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THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

The Official Newspaper of the Church of God International

"Put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13)

Winter, 2019

Heralding the Kingdom Of God

These are the Feast Days of the Lord

The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Ingathering, is a seven-day Festival beginning on the 15th day and continuing through the 21st day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:34).



by Bill Watson

I'm not sure how many of us recognize this fact, but the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles celebrates God's Kingdom, which illustrates humanity's destiny. This seven-day celebration, with an additional day attached to the end, discloses the great mystery on how God intends to solve mankind's problems—fairly. How blessed

are those who have eyes to see and ears to hear this.

Coming back from the Feast this year, as I began to unwind from the experience of this celebration at St. Petersburg, Florida, I couldn't help but to reflect on the happy and inspiring events and environment shared by all in attendance. It was a great time, and provided wonderful feelings of excitement, joy, edification, and appreciation of so much for all those observing this ultimate solution to ending this world's seemingly unfathomable challenges.

It's so sad and unfortunate the rest of the world does not recognize the value of this segment of God's holydays. And it really does go to make the point that if we don't make the effort, within the church, among our own ranks, and *remind ourselves* of the deep rich spiritual meaning of our destiny and God's Kingdom as pictured in this season—well, I'm afraid that we too, God's Church, will forget the *treasured* meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles as well!

Where Your Treasure Is, So Your Heart Will Be

Without a doubt, we as Christians are tempted, tested, and distracted from many venues throughout our lives all day long, 24/7, for 365 days a year. There are so many items competing for our time and attention that if we allow ourselves to live without boundaries, without disciplining our lives, then we too stand a good chance of wasting a lot of time and effort chasing after "nothingburgers." Solomon wrote: "Vanity of vanities, says the preacher; all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 12:8). The Hebrew word *hab-ale* simply means emptiness, something transitory, not lasting. He continues by saying: "And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the **whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man**" (Ecclesiastes 12:12–13). And let's not forget, that does indeed require time invested!

So, why is this important? "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). What we're being told here is, we *need to be long-term oriented*. Realize, all of this material world is temporary and is not long lasting—it's transitory (vanity). We must seek out the things not seen, which are eternal. That is where the

real value is (2 Corinthians 4:18). And the Feast of Tabernacles has the means to keep our mind focused on our destiny, our purpose—giving us an *impacting reminder* that we are but pilgrims passing through this matrix of time and space, looking for another country—one that is irreplaceable (Hebrews 11:13–16)! An eternal Kingdom that will remain forever and ever!

And the Feast is designed to help us keep ourselves on that track and remain focused, minimizing the distractions from encroaching on our minds and derailing us. Jesus told us to seek the Kingdom first (Matthew 6:33). Unquestionably, if we believe the Feast of Tabernacles is representing the Kingdom of God, metaphorically speaking,

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Open Church Policy

The Church of God International is an open church.

We have many people attending who are *new* in the faith. Some will not always keep each of God's laws as they should, and some will not believe everything we teach. We pray that they may be strengthened through the services we render and the examples we set as they come to a closer walk with their God. **We request that you be neither judgmental nor base your standard for obedience on what you see your brother do.** Christ is our standard, not weak and sinful men. Always remember that you will be judged for what *you* do, not what others do. Your job is to pray for them, set the right example, and please the Father in all that you do. Ω

— 2020 Holy Day Calendar —

New Testament Passover

April 7, 2020
(Observed at sundown)

Feast of Unleavened Bread

April 9–15, 2020

Pentecost

May 31, 2020

Feast of Trumpets

September 19, 2020

Day of Atonement

September 28, 2020

Feast of Tabernacles

October 3–9, 2020

Last Great Day

October 10, 2020

Holy days are observed beginning sundown the previous evening and end at sundown on the days listed. Passover is observed at sundown on the day listed.

Notice!

- It is the desire of the staff to publish *The International News* quarterly. We can do this only if *you*, the reader, help by submitting timely articles, reports, and pictures.
- With few exceptions, submissions should be from 800–1000 words in either .doc, docx, rtf, or .txt format.
- Submissions may be sent either to vancestinson@cgi.org or lloyd Cary@gmail.com or, preferably, to *both*.

DEADLINE for the *next* issue is
February 15, 2020.



We look forward to seeing you soon... *in print!*

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“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19–20).

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then it’s only logical for us to translate that scripture into a *mandate* for us to observe and participate in it—which thereby proves our desire for this *treasure* God is offering us.

Jesus spoke to this perspective and appealed for all of us to place priority on this pearl of great price. He went so far as to say we need to be *willing to sacrifice* for it, if it really means that much to us. Notice what He says concerning this. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:44–46).

He summarizes these parables by asking them if they understood these things, of which they confirmed they did. Upon this affirmation Jesus went onto say, “Therefore every scribe [the disciples being the scribes in this parable] instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which brings forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matthew 13:52).

These parables go to illustrate that Christ is explaining the information about the Kingdom of God as a *priceless pearl*, or a *treasure in a field*, and it goes without saying, upon recognizing this revealed mystery, we should be willing to do what it takes to *embrace and share it*. Notice what Paul said to the Corinthians: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels [our mortal lives], that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:6–7).

We have been given a priceless amount of knowledge that is for the purpose of glorifying God in our personal lives. And Paul characterizes it as a “treasure in earthen vessels,” which is this fleshy condition we find ourselves in for the time. And this is why in our 21st century society it becomes so important we exercise precautions to combat the influx of influences that are determined and designed to diminish our faith in Jesus Christ and what the Kingdom of God represents—especially since it is incumbent upon us to reflect, share, and treasure this knowledge in our lives for the glory of God!

Staying In The Light While Surrounded By Darkness

Admittedly, contending for the faith that was once delivered isn’t the easiest thing to do. As written in Jude (verse 3), this was an earnest (agonizing struggle, ongoing) endeavor to participate in—it was difficult to say the least! But we are expected to take those steps and guard against the pervasive anti-Christian forces we see growing around us in today’s world. Obviously, the *Feast of Tabernacles* is a valuable and incredible “tool” to implement—working into our lifestyles as a “safeguarding factor” and *becoming a tradition that reminds us, our families, and friends* of our ultimate goal in life. It really should be an opportunity we take advantage of and use for all it can provide to further empower us for “shouldering” our Christian responsibility!

The reason this would appear to be so obvious is because the Feast should be *filled* with presentations that remind us of our purpose—the resurrection, God’s Kingdom, and helping Christ repair the earth. Subjects like what will the Kingdom of God be like, or ruling with Christ for 1000 years—these are the Feast messages that inspire and give us the motivational *vision*. Topics that cover and remind us of our temporary state, such as why we dwell in booths—temporary dwellings—or as mentioned, living in earthen vessels and how that translates into a glorious spirit empowered body, ruling and reigning with Christ in that Kingdom as kings and priests—these are the topics that put our lives into the proper perspectives that God hopes we will retain, and gives us the purpose to deal with what confronts us in this life.

These types of subjects all go to supporting the fact that the *Feast puts this life into the proper relationship* we should have with our God and Savior, and the world in which we live. It illustrates just how temporary we are in this physical state of *mortal* flesh and that we are just sojourners, as previously mentioned, pilgrims just passing through this three dimensional world, looking for another country where God will have fixed everything and the restitution of all things will be accomplished—while we prepare for the rest of the dead to be raised and readied to meet the Father who ultimately comes to dwell with mankind in the New Heaven and New Earth.

Yes, the Feast is a time when all of these subjects are revisited and shared with those who live in the light with the *treasured knowledge* that provides the ultimate Jubilee—freedom from death and entry into eternal life. WOW!!

What a future we have, and how *valuable* it is to observe the Feast of Tabernacles, knowing we will hear these subjects that reinforce our faith, and like a laser beam, focus our minds on the vision of our destiny. There is *great value* in attending all eight days, uninterrupted, since this is a “pilgrimage feast,” designed for us to leave our physical domiciles behind and all they represent and take the action, the initiative, to aspire for the spiritual food, prepared to help us understand this treasured knowledge in clearer, more cogent fashion. Why? Because this objective—entrance into the Kingdom of God as an immortal—is the ultimate reason for your life! It is the *only* real and lasting treasure; and attending the Feast is a small reflection along the way that illustrates the proof of our commitment—a barometer for God, if you will—to presently measure our sacrifice for that treasure in the field, or that pearl of great price! What’s in *your* heart? Where is *your* treasure? Ω

Florida Feast Photos



Blessing of the Children



Church Service



Grilling

Canada's Collingwood Feast, 2019

Feast 2019 – Collingwood, Ontario

When I asked a young man at the end of this year's Feast where he was hoping to go for next year's Feast, he pun-fully replied, "I don't know, I don't have 2020 vision." While this brought a smile to my face (even more so because he actually does have 20/20 vision), it also caused me to ponder about our Feast experience. Why do we keep the Feast? What are my expectations of myself coming out of the Feast? How will this week-long respite help us collectively going forward? What is our 2020 Vision when looking forward to next year?

So, how was our experience in Collingwood for this year's Feast in 2019? For the fourth year in a row, this picturesque town provided the backdrop for our Canadian Feast site. The New England-like setting, replete with beautiful fall colours, mostly sunny skies, and cool autumn air welcomed over 140 brethren throughout the eight-day Festival. With a high attendance of 130, the theme of the Feast, "That Others May Live," was based on the motto of the *Canadian Armed Forces Search and Rescue Unit*.

This year's visiting elder, Pastor Mike James, opened the Feast and joined Pastors Adrian Davis and Murray Palmatier and other speakers to provide a menu of spiritual food in messages and Bible Studies that re-focused the engaged group on preparing themselves to serve the needs of others. "That Others May Live" is an adage that reminds us that while we are preparing to be kings and priests for Christ, we do so for the benefit of others, not ourselves, both now and preparing for the Millenium and Kingdom of God. Topics included:

- Prophetic looks into the future at what God's covenant people will face, and how the firstfruits can be prepared to endure and serve the needs of others.
- Introspective looks at improving our abilities to connect with people so that we might have healthier relationships in the Body of Christ, and better communicate the Gospel on a personal level.
- Doctrinal studies into topics covering the covenant people of God, forgiveness, marriage, freedom from sin, and the end of death—all pointing to the coming Kingdom of God.

In addition to regular services, programs for our *Sparks*, *Ignite*, and *Infuse* groups welcomed nearly a dozen children and a combined 20 teens and young adults. On three days, our children joined volunteers from our *Infuse* program for prepared Bible Story time. The *Ignite/Infuse* group gathered three times to discuss the progression from Knowledge to Understanding to Wisdom against the framework of the Proverbs. Their service culminated on Youth Day when each of the groups supplied beautiful special choir music along with serving in other areas before and during the service.

A meet-and-greet activity after the first holyday was well attended and helped kick off the fellowship portion of the Feast in grand fashion. The team building provided a lot of laughs and lessons to consider in how we communicate with each other. Later in the Feast, evenings of line dancing and *Infuse*-planned karaoke brought the family together for more fun! Many took advantage of a very sunny Sunday before the Feast ended to get outdoors at a local farm that included a corn maze and other fun activities.

Comments from brethren during a Q&A session on the final day helped drive home the lessons we learned together. The levels of unity, service, love, and sacrifice that were displayed throughout the Feast had a profound impact on both our local members and guest brethren from other parts of the country.

The Feast typically sped by, but not without a clear mandate to go back to our congregations, families and lives to double-down on our efforts to pay forward the gifts of truth, grace and forgiveness that we had been blessed with, *that others may live!* Living out these lessons this next year will ensure that our vision is, indeed, 20/20!

Ω

Submitted by Murray Palmatier

Collingwood Feast Report, 2019

A Radically Spiritual Feast of Tabernacles

God has a way of wrapping the most extravagant gifts in the most plain and ordinary-looking wrapping. The Feast in Collingwood this year demonstrated just that.

"That Others May Live" was the chosen theme for this Feast site—and it shone through every message, every activity, and every interaction throughout the Festival. This theme served as a very important reminder that our journey into the Kingdom of God is not only about us—to save our own skins—but it is about doing everything in our power to help others arrive there also. In such a godless, selfish generation, we absolutely need to be reminded in no small amount that Christ has called us to lay down our very lives for others if necessary, just as He did.

Perhaps the most beautiful thing to witness this Feast was the way the youth exemplified spiritual maturity in their humble attitudes, leadership, cooperation, and above all, an undeniable willingness to serve and give of themselves to make sure everyone who attended felt welcome and spiritually nourished.

Being in the presence of such selfless brethren personally inspired me to a whole new level of relationship with God, and to actively look for ways I can serve and put the needs of others before my own. This *actually* was my best Feast ever. Thank you to all who served to put it together.

Ω

Submitted by Kimberly Brathwaite, CGI Toronto

Collingwood 2019 Feast Pics



To view our full file of 880 official pictures from the Collingwood Feast, please visit: Murray Palmatier
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/Ybx8FMVwRB53uaZG9>

Myrtle Beach Feast Report

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, 2019

What a joy it was to be back in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, for the Feast of Tabernacles 2019! With comfortable temperatures, mostly sunny days, and the ever-present backdrop of the Atlantic Ocean, we had a daily reminder of the tremendous power and perfect creation of God.

As is our tradition, we welcomed the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles at sunset, with amazing fellowship. Approximately 100 showed up to share finger foods and beverages, and most importantly, to share hugs, laughter, and conversation. We greeted many old friends as we welcomed many new ones. As the evening concluded, we looked forward to all that was ahead of us for the next, very precious, eight days.

Our first day of services, we had a high attendance of over 200 brethren. As the days progressed, we averaged a daily attendance of approximately 175 brothers and sisters in Christ. Throughout the Feast, we served 225 brethren. We had a variety of speakers, whose messages were both inspiring and uplifting to all who were there. We enjoyed the musical talents of several of our brethren as they served us all by sharing their gifts with special music during services. I cannot fail to mention the beauty of the congregational singing as we were led by our worship leaders and accompanied by very dedicated pianists each day.

We were very happy to offer daily classes and sessions for all our youth. Our *Sparks*, children ages three to 12, were presented daily lessons by our very dedicated ladies who choose to serve our children each year. *Ignite*, our teens, had a series of interactive presentations made by a different individual, or two, each day. *Infuse* also had daily presentations by different individuals. Our theme for *Ignite* and *Infuse* was, “When All Else Fails,” focusing on our need to turn to God, the knowledge He is always there for us.

On Youth Day, all these young people served us in many capacities, taking over many of the responsibilities for that day, inspiring us all with their abilities to serve and lead. Our youth choir was such a pleasure to watch and to hear; the innocence of our children as they happily, joyfully, gave it their all as they sang for us. Another important part of Youth Day is the Blessing of the Children, such a touching and meaningful experience to witness a young child receive God’s blessing.

Another very meaningful and emotional experience is to be present for a baptism, the moment an individual becomes new in Christ and becomes a part of the body. We had one such special moment this year.

We are always very blessed at Myrtle Beach to have several generations represented in our church family, and as is our tradition, we have several activities for all ages. Our Senior Luncheon is always a highlight, simply a time for fellowship over a good meal, and this year was no different. The Women’s Luncheon is an opportunity for the ladies to get together and come to know one another better. This year our Atlanta ladies made it extra special as they presented gift bags and an ice breaker that focused on our blessings. The Family Dance is a chance for all of us to get together and enjoy the music of our own Festival band, as we enjoy food, fellowship, and a little dancing. The Family Fun Show offers yet another opportunity for us all to be together as we enjoy the talents of our brother and sisters, young and old(er). As I write about the Fun Show, I must mention the Ice Cream Social which kicks off the Fun Show. The Ice Cream Social is one of the events hosted by *Infuse*. Other events hosted by *Infuse*, our young adult program, are a Parents Night Out/Children’s Carnival, as well as the Family Game Day and Cook-In. Parents Night Out gives parents an opportunity to have a couple of hours to enjoy a little time together while their children are being cared for and having a lot of fun at the Carnival. The Game Day and Cook-In this year was in place of the usual Beach Volleyball and Cook-Out. Last, but certainly not least, *Ignite* chose to have a Beach Party for their activity. Lots of pizza, sand, and water made for a very fun afternoon! All of these events are filled with lots of fun, making memories to carry us through until next year.

As we finally came to the Last Great Day, another wonderful service, we held on to each moment as long as we could, taking it all in. The moment we began to say our goodbye’s, we began to look ahead to next year, in Myrtle Beach. God be with you ‘til we meet again... Ω

Submitted by Pam Nolen

More Words About the Word—Voices From Yesteryear...

- When you examine the Word of God, the Word of God examines you. ~ Jack Wellman
- The less we read the Word of God, the less we desire to read it, and the less we pray, the less we desire to pray. ~ George Mueller
- Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgment, hating what He hates, loving what He loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. ~ J. C. Ryle
- I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy who drives the plough to know more of the scriptures than you do. ~ William Tyndale
- The idea of *Sola Scriptura* is that there is only one written source of divine revelation, which can never be placed on a parallel status with confessional statements, creeds, or the traditions of the church. Scripture alone has the authority to bind the conscience precisely because only Scripture is the written revelation of almighty God. ~ R. C. Sproul
- When attempts are made by Christians to combine psychology with the teachings of Scripture, it is, wittingly or unwittingly, the addition of “a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12) and a variation of the “Yea, hath God said...?” dialogue, resulting in the corruption of God's Word. ~ T.A. McMahon
- The world changes—circumstances change, we change, but God’s Word never changes. ~ Warren Wiersbe
- The man who thinks he can know the Word of God by mere intellectual study is greatly deceived. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned. ~ Samuel Chadwick
- Imagine if we started raising generations of children who stood uncompromisingly on the Word of God, knew how to defend the Christian faith, could answer the skeptical questions of this age, and had a fervor to share the Gospel from the authority of God’s Word with whomever they met! This could change the world. ~ Ken Ham
- The Word of God is the breath of God. ~ Woodrow Kroll
- Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen. ~ Martin Luther
- The only "Scripture" most of today's uncertain souls know is an emasculated, paraphrased “Bible,” rewritten to eliminate conviction of sin and catering to the rebellion of those who insist upon having the Gospel modified to suit their unbelief. God will not accommodate their rebellion! ~ Dave Hunt
- I speak as a man of the world to men of the world; and I say to you, Search the Scriptures! The Bible is the book of all others, to be read at all ages, and in all conditions of human life; not to be read once or twice or thrice through, and then laid aside, but to be read in small portions of one or two chapters every day, and never to be intermitted, unless by some overruling necessity. ~ John Quincy Adams
- The Bible is worth all other books which have ever been printed. ~ Patrick Henry

CGI Jamaica Feast of Tabernacles 2019



Pastor Horane Smith (far left) and Pastor George Ramocan (center) standing with the newly baptized members.

The Feast of Tabernacles was held in Runaway Bay, St. Ann this year. At its peak, had 348 attendees and ended on a high with five new converts being baptized on the morning of the Last Great Day.

This year the Church of God returned to the site of the first Feast of Tabernacles held in Jamaica in 1975, by the then *Worldwide Church of God*.

The Opening Night began with a rousing round of hymns and choruses to the Lord Almighty. The Jamaican motto “Out of Many, One People” was palpable, as there were guests from all around the world, which included persons from the Toronto, Canada congregation, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, as well as Africa. Of all the guests from around the world, the Canadian brethren had the largest group of 40 persons. They were given a warm Jamaican welcome along with the participating local congregations: May Pen, Maroon Town, Ocho Rios, and Kingston.

Pastor George Ramocan delivered the opening address where he reminded the church of the significance of the Feast of Tabernacles. This was followed by a resumption of songs of praise as the scores of brethren departed the auditorium of the Holiday Haven Resort to their temporary abodes in high spirits, to return for praise, worship, and fellowship on the First Day of Feast of Tabernacles.

The spirit of love and unity circulated in the air, as EVERYONE was greeted warmly each day by the Welcome Ambassadors and helped to available seats by the ushering team. The praise and worship session was as vibrant as ever, as Deacon Hendricks and the praise team went through a catalogue of melodic song selections. Pastor Horane Smith, visiting from Canada, reminded us (in case we had forgotten) that this body has to go, the world is suffering and can only be saved when Jesus Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God.

On Day Two, I (Stephen Scale) challenged the church to *AIM* (Attitude, Influence, Ministry) for rulership in the Kingdom of God. In fact, the rich variety of sermons and sermonettes by all the speakers over the eight days brought teaching, inspiration, and transformation. *Derrick Allwood, Ricardo Hall, Christopher Hendricks, Eliud Ramocan* all gave sermons, while *Henry Small, Winston Samuels, Jeremy McKenzie, Jordan McKenzie, Jonah Lewis, and Sean Goldburn* all gave sermonettes.

There was everything! Inspirational songs, poems and dances were offered up in honor to the Lord. Even the youths were greatly involved.

The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the wedding supper of the Lamb. It was therefore fitting that during the Feast there was a celebration of the *Findlay's* 25th wedding anniversary, vow renewal, and the induction of the newest marriages for 2019 within the CGI: *Sadiq and Danea Parsons, Jordi and Denisha Smith, Jeremy and Rosan McKenzie, and Ray St. Michael and Stephanie Williams*. The social events were remarkable. Jamaica Night has always been a hit with its live entertainment by a professional mento band, the Jamaican cuisine, games and prizes. This year was to be no different, but it was.

This year's Jamaica Night saw the addition of the inaugural Sports Day Cheerleading competition! Where Judah was victorious. *House of Israel's Cheerleading Team*.

Not to be outdone was the Family Fun Show, which had live entertainment by acrobatic dancers who wowed us with juggling and balancing every object imaginable (bottles, chairs, and even machete) on their noses. Jamaica is renowned for its beautiful beaches. The Family's beach trip to Puerto Seco Beach gave everyone a chance to experience.

The Feast had various parties for the various ministries; Singles party (COSAC), the PALM (Peace and Love in Marriages) cocktail party and various Youths events such as the Youth's “Night-out” and Pool party, as well as the Sabbath School's house parties.

On completion of the Sports Day events, which took a span over three days, the defending champion Israel lost their reign to Judah who won with 391.5 points, 5.3 more points than Israel. Looks like fourth time was a charm for House of Judah!

Pastor Horane Smith hosted the Friday night Bible Study, where he focused on “The Historical Jesus” where he set out to prove the existence of Jesus without using the Bible, and that he did! The Bible study was edifying to all present. The Bible study was followed by an inexpressibly powerful prayer meeting. Prayer after prayer were offered up for various concerns.

The Feast of Tabernacles represents a time when the vast majority of mankind will hear the true gospel about the Kingdom of God for the first time. In this spirit, the Church of God embarked on an evangelism outreach during the Feast, where members were given flyers and invitations to distribute in neighboring communities, inviting persons to visit services on the 7th day of the Feast where we held a campaign around the topic “Should Christians Keep the Feast of Tabernacles?” Pastor George Ramocan delivered the message, and the 19 visitors who attended the campaign specifically, shared that they were well informed and considered visiting the CGI regular Sabbath services.



Model of the tabernacle in Timna Valley Park, Israel

The annual Herbert W. Armstrong Memorial Speaking Competition was nothing short of electrifying. Four speakers: Rosan McKenzie, Ray-St. Michael Williams, Jonah Lewis, and Sean Goldburn took on the challenge to defend the church's position on the topic “It is NOT mandatory to use the Hebrew sacred names of the Father and the Son.” Speaker after speaker explicated their points in this keenly contested apologetic battle. The three judges were unanimous in their results which had Ray-St. Michael Williams declared as the winner of the 2019 Herbert W. Armstrong Memorial Speaking Competition. Sometimes, the third time is the charm!

The Last Great Day culminated with the baptism and laying on of hands of five new members to the body of Christ, most of whom were young adults, hungry for the Word, turning their backs against the world to follow Jesus Christ. Pastor Ramocan closed the Feast with a themed message of *Falling Away*, warning us that the Last Great Day does not only represent the hope for persons who have never heard the Gospel, but also judgement for those who heard but fell away.

Almost everyone would agree, the Feast of Tabernacles 2019 was a resounding success! This was due in no small part to the spiritual warfare fought “in the engine room” by the few faithful prayer warriors who diligently met on the beach every morning from the second day onwards, to pray under the theme “Power Up With Prayer.”

The old cliché, “This was the best Feast ever” was a fitting description as persons shared that they were blessed by the messages, pleased that we were all close in proximity to each other and sharing in fellowship. Everyone is looking forward to Feast of Tabernacles 2020. See you soon, Runaway Bay.

To God be the Glory!

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*Submitted by Stephen Scale (Deacon)
Church of God International—Kingston, Jamaica*

Editors note: The Jamaica Feast reports originally contained many beautiful color photographs of people, places, and events. However, the reports were received in .pdf form with the photos imbedded within the reports and the editor was unable to work with or edit them. Our deepest apologies.



by Lloyd W. Cary

Q — You appear to be quite out of step regarding Christmas. Doesn’t Christmas celebrate the birth of Christ? Christmas traditions have been around for a long time. It feels so right. Shopping for our loved ones can’t be wrong, can it? Why do you shun Christmas? ~ *Anonymous*.

A — Thank you for your recent query. Jesus Christ said: “The truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Free from what? Is Christmas based on truth? If so, we can benefit from its celebration. But if not, it will become a burden to us. We need to prove what we think we know! Does the Christmas season bring a feeling of freedom, or is there a feeling of relief when it is over? Most often, the Christmas customs rule over us, predetermining our behavior. Indeed, the Christmas syndrome enslaves millions with nerve-jangling hustle, bustle, and deadlines—not to mention the burden of credit card debt!

Regarding Christmas shopping, you’ve undoubtedly been there, done that. You’ve been jostled by the crowds that pack nearly every department store. For the 500th time in recent weeks you’ve probably heard over the loudspeakers the lilting tune of “Jingle Bells.” It goes well with the cash registers ringing up sales. Multiple Santa Clauses donning red suits and white beards, bellowing jolly “Ho, Ho’s,” are hired to draw children to sit on their laps while parents with dwindling wallets and purses look on gleefully.

“Christmas,” wrote George Bernard Shaw in 1897, “is forced on a reluctant and disgusted nation by the shopkeepers and the press.” If that was true back then, how much more is it applicable today! Clearly, much ungodly conduct accompanies the holiday season. More than any other time of year, the Christmas season is laden with drunken, rowdy behavior, increased crime, suicides, and family breakup. One wonders, “How and why does Christmas produce such excesses of bad conduct?” Fundamentally, because it is unchristian and pagan. Can you imagine Christ being pleased with these things? It seems everyone wants to get out of doing what God *says*.

The word “Christmas” does not appear in your Bible because there was no such celebration among Jesus’ early disciples.

Indeed, the long tentacles of Christmas have spread around the world. It is celebrated in many, many countries, even those that don’t profess Christianity. Not only has it spread around the world, it also reaches far back into antiquity.

We’ve frequently heard the hue and cry, “Put Christ back in Christmas!” parroted by many who sincerely wish to honor Christ Jesus on the anniversary of His birth. They fail to realize that Christ was never in Christmas to begin with! The Puritan Church of England not only ignored Christmas; they also persecuted any unregenerate souls who dared to keep it in secret! In early New England, Christmas celebrations were forbidden by law because the Puritans were offended by the shocking non-Christian origins of its customs and traditions.

It is a historic fact that both ancient Romans and Greeks celebrated the birth of the unconquerable sun on December 25. The practice traces back to ancient Babylon. Nimrod was deified as the “sun-god.” When cut down by his enemies, he was represented by a log, and when supposedly reborn, he was symbolized by an evergreen tree. After documenting this, Dr. Alexander Hislop’s *The Two Babylons*, page 98, states: “Now the Yule Log is the dead stock of Nimrod, deified as the sun-god, but cut down by his enemies; the Christmas-tree is Nimrod redivivus [revived]—the slain god come to life again.” The log was burned on the eve of December 24; by the next morning it had been replaced by an evergreen tree. Dr. Hislop documents the pagan origins of the other customs surrounding Christmas—the candles, the feasting, the wassail bowl, the mistletoe, the giving of gifts, and others (See *The Two Babylons*, pp. 91–103).

Do Origins Really Matter?

The reason for Christmas is assumed to be Jesus’ birthday. However, Jesus was not born on December 25. He was born in the fall when shepherds were with their flocks out in the open fields. The apostolic Christians did not celebrate His birth, but were commanded to memorialize His death by the Christian Passover, which He instituted on the night of His betrayal. “This do,” He commanded, “in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19,20).

Actually, the Bible specifies no date for Jesus’ birth, and there is no record that Jesus Himself spoke of it, much less directed that it be celebrated. Every major encyclopedia tells us that December 25 is not Christian but

A Shocking Admission!

“The use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints, and ornamented on occasions with branches of trees; incense, lamps, and candles; votive offerings on recovery from illness; holy water; asylums; holy days and seasons, use of calendars, processions, blessings on the fields, sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure... turning to the East, images at a later date, perhaps the ecclesiastical chant, and the Kyrie Eleison, **are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church.**” (*Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, p. 359). The author, John Henry Newman, was appointed a cardinal by Pope Leo III in 1879.

pagan, that it was the birthday of Mithras, a false messiah, long before Christ. They tell us, as does *The Encyclopedia Americana*, “most of the customs now associated with Christmas were not originally Christmas customs but rather were pre-Christian and non-Christian customs taken up by the Christian church.”

Protestants get their Christmas customs from the Catholics. The Catholics got them from ancient Rome. British Cardinal Newman admitted that the Catholic Church did “transmute the very instruments and appendages of demon-worship to an evangelical use” and that much of his church’s customs “are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church” (Cardinal John Henry Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, pages 351–353).

From the Romans, the Christmas practices reach back through Greece, Persia, Egypt, Assyria, and finally to ancient Babylon and Nimrod, their so-called “sun-god.”

Christmas has nothing to do with Christ! It is saturated with paganism and demonism. Christmas survives and spreads because of hand-me-down custom and commercialism. More and more, Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas might more accurately be labeled as “Saint Gimme.” Basically, the spirit of Christmas promotes the spirit not of love, but of selfishness.

The clergy are well aware of the pagan origins of Christmas, yet strangely—even though they *know* that Christmas is simply a pagan festival dressed up with some Christian names—they heartily encourage the celebration.

To “buck the system” would result in loss of influence, position, power, and income. This should not really surprise us, seeing that most have drifted far from the Bible.

No matter how well meaning the intentions, men cannot make a pagan holiday and pagan customs “Christian” by whitewashing them with Christ’s name. Festivals honoring the sun, moon, or other heavenly bodies deny the true God. The scriptural principle is clear: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel” (2 Corinthians 6:14–15)?

If you have not already done so, be sure to request our free publications, *Facts You Should Know About Christmas* and *Is Christmas Christian?* If you have access to a computer, please visit our web site at www.cgi.org where you can download many more booklets and brochures. Also, be sure to tune in to *The Armor Of God* television program.

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Incidentally, What About New Year’s?
Roots of the New Year’s Celebration

“The New Year’s holiday originates with a number of pagan holidays from ancient Rome. The first of January was a holiday dedicated to the pagan god Janus, and the name of the month comes from his name. Images of Janus had two faces on opposite sides, which meant that he saw both the past and the present. There was a saying that whoever greeted January 1 with fun, laughter, and plenty would pass the entire year in happiness and well-being. The very same superstition accompanies the celebrating of the new year for many of our compatriots . . . During certain pagan holidays, people would directly bring sacrifices to an idol. Some were notorious for immoral orgies, adultery, and fornication. On other occasions, for example during the Janus holiday, there were excesses in eating and drinking, drunkenness, and every sort of uncleanness that accompanies them. If we remember how we ourselves in times past have celebrated New Year’s, then we must admit that all of us have participated in this pagan celebration.”—*Georgian newspaper*, authors Gopal Sengupta and Keya Mukherjee.

“Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them” (Jeremiah 10:2–5).

CGI Philippines 2019 Feast Report



Once again, the Philippine brethren from the Malolos, Manila, Alabang, Naga, Masbate, Sagay, and Tacloban local churches travelled to Tagaytay City to joyfully celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. We were joined by visitors from the UK and U.S. in the celebration. On the first day of the Feast, 201 adults and 23 children were present, and on the Last Great Day, 237 adults and 23 children. The celebration certainly goes in our record books as the best Feast ever for us! Here's why:

Bayanihan Night

Although we had only one *bayanihan* night this year (as compared to last year's two), it felt as if we had prepared for more than two nights' worth of food. All the local congregations pitched in at least three viands in addition to desserts and fruits of different varieties, making the menu as varied as it can be. Of course, it goes without saying, everything was fabulously delicious. The menu of our *bayanihan* night was made more memorable with our customary roasted calf. What can we say? To say the least, everyone was satisfied with this abundant blessing. Drinks were also overflowing and added zest to the joyous, festive atmosphere. But what made this night more memorable was the smooth execution of months' long preparation for it. The brethren pitched in to help in the hall preparation, cooking, and clean-up of the venue. The spirit of cooperation was certainly something that made it a success. The smile and joy felt by everyone certainly was a testament to its huge success.

Services

Now, as great as the physical food and drinks were, the real highlight of the Feast came from the beautiful, wonderful, inspiring, awesome, powerful messages delivered during the services by our ministers (*Winston Co, William Co, Mel Arcinas* at the Tagaytay Feast site; *Eli Mellomida* at Cebu City; *Rene Corpuz* at Kiara and *Ed Rodrigo* at Iloilo City). As is our experience and observation, the messages delivered during the Feast days of God are definitely on a class of their own. The Feast of Tabernacles until the Last Great Day afforded us a veritable feast on the words of God. And the words of our Lord Himself concerning this comes to mind in Matthew 4:4 (NIV): "Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" This Feast highlights this truism. Many biblical truths were expounded. We all gained a lot of insights into some familiar passages that are read during Sabbath services. It was amazing learning these things. And it is also noteworthy to mention that all of the services were very well attended. It was a beautiful sight to behold. And we can be sure God is more than happy to see that.

A key theme that emerged from the messages is the reminder of our ultimate destinies, that of becoming children of God, that eventually, we will all become part of the God family. As such, today, we are enjoined to focus on that goal, noting that we are just tabernacling in this earthly bodies and looking forward to the eventual fulfillment of that destiny. We have a race marked out for us and we should finish it, no matter what. A noteworthy and inspiring message centered on the role of the saints during the Millenium, that we will be a royal priesthood, with Christ as our High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

The services were complemented with great, inspiring, beautifully rendered special music sang by the Alabang, Malolos, Naga local church choirs, by two great quartet groups, the youth choir, seniors' choir, and children's choir (it seems everyone here sings). On the high days, the Alabang and combined Manila/Malolos/Alabang/Naga/Masbate choirs

gave opening songs that set the tone for everyone to join and sing their hearts out during the hymn singing.

Activities For Everyone

During the Feast, separate days were allotted for the elderly, the youth and singles, and the children. So you see, we have covered everyone. Various activities were lined up for them to make it truly memorable, not just for them, but for everyone. A program for the elderly among us were made after a lunch together at the Balay Dako restaurant. They gamely participated in the fun activities prepared for them. It was also noteworthy that the youth and singles of the church actively participated in an enjoyable afternoon replete with games designed to familiarize themselves with the book of Genesis. The afternoon's activity was capped with the different teams showing off their team cheers to the delight and amusement of everyone. The children of the members also had an afternoon full of fun and excitement as they were treated to a children's show featuring the creation account and lots of local games in which they actively participated. Hopefully, all of these activities raised the interest of the youth and the children as well, to read and study the Bible. It is in the best interest of everyone to nurture the young ones according to the Word of God.

Couples Night

Another highlight of this year's Feast was the Couple's Night held at the posh Twin Lakes Hotel also in Tagaytay City. The hotel offers a majestic view of the famous Taal Lake and a serene landscape. The event was a strictly formal event (black tie attire for the men and long gown for the ladies). It was a wonderful sight to behold as everyone showed up in their best attires. As expected, the brethren took the time to take pictures of themselves amidst the truly elegant setting. But the night belonged to the 16 married couples who participated in the affirmation of their solemn marriage vows made before God. Some of those who participated were married more than 50 years, the longest having 59 years of marriage. As the 16 couples made their way through the procession, many choked up with tears of joy seeing marriages that last. If at all, it is a testament to love standing the test of time, of relationships growing stronger as the years go by. Through ups or downs, through sickness or good health, through thick or thin, for richer or poorer, they have remained true to their marriage vows, to the one they swore to love and to the One who blessed that union. And everyone was edified by it.

Other Feast Sites, Baptisms

What we have described thus far are the events at the Tagaytay Feast site. However, we can be sure that these same joys and wonders of Feast keeping were experienced as well in other Feast sites: Cebu City; Kiara, Bukidnon and Iloilo City. A good number of the brethren attending the Manila and Alabang local churches decided to celebrate with them and were certainly welcomed by the brethren there. Attendance to the Cebu site was at 70 adults, 27 teens/children; Iloilo at 31 adults, five children and Kiara, 38 adults and 19 children. If we are to combine these with the Tagaytay figure of 224, we all had 414 attendees (adults, teens, and children).

There were 11 baptisms during the Feast (nine in Tagaytay and two in Cebu). Before the Feast, six were baptized in Cebu on October 5th. This certainly gave added reason for the joyful celebration. Truly, we are being blessed more than we can imagine as God gives the increase in those whom He is calling, to be part of the firstfruits.

Everyone's Participation = The Best Feast Ever!

The Christian Overcomer

The Christian life is overcoming continually thanking and praising God in the midst of trials and afflictions always having the hope God will provide a way out of the darkest tunnels we sometimes have to pass through the Scriptures prove Jesus is the way, the truth, and the light our beacon of hope in the tribulations part and parcel of this evil world God knows all our sufferings and can count all our tears and throughout our trials in this mundane human existence also provide successes and happy memories that will help us surpass our light afflictions until the time comes the Saviour would have finally arrived to establish God’s perfect Kingdom on Earth and true happiness for all humans will prevail God’s righteous judgments and blessings will overcome mankind and all human sorrows and travails will cease.

Submitted by Michelle Algarra

Continued from page 8

So much has happened during this year’s Feast that we could only but treasure them in our hearts. It was all made possible by everyone’s participation and by the great teamwork made behind the scenes by the various Festival Committees and by the generous sponsors. To them goes special credits and thanks. But most of all, we thank God Almighty for making all of these possible by His manifold, generous blessings upon us all.

And when it was time to say goodbye, it was with a heavy heart that we did so, much more so, after the customary video showing, highlighting events of the Feast. We all relived those memories once more. But, as we always say, here’s looking forward to next year’s Feast until its final realization when God’s Kingdom is set up on this earth. Till then, we declare “This was the best Feast ever!” Ω

Submitted by Ferdie S. Padilla for CGI Philippines

Time Is a Gift— It Is Your Life

by Michelle Algarra



Michelle Algarra

The greatest blessing or “wealth” God gave human beings is time. No matter our problems, trials, or difficulties, each new day God gives us is worth a million dollars, figuratively speaking. It is the prime responsibility of Christians to be fruitful and productive, and lead successful lives by making the most of this brief human existence.

The aforementioned statement is the reason why the Bible considers sloth, or laziness, and sluggishness, sins. Wasting time is equivalent to wasting so much untold hours which should be better spent on productive labor, or activity. But the term “productive” must also be qualified. Does growing old necessarily mean we must gradually become “more intelligent” or “richer materially” as each year passes? How about measuring one’s age based on psychological growth and spiritual maturity?

A common dilemma faced by individual Christians is determining whether there is corresponding growth in terms of maturity appropriate to one’s chronological age. Even senior citizens sometimes believe their “mental age” is only on the same level as that of young adults.

A minister in the church said that the most important consideration is not how one used one’s life for self-improvement, but in doing good deeds or helping others. It is the responsibility of Christians to strive hard to make use of all the talents and skills that God gave us, and utilize them in helping others, and for the growth of the church, and ultimately to glorify God. By means of this, one also engages in productive labor or activity to enhance one’s self.

Just as tithing leads to blessings from God for sufficient material sustenance, investing in productive labor or activity also brings corresponding profit. The law on sowing and reaping always works—the effort one exerts or how one has striven hard to reach one’s goals will determine the results. Synergy presupposes that the equivalent value of incremental results is of greater worth than the total sum of these “parts.” In varying degrees, these efforts are discerned and rewarded by God, no matter the hindrances.

There are overcomers who, despite debilitating physical and psychological illnesses, for example, are still able to accomplish great feats. They do not consider their disabilities as hindrances, but rather as incentives to strive even harder to obtain coveted rewards in terms of growth or improvement.

This is the case in whatever pursuit, whatever creative activity or endeavour one chooses to undertake, and even the vocation one decides to dedicate one’s self to.

The church teaches that the best way to make use of one’s time is through the basic essentials of devouring spiritual food—communion with God through daily prayer, Bible reading, and the most difficult task of Christians, which is the application of God’s commandments in one’s life.

In one’s spiritual walk, growth is determined in terms of learning to overcome weaknesses like bad habits and addictions, personality defects, and character deficiencies. Mistakes, grievous though they may be, can be a valuable resource for providing one with wisdom and proper judgment, especially when confronted with the same tests or predicaments in the future.

Always be thankful for the gift of time, temporary though human life may be. Invest in eternity, which is endless, infinite, unending. Human life, with its setbacks and difficulties, is only a brief period of testing for the eternity that lays ahead, and discovery of the endless expanse of the universe and other creative undertakings God has in store for the human souls He created. Ω

Scriptural References:

“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Revelation 22:12–13).

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).



The Kingdom Coming—But How?

by Mike James



Mike James

We have just come through another fall holiday season where we focused on the future Kingdom of God coming to this earth. The primary goal of all Christians is to enter into that Kingdom. As Christians, our number one concern is living a life that emulates Jesus, but Scripture does tell us to watch (Luke 21:34–36; 1 Thessalonians 5:6). So there is nothing wrong with watching world events and having an awareness of when the end might come so we are not caught off guard. We can't know the day or hour of the end (Mark 13:32), but there will be signs and omens that the end is near (Matthew 24).

The purpose of this article is to offer some speculation on some trends playing out now and how they MIGHT have some bearing on how the world is heading toward the future Kingdom. Over the years, the Church has speculated about the importance of the United States and British Commonwealth nations in end time scenarios. Speculation has centered on the idea that the United States and British Commonwealth nations are modern day Israel in some ways. The theory [to learn more, order Bill Watson's CD series on 1) *The Biblical Origins of the United States and British Commonwealth*; and 2) *Evidence the USA and Great Britain is Modern Day Israel*] states some of those descendants from the lost tribes of Israel settled in the United Kingdom and later America. The theory states that the blessings promised to ancient Israel through Abraham and Moses (Genesis 17:19; Deuteronomy 28) would be passed on to their modern day descendants (Galatians 3:29; Ephesians 3:6)---the United States and the United Kingdom and Commonwealth nations.

Because ancient Israel and Judah did not stay faithful to God, they were destroyed. Some believe this same fate will befall the U.S. and the U.K. and Commonwealth nations because they are moving away from the true God (YHWH). Whether you agree with this scenario or not, there is no doubt the United States and the British Commonwealth nations are primarily Christian nations. In fact, the United States has more Christians than any other nation on earth. We also have more evangelists taking the message of the Bible and Jesus to the world than any other nation. And in scriptures like Galatians 3:29, we learn that Christians are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise(s) made by God. Those promises not only included blessings for obedience, but cursings for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28). In other words, Christianity today, with its leadership mantle on the United States, could be understood as modern day Israel. The origin of our country and its founding documents are unique and Christian at their core. We could then look at the United States today as a type of modern day Israel. But what does the Bible say about Israel at the end time? It is not a powerful player in the end time scenario. So what happens? Some speculate as the United States becomes more and more secular, we will become less and less powerful in the world. When the United States is no longer a major power, perhaps the kings of the North and South (Daniel 11) will begin to manifest themselves. If that is the case, how might the United States begin to be usurped in the world today?

It is hard to believe the United States could be usurped in the world today. We have the most powerful military and economy the world has ever seen. But let us not forget that every great empire and power of the past has eventually run its course. How might this happen today, and what are some signs to look for?

The most obvious sign is the decrease in the influence of Christianity in the United States. Even though the U.S. has more Christians than any other country in the world, the percentage of the population claiming to be Christian is in a steady decline. Poll data from the 1950s found about 95 percent of the U.S. population claiming to be Christian. Pew Research data in 2007 had the number at 78 percent, and in 2014, Pew found only 70 percent of U.S. citizens claiming to be Christian. The most recent data now has the number below 70 percent. In data for the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the numbers are even lower.

Just looking at some data on mainline Protestant churches today (Methodist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran), we find all three declining rapidly. From 2007 to 2014, according to Pew Research, mainline Protestants in the United States dropped by about five million. One in every five American adults were raised in a mainline church. Only about half of them are still involved with their church as adults. *The Hartford Institute for Religion Research* found in a survey of more than 4,000 churches in 2010 that 71 percent had a full-time paid pastor. Five years later, only 62 percent did.

The foundation of our country is unique among all the nations in this world. We were built on Judeo-Christian principles. No other nation in history can claim the mantle of being modern day spiritual Israel than the United States and the British Commonwealth nations. No doubt other nations have many Christians, but no other nations have influenced the world with Judeo-Christian principles like the United States and British Commonwealth nations. If we are the spiritual heirs of Abraham, the Bible teaches we would be blessed, but when we forget God, we will be cursed. In comparison to the nations of this world, the U.S. appears to be blessed. But there could be some signs on the horizon on how the power of our nation may be waning.

I read a couple of interesting books this year that address how the United States could be diminished in the future. One is titled *The Shadow War* by Jim Sciutto (*CNN* correspondent), and the other is called *AI Super-Powers* by Kai-Fu Lee (prior President of *Google China*). I will begin by addressing some of the trends discussed in Lee's book.

Let's begin with defining "artificial intelligence" (AI). AI is machine intelligence which can be contrasted with the natural intelligence that humans possess. You may remember the historic chess match between Russian Grand Master Gary Kasparov and the IBM computer known as "Deep Blue." Deep Blue won the match. Some began to worry that machines would take over the world like in the *Terminator* movies. That is a long way off if at all, but since 1997 great strides have been made in the field of AI.

AI's roots can be traced back to the 1950s. The mission of the early AI researchers was to recreate human intelligence in a machine. According to Lee, AI has morphed into two camps, the "rule based" and "neural networks" approaches. The rule-based group attempts to teach computers to think by encoding a series of rules: If x, then y. This approach works well for things like games, but not so well when the number of possible choices expands. The "neural networks" group tries not to teach the machine rules that the human brain has mastered, but they try to reconstruct the human brain. This approach makes artificial neurons that work like brain neurons receiving and transmitting information. But in order to do this, you need to provide the machine neural networks with lots and lots of examples of pictures, games, sounds—whatever it is you are trying to create expertise in. So the neural networks approach needs lots of data and computing power. In the 1950s there was not much computing power and data. But today AI is taking off again because of the computing power and data available. The breakthrough started in the mid-2000s due to researcher Geoffrey Hinton's discovery of a way to add layers in neural networks.

The neural networks approach has become the dominant approach in AI research. Due to Hinton's discovery, the neural networks have been enhanced like a human taking steroids. This new approach goes by the name of *deep learning*. "Deep learning" works thru algorithms (a set of instructions used to solve a class of problems or a computation). These algorithms need massive amounts of data from a specific subject to make a decision for a desired outcome. AI does this by training itself to recognize deeply buried patterns and correlations. For example, let's say you could feed your machine millions of pictures of different types of cats. What you would want this machine to do is determine when a cat appeared in a video versus any other animal. Each time it would pick incorrectly, it would learn more about all the correct varieties of cats. This would take a lot of data, but I think you get the idea. This is a simple example. Today we have AI in the field of teaching vehicles how to drive themselves based on the same idea, feeding the machine immense data that allows it to drive a car without a driver. These machines are being driven and tested on roads today.

So what role might AI play in the demise of the United States? Well, when the AI revolution took off about ten years ago, the U.S., Canada, and the UK were leading the world. But today, there are indications China might be taking the lead in the not too distant future. We are in the age of implementation for AI. Most of the important research has been conducted, and entrepreneurs are doing the tough work of moving the discoveries into real world applications. Just like the discovery of electricity morphed into numerous other industries, AI is said to be the electricity of the future, with even more potential than electricity. According to Lee, AI algorithms need big data, computing power, and strong—but not necessarily elite—AI algorithm engineers. Once computing power and engineering talent reach a certain threshold, the quantity of data becomes most important in determining the capability of an algorithm.

There are three things that could give China the advantage in the coming years: their data advantage; the fighting spirit of their entrepreneurs; and the Chinese government. Let's start with the data. China is already the top producer of digital data in the world. Being the most populous nation helps, but it is more than that. Much of this data advantage stems from about five years ago when China's Internet started to do its own thing rather than just copy everything the U.S. was doing. Chinese use of mobile payments for all kinds of purchases has leap-frogged the rest of the world. Don't forget all that bar code data on mobile phone purchases feeds the data that helps AI. Another example is the use of the "superapp" *WeChat* in China. This app is a combination of many apps all in one. There is no one app in the U.S. that collects as much as *WeChat*. Silicon Valley companies can't compete with just web searches, "likes" on social media, and sometime online purchasing in the U.S. with what the Chinese are bringing in.

With an advantage in the data needed to fuel the AI revolution, how do the workers (tech entrepreneurs) in China stack up against Silicon Valley? Well, let's have the expert, Kai-Fu Lee explain it; he has worked in Silicon Valley and with Chinese tech start-ups. Lee says:

"But I've spent decades deeply embedded in both Silicon Valley and China's tech scene, working at Apple, Microsoft, and Google before incubating and investing in dozens of Chinese startups. I can tell you that Silicon Valley looks downright sluggish compared to its competitor across the Pacific."

Kingdom, Continued on next page

The reason for this is the highly competitive nature of doing business amongst Chinese tech companies.

Much of this has to do with the fact that new ideas are copied and refined. If you don't keep working hard and keep fighting for an advantage, you will be run out of business. In Silicon Valley, copying is stigmatized. There is less competition, which leads to more of an attitude of resting on your laurels.

Finally, the Chinese government is very pro-active in setting up an environment that is positive for AI research and development. The Chinese Communists are not only doing this nationally, but they are influencing local governments to follow along. The local governments are offering subsidies and assistance to lure the AI companies to their regions. The US government does not support entrepreneurs here in the same way.

PricewaterhouseCoopers says AI deployment will add \$15.7 trillion to global Gross Domestic Product by 2030. China will take home about \$7 trillion of that, doubling the \$3.7 trillion for North America. If Chinese economic power increases, so too will political influence (soft power) for China all over the world.

China's new *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) might also play a part in the Chinese becoming the dominant superpower in the future. The Chinese BRI began in 2013. The BRI is a global development strategy the Chinese are using to improve infrastructure and investments in 152 countries and international organizations around the world. Some believe the BRI is a way for China to extend greater influence at the expense of U.S. influence. Whatever the motivations, it is just one more example of China's growing superpower status.

What about America's dominance as a military power? Are there any chinks in that armor? China's military prowess is also increasing. Along with Russia, China and Russia have a greater capability with "killer satellites" than the U.S. does. According to Jim Sciutto's book, *Shadow Wars*, both Russia and China have two satellites apiece doing things no other satellites have ever done. These new "kamikaze satellites" are able to maneuver within 1000 feet of sensitive U.S. satellites. The concern is these new satellites can not only kill our sensitive satellites in space, but also retrieve information being communicated by our satellites.

You might wonder how the Chinese and Russians could have eclipsed the U.S. in this particular field for the moment. Don't forget the U.S. has been focused on terrorism for the last almost 20 years. While we put our focus and money into that area, China and Russia have been spending in other areas. These are some of the reasons President Trump promoted his idea for a new U.S. "Space Force." The U.S. needs to focus some of its resources in this direction due to these recent developments. If not, we could be in trouble.

Shadow Wars explains that the U.S. has staged numerous space war games. These simulations indicate killer satellites could destroy our nuclear early warning and surveillance satellites, hampering our war fighting capability. In the civilian world, Russian and Chinese capabilities could shut down our financial markets, the Internet, business, credit cards, phone service, and banking machines. Don't forget our Global Positioning Satellites (GPS) time our traffic lights and railroad signals. Pilots would also be in trouble without GPS.

Notice what General William Shelton, the former commander of U.S. Air Force Space Command, says about a future space war in *Shadow Wars*:

"The foundation of almost any military operation these days is based on some sort of space capability. Whether it's communications, or GPS, or intelligence capability that's provided from space. All that information, and let's face it, this is an information era that we're in today. It's not a force-on-force kind of thing. It's a person with the best information is likely to win. So, all that information comes down via space and that's the way we've—that's become the American way of war, very information heavy, very intelligence heavy. If you take all that away and we go back to industrial-age warfare, I don't know that we know how to operate that way anymore. So, to say that a space war might be devastating to the United States military, I don't think that's any exaggeration at all."

While the U.S. has focused on the fight against terrorism over the last 20 years, both Russia and China have developed anti-satellite technology which surpasses what the U.S. has at this moment in time. The U.S. is now working to overcome this disadvantage, but this example shows that despite its military capability, the U.S. is still vulnerable to threats now and in the future.

Sciutto warns in his book that at the present moment, Russia and China could disable the most powerful military in the world by attacking our vulnerable satellites. Russia and China have weapons capable of bringing our economy and military to a stop. Doing so would lead to a grave threat against both of them due to our nuclear capability. But who knows what new technologies and countermeasures will be created in the coming years to put the U.S. at further risk. I've been involved in the Church of God now for over 33 years. I've read many articles and ideas that never panned out when it came to possible end time scenarios. This article is mere speculation as we look at Scripture and the world as it appears at this moment. Since we can't be certain or positive about end time scenarios, let's just keep watch and continue to do God's work. God would rather have us focusing on preaching His Gospel message and living it than spending too much time on prophetic speculation.

But we need not worry about what's coming in the future. It will get darker before the dawning of God's Kingdom on this earth. Don't let worries and concerns over how the age will end consume you. We need to continue to preach the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to this earth. As long as the United States remains a powerful nation, we should have the ability to preach this Gospel message. If Christianity continues to diminish in this country, our time for working for the message of the Gospel may disappear (John 9:4). Let's work with more effort while we have the time to work. Ω

Sources: *AI Superpowers* by Kai-Fu Lee
The Shadow War by Jim Sciutto
Wikipedia, The Washington Post

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Are You a Tolerant Christian?

Down through the ages of time, man has been hell-bent to create gods after his own image. Today, Jesus is commonly portrayed as a pacifist, a well-meaning but docile teacher, striking a fickle—even a pathetic—pose in people’s minds. But is this *really* the Jesus of your Bible?

by Lloyd W. Cary



Lloyd W. Cary

We hear a lot of talk today about about “tolerance.” Tolerance has become a buzzword in newscasts, entertainment, educational institutions, and casual conversation.

A carefully crafted world view is being disseminated in Western society—one which is not founded in the moral absolute of

yesteryear—a time when most people agreed on what was right and what was wrong, what was good and what was evil, and which things were true and which things were false.

You can hardly open a newspaper or turn on your TV without being confronted with calls for a “more tolerant” society. The pressure is also on individuals to push the limits of personal tolerance to unprecedented heights. We are conditioned to feel *guilty* if we do not tolerate the latest fad or social change.

But as with most buzzwords, you cannot simply look in the dictionary to understand how the term is being used. A dictionary definition of tolerance is: a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, etc., differ from one’s own; freedom from bigotry. Biblically, the true virtue of tolerance portends showing patience, kindness, longsuffering, and forbearance toward others. A whole new alphabet has been created to refer to one’s sexual orientation (LGBTQ+). In the old days, one could see a litter of puppies in a storefront window, hold one up and declare, “That’s a male!” or, “That’s a female!” and get away with it. In today’s corrupt political climate, that might get you into trouble!

The New Tolerance

However, in today’s politically correct world, we are not deemed “tolerant” unless we formally and fully endorse practically every alternative lifestyle and world view. In the realm of religion, tolerance is called *ecumenism*, a movement promoting worldwide unity among religions through greater cooperation and improved understanding.

More specifically, the postmodern definition of tolerance says it’s OK to hold any opinion or belief you like, but above all, if you want to be thought of as tolerant today, you must never, ever, even suggest that one belief system is universally true and morally binding on everyone—especially if you do so on moral or biblical grounds! The idea that you are right and everyone else is wrong is classified as a form of mental illness by some professors. People who believe in absolute truth are considered “dangerous.” Relativism says that truth isn’t fixed by outside reality. If you were to be so bold as to express your thoughts, you may even be accused of “hate speech!” Egalitarianism is another jaw-beaker word that insists on a belief in human equality in every sphere, especially with respect to social, political, and economic affairs.

In our egalitarian society today, the “new tolerance” proclaims that all opinions are equal and that there is no hierarchy of truth—all truth is relative. The new tolerance says every aberration and abomination must be tolerated. Every form of behavior or misbehavior is to be accepted as “normal.” No matter how divergent or discordant someone’s worldview is, we’re expected to embrace them all and treat them all with *equal* respect, as if they were uniformly credible and profoundly valuable. Of course, that kind of tolerance doesn’t really exist. Even the most vocal proponents of tolerance have a breaking point.

Unkind, vindictive, and intimidating labels are often hung on those who disagree with the new tolerance. For example, if a Christian does not embrace the tenets of Islam, but loves Muslim people nonetheless, he or she is often called an “Islamaphobe.” If a Christian does not embrace gay marriage or gay relationships, but loves gay people nonetheless, he or she is still labeled a “homophobe.” If one does not condone killing a baby in the womb, one is labeled as a “hate-monger” or “anti-choice.” For fear of ridicule, ostracism, or possible lawsuits, most professing Christians cave in and quietly go with the flow of their peers.

How would you respond when a coworker labels you “intolerant” for believing Jesus is the only way to God? Would you have an answer (1 Peter 3:15)? If you’d like to see how intolerant this culture really is, take this simple acid test: stand up in any educational, governmental, or even casual forum, and simply declare that the Christian God is the only true God, or that Jesus is the only Savior, or that evolution is a hoax, or that you

believe abortion, homosexuality, and statues of divinity are idolatry, and you will soon see how tolerant those around you really are. You will receive scoffs, derision, and perhaps even a death threat here and there! You will be labeled intolerant, hateful, and divisive.

Intolerance Will Not Be Tolerated!

In short, the new tolerance is not really tolerance at all. It is dogmatically *intolerant* of all universal truth claims. That’s because absolute truth cannot exist in any egalitarian society where all ideas are deemed equally valid. To achieve this new standard of tolerance, every significant distinction between truth and error must be diminished or erased. Virtually anything can now be claimed to be true, as long as it doesn’t profess to be exclusively or universally true.

Sadly, this new definition of tolerance has even taken root in the church. The symptoms are impossible to miss. Too often, if church leaders come to a “new understanding” or “new truth” of the fourth commandment and tell their congregations they are free to keep Sunday for the seventh-day Sabbath, most will comply with nary a whimper. If they are told Christmas, Easter, and other pagan holidays are not really pagan, or that “just because the pagans did it does not mean they are wrong,” or, “everybody else is doing it,” and “all these people can’t be wrong,” all too many will docilely go along with the crowd (Luke 6:39).

Jesus Himself is the One who said that *He* is the *only* way to the Father (John 6:44, 65). For Christians to say there are other ways to find peace with God or enter the Kingdom of God, is to bear false testimony. In one sweeping statement, Jesus discards all other religions as a means of finding forgiveness of sins. This agrees with other Scriptures: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12); and “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

More and more professing Christians are losing their taste for absolute truth and solid, authoritative Bible doctrine. (See our publications *Doctrinal Dilemmas*, and *How To Be a Real Christian*.) Even old-time believers are becoming more and more hostile to clear, definite teaching, and are being conditioned to be skeptical of traditional and orthodox doctrine. Well did the apostle Paul warn of this syndrome in 2 Timothy 4:2–3: “Preach the Word! Be urgent in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all patience and doctrine. For there shall come a time when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but according to their own lusts they shall accumulate to themselves *a great numbers of teachers*, having ears itching to *hear what satisfies their cravings*” [E.V.].

Instead of proving all things by their own Bible (1 Thessalonians 5:21), it becomes easier and more “chic” to scour the theological landscape for second, third, and fourth opinions. Like “cafeteria Christians,” they thoughtlessly pick and choose what pleases *them* most. They show little, if any, interest in defending God’s Truth (John 17:17)—they’re satisfied to let Truth co-mingle with error in the name of tolerance and a fabricated standard of politeness.

Christian Armor Turned Into Rust

As a result, many professing Christians (including many Christian leaders who ought to know better) are either fearful, tired, or have given up the battle in contending earnestly for the Truth once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). It may appear to be intellectual to scour the Internet for contrasting opinions and interpretations, but to take a serious stand for ultimate truth is just “too much work.” The emphasis on tolerance simply will not allow for a spirited defense of God’s Truth. Why, somebody may claim to be “offended,” thus canceling out the Truth! It doesn’t seem “nice” or polite to refute error in plain language, so they focus instead on the slivers of comfortable, common ground that every side can affirm. Alas! Their Christian armor is incrementally turning to rust (Ephesians 6:15–18)! Collectively, we need more oil of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 25:1–13).

Ask yourself this question: Is this the kind of loose grip on biblical truth that God expects from His people? Should such an elective and politically correct approach be used to interpret and teach Scripture? The answer, of course, is a resounding “No!” Again, what would Jesus say? Outside the firm foundation of God’s Word, there is no real assurance of salvation, no true victory over sin, and no hope of being in God’s Kingdom.

Compromise is the Christian’s most deadly enemy. Nearly all heresy comes from within the church. Jude, the Lord’s half brother, warned, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye

Tolerance, Continued on page 13

Tolerance, Continued from page 12

David Kupelian, Managing Editor of WorldNetDaily.com, and author of *The Marketing of Evil*, wrote:

“The plain truth is that within the space of our lifetime, much of what Americans once almost universally abhorred has been packaged, perfumed, gift-wrapped, and sold to us as though it had great value. By skillfully playing on our deeply felt national values of fairness, generosity, and tolerance, these marketers have persuaded us to embrace as enlightened and noble that which all previous generations since America’s founding regarded as grossly self-destructive—in a word, evil.” Ω

should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3–4). According to Paul, Satan has his own ministers who appear as ministers of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:15). They are not genuinely following Christ, but they think they are, and deceive others to believe so as well.

Things Different Are Not the Same

The Scriptures ask, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed” (Amos 3:3)? “No servant can serve two masters” (Luke 16:13). The popular Protestant teaching that Jesus somehow abolished the law or “kept it in our stead” is at the heart of “costless Christianity,” grace turned into license. They may even find some common beliefs, but mixed with error, such as the nature of God, Sabbath keeping, holydays, clean and unclean meats, the state of the dead, and so forth, in order to become “associated” with you, but beware of wolves among the sheep (Matthew 7:15; Zephaniah 3:3–4) and tares among the wheat (Matthew 13:25). Historically, certain ones have infiltrated into God’s church and lain dormant for years before rising to prominent positions and became proactive in sowing doubts, divisions, and heresies. John and Paul warned people of troublemakers by name (2 Timothy 4:14–15; John 9–11).

So how do we respond to that trend? We need to follow the pattern Christ exemplified throughout His ministry. He did not engage in endless committee meetings, or conversations about subjective interpretations of Scripture or “agree to disagree” on foundational doctrines. He did not get hung up in trivial “What if?” questions or debates. He didn’t give equal time to every spurious teacher that came along or try to find common ground with theological opponents. Simply put, Jesus did not tolerate false teaching. And, being followers of Jesus, we shouldn’t either. This does not mean Jesus was intolerant—He was the very model of tolerance. If one will but study the Gospels, he or she will find that Jesus’ tolerance was exemplified in His patience and compassion for people—not leniency toward sin, wrong beliefs, and doctrinal error. He ministered to all kinds of people with no regard for social standing or wealth. He brought the same truth to the religious and political elite as He did to beggars, the lame, the deaf, and social outcasts. His kindness, patience, and tolerance toward the poor, the humble, and suppressed sinners was never-ending.

However, Jesus did not extend that same patience to hypocrites, liars, and false teachers. It did not matter if it was the pious double standard of the Pharisees or the demonic lies of a possessed man—Christ did not tolerate the corruption of sound biblical truth. He had absolutely no tolerance for the hypocritical Pharisees’ brand of religion—especially their preference for human traditions over the Word of God. See in your own Bible how Christ confronted the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23! When faced with false teaching and religious error, He was swift to correct. He was eloquent, but never arrogant. He was forceful, but never unloving. When declaring truth or refuting false teaching, He was firm and uncompromising, but always gracious. In fact, Christ’s example makes it clear that correcting error is one of the most loving acts you can do.

Satan’s strategy is to confuse, deny, and corrupt the truth with as much error as possible. “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:14–15). “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are [being] lost: In whom the god of this world [Satan the devil] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4).

Has he been successful? Could we be blinded? See what God’s Word says: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:9). For more details, request our free booklet, *Devil, You Say?*

What Would Jesus Do?

Christ’s ministry lays out a perfect example of how believers today need to confront and correct false teaching. There is nothing wrong with asking, “What would Jesus do?” The problem with asking that question is that MOST PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW JESUS WELL ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT HE WOULD DO!

In these last days, Jesus is usually portrayed as a pacifist, a kind healer, or a docile teacher, striking a pathetic—almost effeminate—pose in people’s minds. (Hollywood has never gotten it right!) Unless we STUDY, not just READ, the Book (2 Timothy 2:15), the Holy Bible, we tend to remake and refashion Him into a god of our own distorted imagination, which is idolatry.

While Jesus was perfect in love, kindness, and compassion, that’s not the whole story. When faced with religious leaders teaching false doctrine, He did not seek conversation, common ground, peaceful resolution or “building bridges.” He did not compromise. He confronted. He bluntly exposed the errors, lies, and hypocrisy. Contrary to what some would have us believe, that was not “hate speech.” He pointedly refused to contribute to the spirit of spiritual unity and ecumenism with false teachers. He was very intolerant of false teachers, of pride, rebellion, sin, covetousness, adultery, lying, cheating, stealing, fornicating, Sabbath breaking, and murder. He was intolerant of husbands treating their wives poorly. He was intolerant of pain and suffering. Of false gods, of religious hypocrisy, and bigotry. Of false teachers and false gospels (Galatians 1:8–9). He demonstrated that in certain situations, it’s not OK to “be nice”—but take a stand for the truth!

Are we to suppose Christ will tolerate “all” religions in His Kingdom after His return? What did He say? “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21–23). He added, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say” (Luke 6:46)?

Read for yourself what He said further in Revelation 21:7–8: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” Harsh sounding words to liberal ears, but true!

In other words, Jesus wouldn’t be welcomed in most Jewish, Evangelical, Protestant, or Catholic circles today. His bold methods of dealing with error are foreign to today’s churches.

We need to follow Jesus’ ministry from beginning to end, seeing what was behind His many confrontations with pious enemies of the Gospel and truth. Along the way, you’ll find how to be equipped to don the Christian armor and fight the same good fight today (Ephesians 6:10–18). Be sure to request our free booklet, *How to Be a Real Christian*.

Truth is, by nature, intolerant of falsehood. They are direct opposites! Attacks against the truth take many different forms. Satan’s strategy is to deny, confuse, compromise, and corrupt the truth with as much error and confusion as possible. Has he been successful? See what God’s Word says: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:9).

Yes, true Christianity is intolerant of these things. Why? Because its founder, Jesus, was intolerant of them. He confronted heresy! If what you believe isn’t true, wouldn’t you want to know?

We are to put on the very mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). We are to love what He loves and hate what He hates (Proverbs 6:16–19). “Thy Word is Truth” (John 17:17), not tradition, philosophy, or “science falsely so called” (1 Timothy 6:20). Truth must not be sacrificed at the altar of bogus “tolerance!” The bottom line is that Christianity is only as “intolerant” as Jesus is true.

What gives us the right to be right? God’s Word does! Matthew 4:4 says, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word [not the New Testament only] that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” The Bible is the very essence of Truth (Psalm 119:151–152, 160; John 17:17). It was true from the beginning and always will be (Psalm 119:160; Matthew 5:17–18).

The Answer

Back to the title of this article, *Are You A Tolerant Christian?* The answer is easy: Yes... and no. We are to be tolerant of those things Christ is tolerant of—and intolerant of those things Christ is not tolerant of! And that, my friends, is the way it ought to be.

Now, wasn’t that easy?

Ω

God's Truth

by George Roper



George Roper

The pursuit of transparency and accountability is an endeavor that we all employ at various points in our lives, whether it is a personal introspective application in surveying our own sense of self, or whether it is a collective reasoning of peers via jurors deliberating on the fate of another. However many participants are involved, the desired goal remains the same, to arrive at the truth. Yet, truth is a state of being that at times can appear to be skewed. Truth, once seen

as an absolute, in today's world is now debatable. In every aspect of our culture, truth is blurred. On the world stage, leaders are taken to task for possible wrongdoing by their own political process. Be it in the likes of President Trump of the United States, Justin Trudeau of Canada, to Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom, these leaders' motivations and actions are publicly analyzed. Partisan bias and political spin influence the narrative so much so that by the time the accounts of these leaders' conduct are disseminated to the public, it's hard to decipher what is true.

Additionally, on any given day, studies are published attesting that an activity or a product is adverse to our well being. Soon after, another study is released that contradicts the former research. Lobbyists and special interest groups have been known to fund the commission of studies that lean in their favor, further clouding objectivity—leaving an individual who wants to stay well informed wondering, *What's true?*

People have various sources that they look to with confidence to be reliable distributors of truth. Some seek verification of information from the government, the press, social media, or even social influencers. When we look to the pages of the Bible, we find that one such influencer has stymied the prevalence of truth for the majority. In Revelation 12:9d, Satan is described as one “who deceives the whole world,” resulting in a world where truth is not organically gravitated to. The Bible defines truth as the Word of God (John 17:17b). “Your word is truth.” It is that truth, the written words of the Bible, that is authoritative and binding on us all today. It is that same truth that distinguishes right from wrong. It is that truth, brought to life and put into context through the stories and experiences relayed in the Scriptures, that allows one to perceive what is accurate, what to believe, and what is most suitable for our well being.

In the book of Judges, after a description of a controversial current event, the book concludes with a sentence that serves as a commentary for the culture of the time. It is noted that society had evolved in such a way that the populace had strayed from the truth of God.

“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

Every man saw truth in his own way. Essentially, this is the same sentiment that people in our day live by, where everyone does what is right in his own eyes, as opposed to living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). In the book of Proverbs, the Bible explains that our perspective apart from God isn't advantageous to us.

“There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

Rather, we should be more reliant on God's truth, the very Word of God, to direct our thoughts, our personal lives, and ultimately the greater social order. In Isaiah, God explains the discrepancy in the contrast between His perspective, His truth, and in turn, our perspective or what seems right to us.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

The competing factions of the truth of God on one hand, and what seems right in our own eyes on the other, presents a dichotomy that is continuously at odds. Christ criticized those who would follow “what seemed to be right in their own eyes” as opposed to following the truth of God.

“He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

“This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

‘For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do’” (Mark 7:6–8).

When our own customs and rituals supersede that of God's written Word, then we are not advocates of truth. Christ spoke to the religious leaders, and in turn He is speaking to us today. More specifically, in this passage, He is speaking to those who would place more weight on social norms and public opinion in tailoring their behavior as opposed to God's Word, resulting in a superficial committal to God in lieu of a staunch inward dedication to God. The apostle John in his teachings further explained that

those genuinely interested in following God must be responsive to God's written Word, to God's instructions, to God's truth.

“He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4).

The daily implementation of the various facets of our lives have strayed from the truth of God. When an honest inventory is taken, we find that our political strategies, our social ills, our labor concerns, our health-care lacks, and many other capacities have all been affected from departing from God's truth. Our personal lives are also impacted from deviating from God's truth. Choosing to recognize God solely at our discretion and in whatever fashion we see fit, rather than according to how God's Word would instruct us to, is short sighted. Failing to measure ourselves with God's truth gives way to less effective attributes taking precedence in our interactions with each other. Paul explained that dominant character features would arise in the absence of God's truth.

“But know this, that in the last days [a]perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away” (2 Timothy 3:1–5).

These character traits are not ideal, nor are they in our best interest to facilitate. Even among those who have pledged to commit themselves to God's truth, continuous efforts must be made in maintaining our relationship with God, ensuring that we do not develop an attitude of ambivalence in implementing God's truth in our lives. Paul admonished the Corinthians, and his exhortation holds true for us as well.

“Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

We must stay alert to the inclination to be unduly influenced by the corruption that surrounds us and remain evermore committed to the truth of God that we uphold. As followers of God, we identify with God's truth and we respond to it accordingly. We do so in a world that does not share our sentiments, nor does it recognize that truth to be of any worth to navigate their life by. In the book of John, we see an example of the proverbial exchange between one who perceives God's truth and one who cannot distinguish it. In what follows, we find Pilate, the governor of Judea questioning Christ's views in a preliminary hearing prior to Christ's crucifixion.

“Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all” (John 18:37–38, KJV). “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Pilate's response is often interpreted to be sarcastic or rhetorical. Nevertheless, as followers of God, we too must ask ourselves that very same question—*What Is Truth?*—in our continuous evaluation of ourselves, as we try, prove, and affirm God's truth in our lives. Ω

Charles Spurgeon, Quotes On Christmas

“**W**e have no superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called Christmas: first, because we do not believe in the mass at all, but abhor it, whether it be said or sung in Latin or in English; and, secondly, because we find no Scriptural warrant whatever for observing any day as the birthday of the Savior; and, consequently, its observance is a superstition, because not of divine authority.” (Charles Spurgeon, Sermon on December 24, 1871). Ω



Youth News

Here is the latest on our Youth News:

Jeff Reed is taking over as the Elder over the entire Youth Program (*Sparks, Ignite, and Infuse*). Jeff will continue to receive support from Pam Nolen and Murray Palmatier for both *Sparks* and *Ignite*. Kyle and Sherri Wilkes will continue to lead the way with *Infuse*. Jeff is taking over for Mike James as the Overseer for the entire Youth Program.

We are working on a project of scanning old *Sabbath Keeping Youth* (SKY) lessons into our *Sparks* website. Church groups around the world will soon be able to log onto our *Sparks* site and download youth lessons for their Sabbath School programs. The lessons were originally created by Noni McVey, the founder of *Infuse*. We also have lessons created by Angie Buchert that will be made available on the *Sparks* site. Our goal is to have all of these lessons available on the *Sparks* site within the year. Newer lessons have been written, and some of those should hopefully be appearing within the year.

If you wish to purchase a t-shirt for the *Infuse* program, please contact Sherri Wilkes at sherriwilkes@hotmail.com. All proceeds from the t-shirt sales go right back into the *Infuse* program.

We are planning on holding a Youth Conference (*Sparks, Ignite, and Infuse*) in Ohio during the summer of 2020. More details will be forthcoming in the next *International News*.

Introducing Ignite Chat Platform

This year at the Feast of Tabernacles in Myrtle Beach, teens showed interest in having a way to keep in touch throughout the year. *Ignite* is excited to offer a chat platform for our teens to keep in touch with old friends and make new friends within God’s Church. The chat will also give teens an opportunity to discuss and share activities they would like to see implemented at upcoming Feast sites. The *Ignite* chat is hosted within Microsoft Teams and is monitored by an administrator. To participate in the *Ignite* chat, teens must request to be added. The age limit is strictly for teens 13–18 years old. To participate in the *Ignite* chat, please email the following information to ignitecgi@gmail.com:

- Valid email address
- First and last name
- Age
- Attending church or church affiliation

If you have questions or can assist our Youth Programs, please send an email to Jeff Reed at jeff@cgi.org.

C.H. Spurgeon also wrote,

“When it can be proved that the observance of Christmas, Whitsuntide, and other Popish festivals was ever instituted by a divine statute, we also will attend to them, but not till then. It is as much our duty to reject the traditions of men, as to observe the ordinances of the Lord. We ask concerning every rite and rubric, ‘Is this a law of the God of Jacob?’ and if it be not clearly so, it is of no authority with us, who walk in Christian liberty.”

Treasury of David, written on Psalm 81:4.

Ω

In loving memory...



Annie Dorothy Marlor (July 22, 1924–October 21, 2019)

It is said, the most important part on anyone’s tombstone is the *dash*—that little line that marks the time of what that person did between when they were born and when they died. For our dear Annie, that dash wasn’t as little as it may appear. Annie graced this earth for a full 95 years. She had an abundant life rich in love for her family and her friends. Annie always spoke so lovingly of her family and of her dear husband Harry, the love of her life. Eleven years ago, almost to the day, her Harry passed away. It was during the middle of the Feast, and our group was enjoying tabernacling in the beautiful seaside town of Ballina, Australia. Harry wasn’t feeling well so dropped his dear Annie off at services while he went off to get something from the chemist. Harry never returned. And now, eleven years later, during another feast, our dear Annie joins her husband Harry in sleep.

Annie had so much love for her family, for her friends, and her Creator. They were her life and her purpose. Her dedication to them was paramount. Without them she wouldn’t have been the person she was, and they the same. She had a full grasp of what her walk in life was, and her faith gave her enduring strength throughout it. She was a rock to all who knew her.

Annie was the backbone of dedication, stability, and diligence, not only at home with her family but also amongst her brethren here in Brisbane, Australia. She was a beautiful person, humble, graceful, and endearing. I never found any malice in her, nor ridicule, nor condemnation. She met everyone at their level. Annie was so greatly loved, and her loss will be so greatly felt by so many. May we all say “*Rest in peace dear Annie, until we meet again.*”

Annie Dorothy Marlor, born in England on the 22nd of July 1924, died on the Last Great Day, 21st of October, 2019. Annie is survived by her daughters Jean and Irene, her grandchildren Shane and Sharon, and her many other grandchildren and great-grandchildren whom she loved dearly.

Ω

These are the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocation (Leviticus 23:37)... And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3, KJV).

Gems from Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The Devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the Church that part of their mission is to provide “entertainment” for the people, with a view to winning them. Providing *amusement* for the people is *nowhere* spoken of in the Scriptures as a function of the Church. The need is biblical *doctrine*, so understood and felt that it sets men afire.

You must be DIVORCED from your SIN, or you cannot be MARRIED to CHRIST.

The Bible is not the light of the world, it is the light of the Church. But the world does not read the Bible, the world reads Christians! “*You* are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

Scripture is like a lion. Who ever heard of defending a lion? Just turn it loose; it will defend itself.

Conversion is a turning onto the right road. The next thing to do is to walk on it.

Atheism is a strange thing. Even the devils never fell into that vice, for the devils believe and tremble (James 2:19).

I usually find that the greatest doubters are the people who do not read the Bible.

If we to have revivals, we must revive our reverence for the Word of God.

If there be anything in the Church to which you belong which is contrary to the inspired Word, leave that Church.

Don’t say God has been silent when your Bible has been closed.



Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) was England’s best known preacher for most of the second half of the nineteenth century. He was the most popular preacher of his time and is still known as “the Prince of Preachers.” In his nearly 40 years of pastoring, it’s estimated that he had preached 3,500 sermons to about 10 million people.

He did not shrink from controversy and was outspoken against false teaching and hypocrisy.

Pride is the devil’s dragnet in which he takes more fish than in any other, except procrastination.

If there be a man before me who says that the wrath of God is too heavy a punishment for his little sin, I ask him, if the sin be little, why does he not give it up?

In response to an atheist, I ask, “Did you know you are mentioned in the Bible?” Then I show him Psalm 14:1, “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.”

If you have to give a carnival to get people to come to church, then you will have to to keep giving carnivals to keep them coming back.

Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the Book widens and deepens with our years.



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