this titanic spiritual battle? Verse 11.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ *overcame* the devil. He resisted Satan, conquered him, and showed His MASTERY over him! When He gave the devil an order, Satan had to obey. He slunk away, knowing he was defeated in this supreme spiritual encounter of all time.

Christ overcame the devil's wiles by the Word of God. He responded to the devil's temptations by citing the scripture that applied in each situation. He knew the Word of God thoroughly. He KNEW God's will. And He obeyed it. Therefore, the devil could *not deceive Him!*

10. Are Christians today also to resist the devil with the truth God has revealed to them? I Pet. 5:9. What *must* the devil do if resisted steadfastly? Jas. 4:7.

11. What instructions on fighting against the impulses and attitudes of the devil does God give us through Paul? Eph. 6:10-12. What are Christians to put on in order to fight this spiritual battle? Verses 11, 13. Of what does God's *spiritual armor* consist? Verses 14-17.

COMMENT: "*Truth*" refers to the inspired Word of God (John 17:17), the first piece in the Christian's spiritual armor. The "*breastplate of righteousness*" is obedience to God's commandments (Ps. 119:172); the "*gospel of peace*" is the message of the coming Kingdom of God, when Christ will rule this earth and bring it peace.

The "*shield of faith*" refers to the faith of Jesus Christ, which can be within us (Gal. 2:20); Rev. 14:12; Phil. 3:9)—not just to our own human, physical faith. This faith is God's gift imparted by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). And it is this faith—*Christ's faith put within us*—that will enable us to conquer and overcome sin!

The "*helmet of salvation*" is the knowledge of what salvation is, what it involves, what it's all about—the very purpose of life. In other words, it is the knowledge of the TRUE GOAL and potential destiny of mankind—that of becoming *divine members of the Family of God!*

The "*sword of the Spirit*" refers to the written Word of God—the Christian's only offensive weapon in fighting the devil and his wiles (Heb. 4:12). It cuts the enemy's tactics and strategies to ribbons, and shows us what the enemy is up to.

The final thing Paul mentions in fighting Satan and his wiles is *prayer* (Eph. 6:18-20). Christians are to draw close to God in persevering prayer (I Thess. 5:17), praying for all of God's people, the work and ministry of God's Church and for their own needs.

This is the way to defeat—to OVERCOME—Satan and to force him to *flee!* This is the perfect strategy for defeating human nature and the sinful attractions of this world, since they are both essentially motivated by the devil. If Christians will diligently follow this formula, they will succeed in overcoming all three deadly foes.

WHY OVERCOMING IS SO IMPORTANT

The Bible speaks a great deal about "overcoming." Let's understand exactly why it is so important in living the Christian life, and what it has to do with the responsibilities of Spirit-born Christians in the Kingdom of God.

1. Did Jesus Christ *become* perfect? Heb. 5:9; 2:9-10. Notice especially the last part of verse 10. What did Christ set as the goal for His true followers? Matt. 5:48. Who are they to become like? Eph. 4:13.

COMMENT: As we learned in the previous lesson, Jesus spoke of *becoming* perfect. But exactly what kind of "perfection" was He talking about?

In the original Greek, the word for "perfect" in Matthew 5:48 is *teleios*, which also means "complete". In other words, Jesus meant that His followers are to become *spiritually mature* in the character of God.

Obviously, we cannot become perfect in this sense until the resurrection, when God will complete the process and give us new, perfect spirit bodies with a perfect—sinless—nature that will be like God's. But in the meantime, God wants us to *grow* in His spiritual character daily by obeying His commandments, overcoming and rooting sin out of our lives.

2. Even though Christ was the very Son of God and had the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34), did He still have to *learn* obedience? Heb. 5:8-9. Did Christ "overcome"? John 16:33. Did He resist temptation? Heb. 4:15.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ *became* perfect through the trials and tests of human experience. He *overcame* the temptations of the devil, His flesh and the world around Him. In spite of opposition and temptation, He kept God's commandments perfectly. Thus He was able to become the Savior of mankind and the supreme example of spiritual maturity Christians are to be striving to emulate.

3. Just how important is overcoming to your being in God's Kingdom and receiving a *reward*? Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26-27; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7.

COMMENT: Through overcoming the sinful pulls of the flesh, the world and the devil, our spiritual character is being perfected—we are building the very character of God. And the more we overcome, the greater the *responsibility* we will be given in Christ's government on earth. Thus the greater will be our *reward*!

But no one can overcome for us. It requires putting forth effort on our part, together with the power of God's Holy Spirit, to become the kind of spiritually minded and motivated person God can use in His Kingdom.

4. Is overcoming done all at once, or is it a life-long process? Matt. 24:13, 45-47.

COMMENT: The Bible shows that striving to develop the spiritual character of Christ is an ongoing process of *overcoming* throughout the Christian life—of putting sin out of our lives, learning to control and rule over the downward pulls of our nature.

It is those who **OVERCOME** to the very end—those who are *still growing* in character at Christ's return (or at their death, if that comes first)—who shall inherit God's Kingdom and receive a reward!

5. Does II Peter 1:5-9 also show the need for *continual growth* in the virtues of Christian character as long as a person lives? Do verses 10 and 11 imply that those who don't continue to grow and overcome will not make it into God's Kingdom?

TO BECOME INHERITORS WITH CHRIST

1. Because Jesus Christ *overcame* during His human life and was born again by a resurrection, where is He presently seated? Rev. 3:21. Have *all* the angels, authorities and powers been made subject to Him under His Father? I Pet. 3:22; Eph. 1:20-22; I Cor. 15:27.

2. What will Christ's official title be when He returns to rule the nations of earth? Rev. 19:16. Will His glorious government continue to expand throughout the universe forever? Isa. 9:6-7.

3. Just how great is the authority which Christ has already inherited? Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 28:18.

COMMENT: Notice how the Moffatt translation renders the original Greek of Hebrews 1:2: "But in these days at the end he has spoken to us by a Son—a Son whom he has appointed *heir of the universe*!"

4. Will Christ be the only inheritor and ruler of this earth and the vast universe, or will there be *co-rulers*, "joint-heirs," with Him to *share* His great inheritance and responsibility? Rom. 8:16-17; Rev. 21:7.

COMMENT: True Christians are now the Spirit-begotten children of God. They are heirs—joint-

heirs with Jesus Christ—destined to inherit and help rule EVERYTHING God has created!

Notice also the second chapter of Hebrews. Beginning with verse 6, the Apostle Paul quoted Psalm 8:4-6: "What is man, that thou [God] art mindful of him? Yes, why should the great God be concerned about us mortals? Why *were* we born?"

Here is the answer: "Thou has put ALL THINGS in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he *left nothing* that is not [to be] put under him" (Heb. 2:8).

Do you grasp that? Absolutely nothing God has created is excepted. The awesome destiny of mankind is co-rulership first of this earth, and then the vast universe with Jesus Christ! We were BORN TO RULE! But not until we have *qualified* and been "born again"—born of the Spirit of God as members of God's Family.

Thus far only Jesus Christ, the "firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29), has received this power. So "...now [today] we see *not yet* all things put under him [man]. But we see Jesus... crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2:8-9). He alone has received the power and glory we are to receive when we, too, are born of God at the resurrection of the dead.

Can you begin to grasp the magnitude of these sure promises of God?

5. In what capacity is Christ now serving true Christians? Heb. 4:14-16.

COMMENT: As the High Priest of all Spirit-begotten children of God, Jesus Christ is always available to help them in times of need. He takes special interest in their spiritual development, helping to prepare them so they can eventually inherit "all things" with Him!

QUALIFYING TO RULE WITH CHRIST

Many are surprised to learn that the Bible says so much about ruling in the Kingdom of God. Some doubt whether they could ever rule, while others have no desire to rule at all. Perhaps you have thought: I don't want to *rule* in the world Tomorrow. I just want to *serve* God. The problem is that few people have ever really understood what it means to serve.

History right down to the present is filled with accounts of rulers, politicians and bureaucrats who have abused their power and served their own interests, while calling themselves "benefactors" or servants of the people (Luke 22:25-26). However, God's rulers in the World Tomorrow will not be like them.

Jesus Christ, who has qualified for the greatest position of rulership under the Father in the coming government of God on earth, said He came to be a *servant!* (Luke 22:27). Let's see what service to God has to do with rulership.

1. How does a truly converted Christian express service to God? Matt. 25:31-40.

COMMENT: We serve God when we help and *serve our fellowman*. Christ said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (verse 40).

This troubled world is filled with needy, sick and lonely people. Hundreds of millions in this world would benefit from even basic instruction in how to improve the quality of their physical lives, including their basic nutrition and everyday hygiene! But above all, they need to know the *truth of God*—His purpose and plan for mankind.

Christ came to *serve*, not be served (Matt. 20:28). The footwashing ceremony, which He established shortly before His crucifixion, symbolized this attitude of service. We should want to *imitate* Christ's example of service to fellowman (1 Pet. 2:21; John 13:17).

A deeply converted Christian will want to help teach this world and help others to share in the physical and spiritual blessings that result from living God's way of life. This is what the return of Christ and the establishment of His ruling government on earth is all about! All Spirit-begotten Christians are now *in training* for an important role in helping to teach the world God's way. They are also learning to help administer the government of the wonderful World Tomorrow for the good of all mankind!

The Christian life, then, is one of overcoming, growing and preparing for *service through rulership* in the Millennium, as well as serving others here and now.

2. What will the saints be doing in the Kingdom of God during the Millennium? Rev. 3:21; 2:26;

5:10; 20:4-6.

COMMENT: We read of "thrones," "judgment" and "reigning." These scriptures clearly tell us that Christians will receive positions of rulership in God's Kingdom. All who are begotten by God and overcoming now will become "kings and priests" (teachers—Mal. 2:7) in the Kingdom of God. Our destiny is *rulership of the world*—and eventually the *entire universe*—under Christ. Yes, we were born to *rule!*

3. By what principle can a person of ordinary ability in this life ever qualify to take on far greater responsibility in the Kingdom of God? Luke 16:10.

COMMENT: We learn to rule by being *faithful*—conscientious—in whatever we do. We must put into practice in our daily lives the principles and laws we learn from God's Word. Even the person who considers himself to have only a little ability and natural talent *can qualify* to rule in God's Kingdom. We learn to rule in the World Tomorrow by learning to manage our own affairs and responsibilities today, no matter how small they may be.

God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11; Gal. 3:28). Whether we were born male or female has *no bearing* on our reward in God's Kingdom. Our future reward will be determined solely by the degree of our "works" in this life. Note: It is by God's *grace* that we will enter His Kingdom, for immortality is a *gift* from God. But it is our *works* that will qualify us for an office of responsibility—an opportunity for greater service, for doing more good—once we are born into God's ruling Family.

As our Savior and elder brother—"the firstborn among many brethren"—Jesus Christ has already qualified for the highest office under God the Father in the coming World Tomorrow. No one else can ever receive the position of rulership the Father has promised Him. Notice a few other positions mentioned specifically in the Bible.

4. To whom has God promised rulership over the reunited nation of Israel? Ezek. 37:21-22, 24. What positions of rulership did Jesus promise to give each of His twelve apostles under David? Matt. 19:27-28. Has God alluded to others who will be in His Kingdom? Read Hebrews 11:4-40.

COMMENT: Other overcomers have gone before us and will be in God's Kingdom. They have already qualified for responsibilities in God's ruling Family, though God has not revealed their specific positions to us in the Bible. But *every* individual will have a tremendous job to do, for an entirely new civilization must be built on earth during the Millennium (to say nothing of the universe beyond)—built this time to God's specifications. It will take many different, vital jobs to recreate world society as God would have it.

5. Will there really be enough opportunities to serve for *all* who have overcome down through the ages? John 14:1-3.

COMMENT: By speaking of the temple ("my Father's house") having many "mansions" ("rooms" in the Revised Standard Version and other translations), Jesus showed that there would be places for many assistants in the government of the Kingdom of God on earth, when Jerusalem will be the millennial capital of the world. He said, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am [headquartered in the temple of God on earth], there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

Christ assures us that there will be ample opportunities and challenging, interesting positions of responsibility for all who are born into God's *ruling* Family.

True Christians today should have a burning desire to bring God's way of life to the entire world—to teach God's wonderful way to peace, joy and abundance. And they'll be able to do just that when Christ returns to set up the Kingdom of God and they are born of God!

But to *qualify*—to be properly *trained*—to serve and teach in the World Tomorrow—true Christians must learn to serve and teach *now*.

The *only* reason *any* person is called to salvation now is to **QUALIFY** to help in ruling and teaching in the World Tomorrow—to help call and save the the thousands of millions during the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment period. God hasn't selected certain ones today for special favors. He has called them for a *special purpose*—a tremendous **JOB** to do!

The Christian life, therefore, is one of preparing for *great service* in tomorrow's world. Spirit-begotten Christians are now in *training* to help teach the world God's way and to administer the government of God for the good of humanity!

YOU CAN OVERCOME!

The newly Spirit-begotten Christian has embarked on a new and exciting way of life. But as with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and Paul, God knows that Christians still can and sometimes do *sin* (I John 1:8-9). But our merciful God promises to forgive us if we repent, and will strengthen us so we can continue to overcome and be granted eternal life in His glorious Kingdom.

But exactly how is it possible to continue to overcome, to press on toward the eternal goal, to strive toward developing the perfect, holy and righteous character of Jesus Christ and be born into God's Family? It is through the FAITH OF CHRIST—*“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (Col. 1:27). Paul said: *“I CAN do all things [overcome any trial, test, trouble or sin] THROUGH CHRIST which strengtheneth me!”* (Phil. 4:13).

AND SO CAN WE!

Yes, through Christ we *can* please God, fulfill His Law and OVERCOME! Let's understand.

1. Did the Apostle Paul, who was inspired by God's Holy Spirit, actually say that Christians must “work out” their own salvation? Phil. 2:12. Also notice II Peter 1:10.

COMMENT: Immediately upon their spiritual begetting, Christians have something they must begin to do and continue doing for the rest of their natural lives. The Christian life involves “works”—it involves *doing something!* Christians must put forth *effort* to overcome. Christ said: *“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work”* (John 5:17). God's way of life is one of productivity, growth and exciting challenge.

2. Then can we earn our salvation by our own works after all? Rom. 6:23; Phil. 2:13; Eph. 2:8-9.

COMMENT: As mentioned earlier, eternal life is a *gift* of God. You cannot earn your salvation by your works. However, the Christian still has his part to do.

The Bible tells us that we must put away the habits and sins that enslave us. We must thwart ungodly, unchristian habits and thoughts that would ultimately lead to eternal death (Rom. 6:23). But how? Through our own strength and willpower alone? No, if it is impossible to conquer the influence of the world, the flesh and the devil through human strength alone.

Benjamin Franklin, one of the five principal founding fathers of the United States once set himself to attain the goal of moral perfection. Here is an excerpt from the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, part II;

“It was about this time that I conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wished to live without committing any fault at any time; I would conquer all that either natural inclination, custom, or company might lead me into. As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other.”

But before long, Dr. Franklin found the task no easy one. Continuing with his autobiography: *“But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined. While my care was employed in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another; habit took the advantage of inattention: inclination was sometimes too strong for reason. I concluded, at length, that the mere speculative conviction that it was our interest to be completely virtuous, was not sufficient to prevent our slipping; and that the contrary habits must be broken, and the good ones acquired and established, before we can have any dependence on a steady, uniform rectitude of conduct”* (emphasis ours).

3. What similar frustrations did Paul experience in striving to overcome his nature? Read Romans 7:7-25. Notice especially verses 15, 19 and 23.

COMMENT: Paul found that when he tried to resist his human nature, bad habits and sins would not easily be dismissed. In fact, when his attention was drawn to eradicating his personal sins, they only seemed to become more pronounced. Paul, the apostle whom God inspired to write at least thirteen books of the New Testament, cried out: *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* (verse 24).

Of course, Paul did overcome. Shortly before his death, he wrote the following words to his young protégé Timothy: *“The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the*

Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day [the resurrection at Christ's Second Coming], and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (II Tim. 4:6-8, RSV).

Notice how Paul succeeded in overcoming

4. What, or who, is the KEY to Christian overcoming? Phil. 4:13; John 15:5; I John 4:4; Rom. 8:37.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ, who has already defeated Satan (Matt. 4) and qualified to become "King of kings and Lord of lords," will help Christians defeat Satan and this world's influences *through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit!* He told His disciples to be of good cheer because He had overcome the world (John 16:33). John further testified that the One who dwells in every true Christian through the Spirit of God is *greater* than Satan (I John 4:4).

5. But didn't Jesus say He could, of *Himself*, do nothing? John 5:30.

COMMENT: Think of it. Even the very Son of God said He could do *nothing* (no spiritual works) by His own human power. If Christ, when in the flesh, had no faith in Himself, how much less, then, can you and I accomplish by trusting in ourselves?

Few realize that Christ's obedience and even the miracles He performed were not done by any supernatural power of His own. ALL His spiritual works were done literally through *faith in God's power*, setting a marvelous example for us.

6. What was the source of Christ's dynamic faith? John 14:10-11.

COMMENT: The Father who lived in Jesus through the Holy Spirit made His obedience to God's Law possible! Christ had the very *faith of God*.

7. Are Christians to live by faith? Heb. 10:38; Rom. 1:17. But is having faith in God all that is required? Rom. 3:31. Is faith *without* obedience to God a *dead* faith? Jas. 2:20-22.

COMMENT: The Bible very plainly shows that each individual Christian has a part in the salvation process. Nevertheless, many professing Christians have been taught that Jesus lived a good life for us—that He obeyed God's Law in our stead. But we have seen that a Christian is not excused from overcoming, growing in spiritual character, and enduring in spite of all opposition or temptation to quit. These scriptures make it crystal clear that having faith does not excuse us from having spiritual works.

This is a great mystery to those who don't understand God's purpose and plan of salvation. Since *we must do* these things to be saved, yet are utterly unable to do them of *ourselves*, many have concluded that God sent Jesus to do it all for us and thereby excuse us from obeying God. Nothing could be further from the truth!

The true answer is the *key* to salvation. It is FAITH. Faith in God's POWER—the same kind of *living faith* Jesus had!

8. By *whose* faith is a Christian's "righteousness"—his obedience to God's spiritual LAW—made possible? Rev. 14:12.

COMMENT: Spirit-begotten Christians have the very "faith of Jesus." It's not just *our* faith in Him, but *His* faith—the *very faith through which He kept God's Law—placed in us and ACTING in us!*

9. Does the Bible call Jesus the author and finisher of our faith? Heb. 12:2-4.

COMMENT: A more accurate translation of the phrase "author and finisher" is "pioneer and perfecter". Jesus led the way, as our pioneer, setting us the supreme example of living faith. But Jesus also *perfects* His faith *IN us!* Here's how.

10. Did the Apostle Paul plainly state that Christ lived in him? Gal. 2:20. How did Christ live in him? Phil. 2:5; Rom. 8:9-10. Then did Paul live his life by *Christ's* faith dwelling in him? Gal. 2:20 once again.

COMMENT: Paul didn't live by his own faith. The mind of Jesus Christ dwelt in Paul through the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit of God implanted in Paul's mind the same faith that can be in your mind! This faith—the very faith of Jesus Christ—will enable you to live a life of overcoming as did the Apostle Paul!

11. Is the very faith of Jesus Christ, by which we receive eternal salvation, a *gift* of God? Eph. 2:8-9. Is this faith one of the results of having the Holy Spirit? Gal. 5:22.

COMMENT: The faith that saves is the faith of Christ. Yes, Christ's faith—*not our* faith. And Christ, who can live in us by God's Spirit, will impart His strong faith to us and thus make our spiritual

obedience and overcoming possible!

12. What must you do to receive the Holy Spirit and the very faith of Jesus Christ? Acts 2:38. Must you be *willing* to obey God? Acts 5:32. And must you first show faith toward Christ before He will give you *His* faith? Acts 20:21; Rom. 1:17.

COMMENT: God will give His Holy Spirit and the resulting faith of Christ only to those who meet these *prior conditions*.

Repentance is toward God and means that we have decided to change the entire course of our life—to *quit* sinning against God and sincerely desire to begin living by all of His commandments. We *utterly abhor* not only our old sinful way of life, but also the inclinations of our carnal mind, which has been swayed by the devil (Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:2), the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4).

Then we must show our *own* faith, or belief, in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whose blood was shed in order to pay the death penalty our sins have incurred. Upon faith in, and our acceptance of Him as personal Savior, and then after repentance and water baptism, God is bound by His Word to give us His Holy Spirit.

Yes, it does take our own faith to believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins. *But that faith doesn't save us!* Only when God gives us the Holy Spirit to beget us spiritually, and we receive the faith of Christ implanted within us, have we received *saving* faith! And it all comes as a free gift from God. We could never "earn" it.

13. Once we receive God's Holy Spirit, must the faith that it imparts grow? II Thess. 1:3.

COMMENT: Faith is not implanted in our minds whole and complete at the moment we receive the Spirit of God. Faith must grow. It must be nourished in order to develop. It needs exercise and practice. That faith must *grow* by testing and *by our works*. It must be *living* faith.

14. Let's reexamine the example of Abraham—the "father" of the faithful (Rom. 4:16) and the one whom God called His friend. How was Abraham's faith made perfect? Jas. 2:21-24, especially verse 22.

COMMENT: Abraham was a close friend of God. As a result, he received the help necessary to set an outstanding example of faith. If we will let the Spirit of God from Christ flow through us, then we, too, can be close friends of God as Abraham was, and be perfecting faith as he did.

Good friends spend a lot of time together in *conversation*. They discuss life, their goals, problems, and listen willingly to each other. If you are a close friend of God, then you will want to talk to Him. You will also be listening to Him *talk to you* through the pages of your Bible. And you will often think about and ponder His words. Notice what Christ said about this two-way conversation that all true Christians are to have with God.

15. Did Jesus teach His followers to converse with the Father through prayer? Luke 11:1. What is the general format we should follow when we pray? Verses 2-4; Matt. 6:9-13. Should we repeat words aimlessly or by memory? Matt. 6:7-8. Should we pray in a private place, where we can be alone with God? Verses 5-6.

16. Should we not only pray for our own needs, but also for the work of God's Church, His ministers, and His Spirit-begotten children (the "saints")? Eph. 6:18-19. Who set an outstanding example of this kind of prayer? Col. 4:12-13.

COMMENT: When you pray to God, you are actually *talking* to Him. You are coming into His presence, letting Him know how you feel about certain things and how you think about certain problems. You are asking Him for His guidance, counsel, advice and help in solving the problems you face.

When you pray for the needs of others and the needs of God's Church, God listens! He is very much concerned about the welfare of all His people, and the crises and trials they may be experiencing, as well as your own personal welfare.

God is not far off or aloof to His Spirit-begotten children. He wants us to come to Him often, to *talk to Him in prayer*, so that we may receive the help we need to live the Christian way of life.

He also wants us to *listen to Him* when He speaks to us. How does He do this? Through His inspired written Word, the Holy Bible. When you read and study the Scriptures, God is actually *talking to you* through them. They are His words to you.

Learn to let Christ, and the Father, speak to you from the Bible. Absorb the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5) and allow the Word of God to guide and direct you as you strive to live the Christian way of life.

God's way is plain and simple when we understand it. We *are able*, after all, to press toward the goal of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ, to *strive* toward the perfection of the character of God through the FAITH OF CHRIST—"Christ in us, the hope of glory". And it is all accomplished as a result of having the Holy Spirit in us, and as we exercise it.

We are to keep God's Law and live the Christian life *as if* we were doing it all through our own effort, but because "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," God makes up the necessary difference. Like Paul, who was mindful of his own human limitations, we look to *God* for the help to accomplish His purpose in us—"for my weakness makes me strong in him" (II Cor. 12:10, Phillips).

Through Christ *YOU, TOO*, can conquer every sin, surmount every obstacle, defeat every foe, and overcome every hindrance that stands to thwart your way into God's Family!

Remember the Apostle Paul exuded *Christ's* confidence. He was SURE! He was CERTAIN! Paul walked, talked, and lived with Christ and the Father *through the Holy Spirit within him*. He had the very faith and assurance of Jesus Christ.

So can you!

ARE YOU QUALIFYING?

You were born with the potential of becoming a member of the universe-ruling Family of God—and, if God is calling you now, to have a part in governing, teaching, and guiding the world in the Millennium and in the Great White Throne Judgment period. And after that, to help rule the universe for eternity!

This is the incredible human potential, the awesome destiny God has in store for those who become members of His Family!

Have you begun the salvation process toward this marvelous goal? Analyze your own life and character. Have you begun *obeying* God? Are you *growing* spiritually? Are you developing—growing—in self-control? In the ability to restrain wrong desires, selfish motives or vanity? Are you replacing bad habits and attitudes with right thoughts and deeds?

If you suddenly had some great responsibility thrust into your hands—perhaps running a major department of a city—perhaps managing a vast business with many subsidiaries—would you be able to direct and carry out that responsibility as *God* would have it done?

Well, the test is this: If you are now rightly directing the *little* powers in your control, such as your temper, your voice, your passions and emotions, or your present income, then you probably could be entrusted to properly carry out larger responsibilities.

But if you have not yet begun to learn to control and constructively guide even these little powers in your care, then how could God entrust you to handle far greater responsibilities in the Kingdom of God? If you are not faithful even in the use of your present income, who will entrust to your care the *true riches* and the great power of God?

Ask God for the understanding and wisdom to rightly use and direct the comparatively small powers, abilities and responsibilities that are now yours so you can be a faithful and productive servant of God.

Strive to be faithful over what God has already given you, so that one day Christ can say to you: "Well done, good and *faithful servant*; you have been faithful over a *little*, I will set you over *MUCH*" (Matt. 25:21, RSV).

This life is the training ground. We learn to rule by performing our responsibilities faithfully and by learning to rule over ourselves as we live the Christian way of life.

Preparing to rule in God's Kingdom begins with submission to His rule now. God will not save any person He does not govern. So learn God's laws. Study them. Think about them. Live by them. And with the power of God's Holy Spirit, grow in the very character of God by obeying Him and overcoming the temptations of the world and the influence of Satan the devil.

Seek God by drawing closer to Him in prayer and Bible study. *Change!* Grow spiritually. Continually

build the character of God until death, or until the moment Jesus Christ returns and instantly changes your weak, physical body into a powerful, sinless, *glorified spirit body!* (Phil. 3:20-21). Then you will be ready to rule with Christ—to fulfill your awesome destiny of helping to rule the earth and the universe beyond as a *member* of the Family of God!

It's a breathtaking, exciting, incredible calling! A glorious, wonderful future! Have you *begun* to qualify for it?

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—Tom Justus
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