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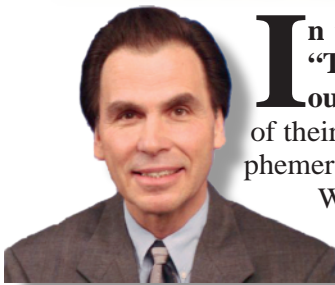
"Put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13)

Winter 2012

Virtual Reality—The New Addiction

Jesus Christ warned us that "the love of many shall wax cold." Our world is filled with stories that confirm this growing phenomenon. Believe it or not, the technologies we are surrounded by can potentially facilitate this by isolating our affections. How are you safeguarding and adjusting your life to assure your affections won't wax cold? Or are you incrementally allowing yourself to slip into the desensitizing and sometimes delusional virtual realities of cyberspace?

by Bill Watson



Bill Watson

In the second book to Timothy, Paul writes: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness [religion], but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:1-7).

What Paul is describing are the varieties of *character flaws* and *behaviors* that result from the love of so many *waxing cold*. Unfortunately, our twenty-first century culture provides an enormous amount of additional "tools for addiction" that can be used to trigger or enable the many characteristics Paul lists. So often, because we don't control these tools of addiction in our lives as we should, they make it easier and more natural for us to fall into these proclivities so appealing to our human nature.

Throughout mankind's history, there have been many kinds of *enablers*. Sadly, religion has contributed immensely to the abuses humanity has incurred upon himself. But there are many more: alcohol, drugs, sex, pornography, and of course, money. Additionally, there are unhealthy relationships, narcissism, sociopaths, egocentricity, power, fame, popularity, avarice, and greed. There are *intrinsic* items in our lives like clothes, cars, boats, planes, and homes—even our educational level, or perhaps the possession of a weapon. They all contribute to our failure and consequent expression of these characteristics listed in 2 Timothy 3. So many things enable and drive us into *triggering* specific inclinations in our character that far too often lean toward igniting our selfish weaknesses and/or flaws. It's just the nature of things in the world in which we live.

Many of the "triggers" or "enablers" that surround us have been around for a very long time—since the beginning of mankind's creation. Surely, we can recognize or think of a variety of catalysts that have *plagued* and *tempted* humanity down through the centuries. However, there is a *new* item that has recently emerged just over the last two to three decades, creating a whole *new type of addiction* with multiple listings of "syndromes" and/or "disorder" labels that has created a whole *new* type of social disruption. Do you know what it is?

Virtual Reality, continued on page 6

Ho,
Ho,
Hoax!

Is Christmas Christian?



"What a strange question," most would object. "Of course Christmas is Christian! Why, it commemorates the birth of the Savior of the world—Jesus Christ—doesn't it?" Does it really? Or is it something we have been unconsciously spoon fed and taken for granted? Do not make up your mind before you examine the facts.

by Lloyd W. Cary



There is no time that is more nostalgic than Christmas. It reminds us of home, of family, of "the good old days" when we were children. We think back to Norman Rockwell-like settings of sleigh bells, Christmas trees, Yule logs burning in the fireplace, caroling, and children shouting in glee as they unwrap presents "Santa" has brought them for being good. It may come as a shock to most to learn that, despite all these warm, fuzzy feelings, Christmas has *PAGAN* origins and is not a Christian festival at all.

Many have an immediate emotional reaction when confronted with this truth, but we must remember the Proverb that says, "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him" (Proverbs 18:17). In other words, if one is steeped from childhood in the belief that Christmas is a Christian holiday, the information that it is indeed pagan will tend to be vociferously rejected.

Christmas, continued on page 8

What's inside...

Babylon—Then and Now!
and
Time and Reality—Its Bad Habit
Evan Chase
Pages 2, 5

Personal Evangelism
and
The Spirit of Compromise
Lloyd Cary
Pages 3, 10

What Does It Take to Melt Your Heart?
Lonnie Hendrix
Page 4

Feast Reports
Pages 11-17

Church News
Pages 18-19

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Babylon—Then and Now!

by Evan J. Chase



Evan J. Chase

By the waters of the Euphrates River in modern-day Iraq, archaeologists for many years have been excavating the ruins of ancient Babylon.

The city Babylon, in the kingdom of Babylonia, had its origins in about 2246 BC with Nimrod and the Tower of Babel (Genesis 10 and 11). Babylon's walls attained a height of 300 feet and thickness of 50 feet! Its circumference was about 50 miles. It also had a man-made lake 40 miles square. The Hanging Gardens, a wonder of the ancient world, was only one of its many incredible edifices! Babylon's Temple of Baal was a half-mile square and 600 feet tall. Babylon, for centuries, represented the pinnacle of man's power—the arts, religion, science, military might, and finance. "Babylon" in Hebrew means *confusion*—and confusion in its many biblical references always means instability, emptiness, shame, and disorder—the result of man living physically and spiritually cut off from his Creator. That is a definition of the entire world's system of living and governing both throughout history and *especially* today! By the time the prophet Daniel lived there during the Jewish captivity, Babylon was in decline. The handwriting was indeed on the wall (Daniel 5) looking toward its conquest by Cyrus in 539 BC. Babylonia then became part of many succeeding empires.

Six hundred years later, in about AD 90, the aged apostle John received visions which he wrote as the book of Revelation. In it is described a yet future time of Babylon's fall (Revelation 18). We do understand that at the end time there will be a superpower resembling ancient Babylon, but we can also apply these verses to mankind's societies throughout history. Indeed, Babylon has been with us in essence for these thousands of years—just as sin is typified as Egypt! Christians live in enemy territory—we eat, drink, think, see, hear, and breathe Babylon every day! Once we realize this, many scriptures will make even more sense to us, such as Jesus Christ's admonition to "watch" (Matthew 24:42). Thanks to both mankind and the spiritual ruler of this world, Satan, along with his billions of demon helpers, we are indeed in a modern-day Babylonish system! *All* this world's philosophy, religion, science, agriculture, food sources, entertainment, politics, media, and governments reek of Babylon (Revelation 17:5)!

Almighty God says it will all some day be brought to nothing and ended at the restitution of all things (Acts 3:19-21) when Jesus Christ returns to rule all nations as King of kings and man will no longer be cut off from God. This is why as Christians we are reminded not to be too concerned with our lives and possessions now—very big changes are coming (1 John 2:15, 17; Matthew 6:19-20, 25)!

Even as Daniel was able both in safety and danger to live a godly life in the midst of ancient Babylon, so are we instructed to not partake of modern Babylon's sins, so as to avoid the plagues coming on her (Revelation 18:4). Christians are ambassadors for a new coming Kingdom of God. The time is now—be aware of your surroundings, reject the wrong, stay close to God, and avoid the fate of Babylon! Ω



Ancient Babylon

"Welcome to the Church of God International!"

The Church of God International sponsors the *Armor of God* telecast, provides written material on a wide range of biblical topics, and has congregations in the United States, Canada, Jamaica, the Philippines, and Australia, with affiliates in other parts of the world. We invite you to find out more about us, our purpose and mission, our beliefs, and our customs. Send for our newly revised booklet, ***Welcome to the Church of God International!*** Simply send your request to:

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Our Great Commission

"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 alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20).

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Personal Evangelism

by Lloyd W. Cary

Believe it or not, NOT everyone is welcomed into God's church! Some branches of the Church of God culture insist on screening or processing those who may wish to attend Sabbath services to see if they are good enough, knowledgeable enough, spiritual enough, or agree with their every doctrinal whim! We sharply disagree!

The Church of God International encourages personal evangelism. To “evangelize” means to proclaim the good news of the Gospel of Christ.

The Gospel includes the history of the birth, life, actions, death, resurrection, ascension, and doctrines of Jesus Christ. It includes the revelation of the grace of God to sinful man through the mediator Jesus Christ. It includes the character, actions, and doctrines of Christ, with the whole scheme of salvation, as revealed by Christ and His apostles. It includes the good news of the world tomorrow—the literal kingdom or government of God upon the earth at Christ's triumphal return. This Gospel is said to have been preached to Abraham by the promise, “in thee shall all nations be blessed” (Galatians 3:8).

Jesus gave the Great Commission to His twelve apostles in Matthew 28:18–20 and Mark 16:15–16.

The question sometimes arises, Did Jesus mean this Great Commission *only* for His twelve disciples as some preterist's believe, or does this include each and every one of us? We firmly believe that we *also* are under this obligation to teach others. How are we doing, Christians?

Polls and statistics tell us that across the countries, churches are steadily shrinking. The *most common* reason people COME to church is to find answers to puzzling questions. And the churches of this world do not have the answers! Brethren, God's Word, the Bible, *has* the answers! Are we, Christ's followers, *too timid* to share them?

Remember that the early church never had the benefit of radio, TV, or the printing press. For centuries, the Gospel—the faith once delivered—was communicated only by painstakingly hand-copied duplicates of the Bible and by word of mouth—by personal evangelism!

But are we to assume God has stopped giving the increase? No, God doesn't change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

Statistics show that fully 87 percent of people who attend church services are there because someone else INVITED them! It would be safe to say that there are people reading these words who attend Sabbath services because someone else INVITED them!

Several years ago, a minister asked a group of about 12,000 people, “How many are here because they heard the broadcast?” Many hands went up. “How many are here because they saw our literature?” More hands went up. “How many are here because of a personal contact?” MOST hands went up!

It should be pointed out that if every person in your congregations would personally invite just ONE person a year, we would *double* in size in one year! And if each of these persons invited just *one* other person a year we would double again. We would begin to grow exponentially!

We read in Acts 2:41 that about 3,000 souls were added in one day! Of course, we know God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7). Verse 47 goes on to say, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

In 1 Peter 4:17 the question is asked, “What shall be the end of those who do not obey the Gospel?” If people have not heard and learned the Gospel, they cannot *obey* it. Could it be that some of the problem today rests with us? Do we just pay our tithes and then sit back and expect the ministry to do all the evangelizing?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:16, “WOE is to me if I preach not the Gospel.” How are people going to answer the Gospel call if we, God's people, haven't bothered to tell the good news to others?

In the first century, the good news of the Gospel caused great excitement! We need to be just as excited today! Let our lights shine! They told and taught things they knew—things they saw and heard with their own eyes and ears. If we have been attending Sabbath services for any length of time at all, if we have read the literature available, we are virtual warehouses of biblical knowledge! Others are literally *dying* to know what you know! We need to tell others what we know and have proven. Personal evangelism is something we can DO for the church! What a wonderful reward we have when we lead someone to the truth! “Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).

Even when the early Church was being heavily persecuted—some even unto death—we read in Acts 8:4, “Therefore those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.” What stops us today? Where is our motivation? We are not being persecuted. We have many more advantages. We have the automobile, the airplane, the telephone, the bicycle, the Internet, and the printed page. We are without excuse.

Reaching the lost is the “work” the Lord has commanded each of us to do. It is our job assignment, our commission, our mission. Evangelism is not only to be done in distant lands, but we must also teach those near us as well. Successful evangelism is accomplished *one person at a time*.

We all know somebody, don't we? A family member, a co-worker, a friend, a neighbor, or even a stranger we meet. Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation.” Are we ashamed? Shy? Bashful? Timid? Fearful? What is our excuse? Time and time again, we are told in the Scriptures, “Be strong and very courageous!” How will we answer Christ when He asks us how many lost souls we have personally witnessed to, how many we invited to Sabbath services? Will you hem and haw and stutter something like, “Well, I paid my tithes and prayed for increase?” Or will you be able to give Him a positive number?

What is the Gospel?

- It is called the Gospel of the Kingdom of God in Matthew 24:15.
- It is called the Gospel of God in Romans 1.1.
- It is called the Gospel of Christ. Romans 1.16.
- It is called the Gospel of his Son in Romans 1:9.
- It is called the Gospel of the grace of God in Acts 20:24.
- It is called the Gospel of peace in Romans 10:15.
- It is called the glorious Gospel of the blessed God in 1 Timothy 1:11.
- It is called the Gospel of salvation in Ephesians 1.13.

Ω

No excuses!

Many of us rationalize, “But I am not an outgoing person,” or “I don't know how,” or “I never had the opportunity.” Will Jesus Christ accept such weak excuses? What have we got to lose?

We can begin anywhere. We can use world events as a lead-in, then show people that there is good news—there are answers. We can begin by sharing our own miraculous calling, how God has blessed us, and share the vision of what God has in store for all mankind. Tell them about the conditions in the Millennium. We use the Ten Commandments one by one to show that everyone is a sinner, that none of us can keep them; therefore, all of us need Jesus as our Savior. Once people understand they are sinners and their own goodness cannot save them, they are more willing to repent (change their mind) and trust Jesus Christ as Savior.

Sometimes witnessing for Jesus can be discouraging because we don't always see immediate results. We are programmed to expect instant gratification. But sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others doesn't always give us instant results. Only one in five people will respond the first time you invite them to church, but don't give up. Some will respond only after several invites.

If we talk to others about Jesus Christ but our life contradicts our words, people won't believe our testimony. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Jesus says in Matthew 9:37–38, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” Paul admonished, “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee” (Titus 2:15).

Come on, Christian, LET'S GO DO OUR JOB!

Ω



Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psalms 119:105).

What Does It Take To Melt Your Heart?

by Lonnie C. Hendrix



Lonnie C. Hendrix

Have you ever heard the old saying, “Everybody has at least one personal story that would break your heart?” If you think about it, that statement is very true. We have all experienced hurts and emotional wounds in the course of our lives. We all have scar tissue from living this life we live. In fact, I think it is safe to say that it is almost impossible to avoid at least a couple of these hurts during the course of even a privileged life span on this planet. Think about it. Over the course of our lives, we survive a thousand shocks, disappointments, failures, injustices, attacks, and abuses.

What is the cumulative impact of all of those hurts? What do we say? “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger!” As we grow older, the skin gets thicker. The scar tissue forms. We develop calluses. We erect walls around our hearts to protect them from further attacks or hurts. That is how most of us have learned to survive. To one extent or another, most of us grow colder and more remote over time.

Have you ever observed just how different most adults are from children? With most children, the emotions are very near the surface. Affection comes easily for them. A smile or giggle is easily provoked from a child. Tears flow freely. However, it is not that way for most adults.

That is why this article is entitled, *What Does It Take To Melt Your Heart?* What does it take to get past that scar tissue and to penetrate all of those hurts? Moreover, this is an extremely important question because of something Jesus Christ once said.

We read: “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child WILL NEVER ENTER IT.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them” (Mark 10:13–16, NIV here and throughout article).

So why did Christ say we must receive the Kingdom of God like a small child? Even a small child can be extremely selfish and cruel. What is it about them that God wants us to emulate?

It is their VULNERABILITY. Children are still capable of being reached. They are still able to feel and connect. In short, they have not been spoiled by this life yet. They have not had the time to build all of those walls around themselves. They have not yet been scarred by a thousand hurts and slights. They are still open to love and be loved. Most of them are not even worried about getting hurt.

Now let us contrast that with the adults we see when we look in the mirror. We have built those walls. We have developed that scar tissue and calluses. We hold grudges. We refuse to allow ourselves to forgive ourselves and each other. “I’ve been hurt, and I’m not going to allow that to hurt me again,” we tell ourselves. We hold onto it like a dog holds onto a bone.

Peter once asked the Lord how often he should forgive someone who had sinned against him (Matthew 18:21). “Up to seven times?” he asked. “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times (or seventy times seven),” Christ replied (Matthew 18:22). He then proceeded to tell His disciples the parable about the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23–34). In this illustration, the master had forgiven his servant a great debt. Later, that same servant went out and demanded the payment of a much smaller debt that was owed him by one of his coworkers. When the master heard about what had happened, he had that unmerciful servant thrown in jail and reinstated the large debt which he had previously forgiven. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother FROM YOUR HEART,” Christ concluded (Matthew 18:35).

We see people in need and convince ourselves that they do not need our help. And yet, we are told in Scripture: “If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be HARDHEARTED or tightfisted toward your poor brother” (Deuteronomy 15:7). Over and over again, God enjoins His people to open their hearts to each other and to Him.

In fact, the Bible has a great deal to say about preparing our hearts to receive God. Let’s notice a few of those scriptures.

Moses instructed the children of Israel to “Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer” (Deuteronomy 10:16). Moses also prophesied about the future. He foretold the time when the Israelites would abandon God, and He would allow them to go into captivity (Deuteronomy 30). He also promised that the Lord would bring them back to their home when they repented. Moses said: “The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so

THAT YOU MAY LOVE HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, and live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Ezekiel also predicted that God would allow the Israelites to return to their homeland one day (Ezekiel 11:16–17). He reported that God had told him: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19). Moreover, he repeated this prediction later on in his book (Ezekiel 36:24–28).

Jesus once quoted a passage from Isaiah in describing why the people of His day could not understand His parables (Matthew 13:13–17). Notice that Christ said His disciples could see and hear. Their hearts were open to what He was telling them.

Brethren, when we come to Christ, we have to make ourselves vulnerable again. We have to literally open our hearts to Him. The Israelites would rip their clothing to express their sorrow and repentance, but notice what the prophet Joel told them: “Even now, declares the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments” (Joel 2:12–13).

We are told in the book of Acts that when the people heard Peter’s message on Pentecost, “they were pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37). David said, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). He went on to say, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). In evaluating people, we are told that the Lord looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). We are also told that “the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Brethren, God’s message to us is clear: If we want to connect with Him, we have to make ourselves vulnerable again. We have to tear down the walls and cut away all of the scar tissue and remove those calluses we have developed over the years.

The prophet Jeremiah said: “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem...” (Jeremiah 4:4). When Stephen was preaching to the Council before he was stoned to death, he said: “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears” (Acts 7:51)! Paul told the Romans, “No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code” (Romans 2:29).

Brethren, the message is clear: If we want to be with God, we have to cut away all of that flesh. God has to be able to penetrate that thick stony covering that we have erected around our hearts!

Many of us came out of a tradition that made fun of any notions of “giving your heart to the Lord.” Brethren, that was wrong! The truth is, if you don’t open your heart, you won’t be in God’s Kingdom! This is made plain in the epistle to the Hebrews: “So as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said: ‘TODAY, IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS YOU DID IN THE REBELLION’” (Hebrews 3:7–15).

Jesus Christ’s heart was reachable. Remember the story about when Lazarus died (John 11)? Why did Christ weep? He knew that He was about to resurrect this man. The answer is that He was touched by the grief of those people.

I can understand that. My second great uncle died in 1996 at the age of 95. I loved him very much, and I was sorry to see him go. I did not cry, however, until I observed the weeping of his wife of more than 60 years—that melted my heart.

Brethren, the kind of vulnerability that God expects from us is not easy. If it was easy, there would be billions of people in the first resurrection!

It is not easy for me either. I have had to learn to open up my heart and make myself more vulnerable.

A little over a year and a half ago, Darlene and I received the news that she had breast cancer. We were both devastated. However, in the midst of that devastation, we learned that many of you were praying for us. Our plight had touched something in all of you.

Many of the people in our local congregation brought us food on the days that Darlene was having chemotherapy.

Heart, continued on next page

The Spirit Of Compromise

Have you ever known anyone who was once strong for the truth and have since fallen away? Why? What happened? Could it happen to you?

by Lloyd W. Cary



Lloyd W. Cary

I was once an avid non-believer. In fact, I was a militant *non-believer*. Through a series of events not of my own devising, I became a member of, what I was told, was “the one and only true Church of God.”

Our former church affiliation averaged from 400 to 450 people. For the most part, they were great people. There were friends, relatives, acquaintances, and true brethren. Many, if not most, were zealous, fervent,

dedicated, impassioned, “doing-the-Work” professing Christians. And yet, now some two decades later, most are gone—disillusioned, scattered, disenchanted, indifferent, and confused. Some have come away angry and embittered. Why? What happened?

For example, an old friend in that organization was “on fire,” zealous for the Truth. He had a fantastic memory for reciting Scripture, was very meticulous, almost fanatical about keeping the letter of the law and, as time went on, became almost Pharisaical in self-righteousness. Unfortunately, he lost it all. He quit the organization and eventually turned against it. He is now in the grave awaiting a resurrection.

Have you ever wondered how those who once *knew* the Truth so completely can lose sight of it? How does that *happen*? There may be various reasons, but in this article I want to show you one of the major reasons that so many have “lost it” and what *you* can do to *keep* from losing it.

I know of no one who was a strong, dynamic, “doing-the-Work” Christian one day, and fell away from the Truth the next day. Something happened.

Show me someone who has fallen away from the Truth, and I’ll show you a person who began making a series of COMPROMISES in his or her life!

Show me someone who has fallen away from the Truth and I’ll show you a person who began making a series of COMPROMISES in his or her life!

Just What Do You Mean, “Compromise”?

When we break down the word “compromise,” we have *com*, which means “with,” “combine,” or “co-mingle,” and the word *promise*. Put together, compromise means “with promise.” There is always a promise of a

Heart, continued from previous page

Brethren, I cannot begin to put into words what that meant to us. To say that your reactions touched our hearts does not seem sufficient. It made a bad situation better. Even so, when it was all over, we slowly went back to our everyday routines and pushed aside our thoughts and feelings about what had happened. *Why is it that we can only let our defenses down for a little while?*

Nevertheless, we must open our hearts to God and to each other. It is the only way we are truly going to survive this life. It is only through making ourselves vulnerable again that we can truly achieve what God expects of us.

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment in the Law, He replied: “Love the Lord your God WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37–40).

Brethren, we need to be tearing down those walls that we have erected every day of our lives. We need to be cutting away that scar tissue and allowing ourselves to feel again. We need to use all of our hearts in loving the Lord and each other, not just some little corner or piece around the edges. Our profession is a full-time occupation, and our employer demands all of our energy, attention, and devotion. For the true Christian, religion is not just a piece of his/her life.

It will not be easy. It is hard to let down our defenses. Even so, we have to try, because that is what our Heavenly Father expects from us. That is what He has called us to do. So brethren, I ask again: *What does it take to melt your heart?* Ω

benefit. Most sin starts out as “fun,” enjoyable, or in some way beneficial. We generally compromise because we want *our* way instead of *God’s* way. Some synonyms for compromise are: accommodation, arrangement, settlement, bargain, and middle ground. Society has conditioned us to believe compromise is a *good* thing—and it CAN be, for instance in the case of company/union negotiations—but NOT in a Christian’s life!

Upon reflection, compromise is what caused the sin of Adam and Eve. They once *knew* God and had a personal relationship with Him. Then they began to listen to an outside influence—the serpent. They visualized the *benefits* of disobeying God—believing that they could someday be as God. They were deceived—they believed a lie as opposed to divine revelation. They sinned—transgressed the law of what God said. THEY COMPROMISED!

Likewise, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of red pottage (Genesis 25:27–34). HE COMPROMISED!

God revealed Himself to the fledgling nation of Israel. He gave them His Ten Commandments. “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw *it*, they removed, and stood afar off” (Exodus 20:18). They said, “...All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient” (Exodus 24:7). They were led, fed, instructed, and protected by God for 40 years in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2), yet they murmured, broke the Sabbath, and sinned repeatedly. They knew the truth and yet they still compromised by failing to obey.

Even wise King Solomon COMPROMISED by multiplying wives to himself, against God’s commandment: “Neither shall he [the king] multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away” (Deuteronomy 17:17). “But king Solomon loved many strange women...” (1 Kings 11:1). The result? “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods...” (verse 4). HE COMPROMISED!

Samson disclosed the secret to his enormous strength for the favors of Delilah. By divulging his secret and allowing his hair to be cut, Samson disregarded his Nazarite vow and thus severed his covenant with God (Judges 16:16–20). As a consequence, God finally withdrew his supernatural strength. Samson COMPROMISED!

Moses was an example of one who refused to compromise: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25).

Let’s Be Honest!

Let’s be honest: there are some things that we, as Christians, *know* are contrary to God’s will, and we do them anyway. True or false?

One of Satan’s most effective weapons against the people of God has always been the appeal to compromise. We slip and slide and try to maneuver around what we *KNOW* from God’s Word! We want *our* way over *God’s* way. We often start out by rationalizing that our situation is different, and justify it by invoking the “ox in the ditch” excuse. Now, Satan the devil *knows* that God’s people are not likely to go out and commit a horrendous sin—rob a bank, blackmail, or murder someone. But if he can nudge or move a Christian to give in—compromise—A LITTLE BIT AT A TIME, INCH-BY-INCH BY CREEPING INCREMENTALISM, he has them on a slippery slope! After all, we *all* know the way back to Babylon—back into the chaos, confusion, and morass of the world that we came out of!

The message of the world is: “Relax! Take it easy. Don’t be a fanatic. After all, God understands.” It says, “I’ll scratch your back if you’ll scratch mine.” “You read my stuff, and I’ll read yours.” “You come to my church, and I’ll come to yours.” It says, “All these churches can’t be wrong” “Trust me, I wouldn’t steer you wrong—and look at all these wonderful people and all these great benefits!” Brethren, beware! Compromise is like leaven; a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9).

That’s what happened to a major branch of God’s Church within the lifetimes of most of us! Little by little they were given “alternative understandings” to what the Word of God plainly *said*! The doctrines of God are all linked together; when you change one, like toppling dominoes, each affects another, and another, until one’s entire belief system is altered. In due time, the “new, changed, improved, enlightened, and liberated” church is barely recognizable from what it had been. Within a short space of time, many of the pagan doctrines God’s called-out ones once universally abhorred was repackaged, relabeled, perfumed, gift-wrapped and promoted as though it had great value. What took hundreds of years in the past was accomplished in a single generation.

Little by little, adherents were taught to compromise God’s Word by

Compromise, Continued on page 10



It's the *digital invasion*, or more specifically, "Internet addiction," professionally labeled as *Internet Addiction Disorder* (IAD).

Invasion of the Megabites

There is a very serious concern among mental health professionals that this invasion, with all of the inherent attractions and temptations that come from our curiosities and competitiveness to participate in an endless number of games and to traffic in an unlimited amount of information, will rob us of our connection to the sensitivities *reality* requires. This newly created "cyber world," with its Internet and prodigious amounts of digital gadgets and apps, is indeed changing our brains as well as our behavior and habits, and has become the newest, most modern "tool of addiction."

Clearly, a whole new variety of addictions have emerged—and the fastest among these digital pathologies topping the list is *pornography*. World-renowned Christian apologist, author, and radio commentator, Josh McDowell, said: "The greatest threat to the body of Christ, to the church, to families, and to the individual Christian is the pervasive, destructive pornography available through the Internet. An insidious intruder is putting your children at risk. It is systematically stalking your children and, sadly, most parents and Christian leaders are oblivious to it."

Though this is unquestionably true, the fact is, there are *multiple fronts* of attack that we as individuals and families are contending with from this invasive intruder, IAD. A quick comparison of the year 2000 with 2010 illustrates the magnitude of this growing threat and the potential impact it's had on our lifestyles, mental health, and emotional balance. Notice the *explosive increase* over this 10-year period.

We spent an average of 2.7 hours daily online, compared to 18 hours in 2010; 100 million daily Google searches, compared to 2 billion previously; 12 billion daily emails, compared to 247 billion in 2010; 12,000 daily blogs, compared to 141 million; 0 iTunes, compared to 10 billion downloads in 2010; 0 daily Tweets, compared to 50 million; 0 daily YouTube videos, compared to 4 billion in 2010; 0 people on Facebook, compared to 600 million in 2010. This is an astonishing comparison between the years 2000 and 2010! One cannot deny our lives have been severely changed, and not always for the better! Let me illustrate some of the "fruit" of this new social intruder, IAD.

Just a few decades ago, in order to get the adrenaline high that was obtained solely from things like alcohol, drugs, or sex—it's a fact that now, one can achieve the same result by simply going online! That's right—with just one "click," you can be exposed to a myriad of powerful subjects, images, and/or videos that are potentially lethal in their *addictive attraction*.

Interestingly enough, an expert in the study of this field, and member of the *American Psychological Association*, Dr. Kimberly Young, presented a very pointed warning in 1995—that's right, 1995!—in a paper she authored, titled *Internet Addiction: The Emergence of a New Disorder*. Her early research disclosed, "Marriages, dating relationships, parent-child relationships, and close friendships were being disrupted by excessive use of the Internet. Dependents gradually spent *less time with real people* in their lives in exchange for solitary time in front of a computer."

This goes to substantiate the *American Journal of Psychiatry's* opinion that this now appears to be a very common new disorder. And though there has yet to be a confirmed formal diagnostic category, it is anticipated that IAD will be included in the up and coming fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

Already, three major categories have been determined: 1) sexual preoccupations; 2) excessive gaming; and 3) Email/text messaging. Obviously, those involved with these activities can waste enormous amounts of time online, spending away precious moments from their

real lives and those who matter



Did you realize...

- 60% of married men will have an extramarital affair
- 50% of married women will have an extramarital affair
- 57% who are online use the Internet to cheat
- 38% who are online engage in explicit online sexual conversation
- 50% talk on the phone with someone they first contacted online
- 31% who converse online are led to an actual sexual encounter
- 33% of 97 million U.S. singles date from online contacts
- 25% of online relationships are romantic in nature
- 70% of Internet users' time is devoted to building romantic/platonic relationships
- 84% of teens own one or more personal media devices
- 51% of teens use the Internet daily
- Multiple websites for "married couples" to arrange extra-marital affairs now exist



most to them, in exchange for the adrenaline high that comes from the *virtual reality* of cyberspace.

According to many of the most recent statistics, our children, young mothers, middle-aged to older married couples, and single people are most vulnerable. Most of these IAD's manifest in the following digital addictions: cybersex, cyber affairs, arranging dates via services, sexting, cyber bullying, Internet gambling, Internet video gaming, texting, and social media accessing. And the list keeps growing as technology develops and grows.

So What's the Risk?

Many who are involved and "online" do not see the risks that lurk within the cyberspace media frenzy. They view it as a convenient way to conduct business, socialize, pass the time away, or just meet new friends. It is very easy for IAD to cause one to neglect his family, physically and/or emotionally. Marriages can become estranged, especially if the time spent is used for sexting, cybersex, pornography, etc. It can infringe on your career and cause work-related problems, which can lead to financial issues and perhaps even bankruptcy—especially if compounded by allowing the ease of online shopping and/or gambling to get out of hand. And most

recently, research has proved that personalities can change and one may even take on different personas, adding to identity crisis and personality disorders, especially while online.

Growing evidence is beginning to show that digital addictions can actually change the functioning of the brain, which may result in some possible damage. When IAD becomes obsessive/compulsive, it has much in common with other addictions. Here are four points to consider: *First*, if you are compelled to participate in the activity excessively, then you should take action to reduce your time spent on the device. *Secondly*, if upon stopping, or unable to use the device, whether I-phone, computer, I-pad, Blackberry, etc., for any length of time, and you become irritable, tense, anxious, depressed, or angry—these are recognizable signs that should be considered as withdrawal symptoms. *Thirdly*, if you are driven to constantly upgrade to a bigger and faster unit, with more variety, apps, memory, etc., this should be a warning sign. The more stimulating the software and games become, you can be assured more time will be spent online. And *finally*, if you are beginning to notice an increase in arguments, lying, reduced achievement, social isolation, headaches, or fatigue—all of this can be an indication that IAD is a legitimate incremental possibility in your life.

However, what is most serious about IAD is what it can do to your pleasure receptors. Like most addictions, because IAD has a similar effect on your "pleasure system" as do



Continued on next page

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other substances, sometimes an increase in pleasure *loss* is experienced—known as “anhedonia”—in the little nuances of our lives. If one’s digital device use is permitted to go on unchecked, and an addictive, excessive habit develops for any length of time, it *may lead* to depression problems. Dr. Archibald Hart has written a very good book on this subject titled, *Thrilled to Death: How the Endless Pursuit of Pleasure is Leaving us Numb*.

The words of Jesus Christ, our Lord, come with a very contemporary and strong warning about how the “love of many will wax cold” in the last days. As Christians, it is important we balance our lives against all the potential distractions that come in the form of a *multitude* of contraptions—and the world of digital devices is certainly a major trap if we allow it. Clearly, the almost cult-like following *Apple* has with its products is a testament to the potentially addictive world cyberspace has to offer.

A Balanced Life is the Christian Lifestyle

Some time ago, my wife and I went to a small local tavern for dinner and drinks. It’s a quaint little pub type of establishment where a lot of the locals go who live in our rural township in Ohio. Upon arriving, we decided to eat at the bar and proceeded to seat ourselves at one of the far ends. I happened to notice that only two others were sitting beside us there. Additionally, I noticed both were using their I-phones for whatever purpose, and were not talking to each other, even though they were a couple.

After some time, the place began to fill up, especially around the bar. I happened to break from the conversation with my wife to notice what I thought was rather extraordinary. There was very little talking—I suppose that’s what caught my attention and interrupted my conversation, now that I look back on it. To my surprise, it seemed most everyone was on his or her I-phones! Those who weren’t, sat quietly while the others attended to their business or interests. They were all together, sitting next to each other, but no one was talking—many were busy, engrossed with their digital devices, texting, reading, or answering email, while others sat patiently waiting for their partner to finish up with the call, text, or email review! I found this fascinating and quite illustrative of the day and age we’re living in.

Since this experience, I can’t help but notice how many people simply entertain and/or occupy themselves with virtual reality devices instead of spending quality *real time* with those they love. I’m sure you’ve noticed, when in public, people checking their email, texting, or answering a call while they’re supposed to be engaged in the audience of the person they’re with. Humorously, I’ve heard it said, the primary reason there was a baby-boom generation during the 1950s was because there were no televisions in the bedroom. As comical as that may sound, let me remind you, we not only have television, but a prodigious amount of digital device distractions in the bedroom today that compete with our time for intimacy. And let me remind you, at least for some ethnicities, our reproduction rate isn’t even high enough to stay even!

I say this in jest, of course, but the point is made rather plainly. We are surrounded by many distractions that compete for our time spent in the real and actual world with those we love—and if we’re not careful, controlled, and actively managing the time we spend on these *devices*, the additional distractions and temptations that come with the *virtual* world will rob us of what little time we have left for our *real* world relationships. That’s the point!

We are told in Daniel, in the last days, “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:4). This describes a very busy time that would demand a great deal of our attention—much like today. Living a balanced life between the material and secular obligations we find ourselves living with, and that of the spiritual and emotional demands a Christian lifestyle requires, isn’t an easy task. Yet, our Lord in His prayer, prior to His crucifixion, appealed to the Father; “...not that thou shouldest take them [Christians] out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them [Christians] from the evil. They [Christians] are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:15–16).

Our Lord’s expectation of us is that we will be careful and cautious about the evil that stalks us. Maintaining vigilance about our habits, behaviors, and how we care about others is paramount to our Christian character and way of life. Notice, in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14), how Jesus makes it clear that the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and lusts of other things, can and will choke off the growth of His Word, preventing any *fruit of conversion* from us, if we don’t control these cares and their effects in our lives.

Like it or not, we have cares, opportunities, and demands upon us in this world. Therefore, we must *discipline* ourselves in the use of our time by prioritizing our life’s circumstances and obligations. All I’m suggesting is, the priority we place on the time we have with those we care most about, should be shown in *actuality* in the *real* world rather than sacrificing that time with the *virtual* world. This is what Christ would expect! It’s only right, if we really do care for those in our lives.

Now don’t get me wrong—surfing the web, texting, reading and writing emails, Tweeting and Facebook, managing your site, etc., is not evil in itself, any more than drinking alcohol is, or missing a Sabbath service or holyday service on occasion. But if it’s going to become a major priority and/or habit in your life to over drink, miss Sabbath services, skip out on the holydays, or spend an extraordinary amount of time in the virtual world at the *expense* and sacrifice of our real life’s needs, that’s when it crosses over and becomes wrong. That is a misappropriated priority.

If we are allowing these technologies to preempt and encroach on our time spent with God and family—that is when these digital devices can become a lethal distraction that can lead to damaging, or outright destroying the relationships that mean so much to us—including our relationship with God. It would be an interesting comparison and assessment to honestly evaluate our time spent with television and other virtual reality technologies with that of our Bible Study and family time. Ponder that for a moment and be brutally *honest* with yourself.

Maintaining a balance, control, and discipline with these easy-access digital mechanisms is fast becoming a real challenge for many individuals who own these devices. Far too many of us are allowing them to infringe upon our personal living habits, consequently becoming a new habit that negatively impacts our lives.

If not controlled, they are capable of destroying your relationships, “messing with your mind,” and possibly changing your personality, causing you to be an “inattentive surf.” This is fast becoming a proven fact by the psychological counseling community, according to growing statistics. The emotional connection to those around us—our husbands, wives, children, grandparents, sisters, brothers, friends, co-workers, etc.—can be at risk if we’re not careful with the time we spend in *virtual* reality, compared to

actual reality.

So, *manage* and/or *budget* the time you spend in the cyber world. Don’t let your digital contraptions control, use, and abuse you—instead, *you* remain in control and use it for the perceived benefits you believe will serve you well! Remember, *you bought and paid for this technology—you own it—it doesn’t own you!* Ω



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Coming Soon! Sermon Transcripts on line.

Christmas, Continued from page 1

Another Proverb states, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” (Proverbs 18:13). We need to examine these facts with open minds, searching out the truth, not with minds clouded with emotion and tradition.

The plain truth is that NOWHERE in the Bible are believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or of Jesus Christ instructed to celebrate Christmas. You may search your Bible from cover to cover only to find that it just isn’t there. Upon close examination, you will find that the early Christian church not only did *not* celebrate Christmas, but instead, God’s people kept the sacred festivals God ordained in the Bible as outlined in Leviticus chapter 23. (Write for your free copy of our booklet, *God’s Seasonal Plan*.)

What the Experts Say

Consider these amazing facts from historians and reliable sources:

“Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church... the first evidence of the feast is from Egypt” (*Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 1911 Edition).

The 25th of December was celebrated in ancient days as the birthday of the unconquerable SUN god (variously know as *Tammuz*, *Mithra*, *Saturn*, *Adonis* or *BAAL*) centuries *before* Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem.

“Christmas customs are an evolution from times that long antedated the Christmas period—a descent from seasonal, pagan, religious and national practices, hedged about with legend and tradition... In the beginning many of the earth’s inhabitants were sun worshippers because the course of their lives depended on its yearly round in the heavens, and feasts were held at its return from distant wanderings. In the south of Europe, in Egypt and Persia the sun-gods were worshipped with elaborate ceremonies at the season of the winter solstice, as a fitting time to pay tribute to the god of plenty, while in Rome the Saturnalia reigned for a week... The exact day and year of Christ’s birth has never been satisfactorily settled. The fathers of the church in A.D. 340 chose the day of the *winter solstice* which was firmly fixed in the minds of the people and which was their most important festival” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1949, Article “Christmas,” p. 642).

“In a famous letter to Augustine, Pope Gregory directs the great missionary to accommodate the ceremonies of the Christian worship as much as possible to those of the heathen, that the people might not be startled at the change, and in particular the Pope advised Augustine to allow converts to kill and eat at the Christmas festival a great number of oxen to the glory of God, *as they had formerly done to the Devil*” (*The Story of Christmas* by Michael Harrison, p. 28).

“It is nevertheless almost certain that the 25th of December cannot be the nativity of the Savior, for it is then the height of the rainy season in Judaea, and shepherds could hardly be watching their flocks by night in the plains.... Not casually or arbitrarily was the festival of the nativity celebrated on the 25th of December. One of the principal causes that co-operated in fixing this period was that *almost all the heathen nations regarded the winter solstice as the turning point of the year—the beginning of the renewed life and activity of the powers of nature, and of the gods who were merely the symbolic personifications of these*. In more northern countries this fact must have made itself peculiarly palpable—hence the Celts and Germans, from the oldest times, celebrated the season with the greatest festivities. At the winter solstice the Norsemen held their great *Yule-feast* in commemoration of the fiery sun-wheel, and believed that during the twelve nights from the 25th of December to the 6th of January they could trace the personal movements and interferences on earth of their great deities, Odin, Beretha, etc. *Many of the beliefs and usages of the old Germans, and also of the Romans, relating to this period, passed over from heathenism to Christianity, and have partly survived to the present day*” (*Chambers Encyclopaedia*, 1908 Edition, Vol. 11, p. 222, Article “Christmas”).

“There is no authoritative tradition as to the day or month of Christ’s birth.... The winter solstice was regarded as the birthday of the sun and at Rome a pagan festival of the nativity of ‘*sol invictus*’ was introduced by the Emperor Aurelian on the 25th of December, 274. The church, unable to stamp out this popular festival, spiritualized it as the feast of the Nativity of the Sun of Righteousness. When Christianity spread northwards it encountered a similar pagan festival also held at the winter solstice—the great Yule feast of the Norsemen. Once again Christmas absorbed heathen customs. From the various sources came the Yule log, the Christmas tree introduced into England from Germany and first mentioned in 1789” (*Chambers Encyclopaedia*, 1970, p. 538, Article “Christmas”).

As you can see, there is no shortage of historical evidence that Christmas long antedated Christ. Scholars have known these facts for centuries. They can be easily confirmed in any reference library. In short, we see that each year on December 25 the ancient pagans held a festival in honor of the SUN god. In order to win Gentile converts to the Christian faith, the Roman Church, centuries after the times of the apostles, *adopted* this ancient pagan winter festival of the SUN god and renamed it the “Mass of Christ”—or in its shortened form, “Christmas”—mistakenly thinking that the play upon words would shift the honor to the *SON of God*, the Savior of the world.

What, then, does *God* think of this pagan honor bestowed upon Him? “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). He then goes on to mention one such custom. “For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not” (Jeremiah 10:3). Do you know of any such custom today (verses 3–4)? Again, in Deuteronomy 12:30–32 God warns, “Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire *not* after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.’ Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he *hateth*, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: *thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it*.” As shocking as it may seem to most, there in your very own Bible God says He *hates* those pagan customs that are attributed to Him! (Be sure to send for our free booklet, *Facts You Should Know About Christmas*.)



The cherished X-mas tree idol

More Authoritative Quotations

Now that we understand our Savior was not born on December 25, but in the autumn of the year, perhaps on the Feast of Trumpets or during the *Feast of Tabernacles*, let us consider further what various historians say about how December 25 came to be celebrated as the Savior’s birth.

In the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the author Gibbon says: “The Roman Christians, ignorant of his (Christ’s) birth, fixed the solemn festival to the 25th of December, the Brumalia, or Winter Solstice, when the Pagans annually celebrated the birth of Sol” (Vol. ii, p. 383).

Grolier’s Encyclopedia says: “Christmas is the feast of the birth of Jesus Christ, celebrated on December 25.... Despite the beliefs about Christ that the birth stories expressed, the church did *not* observe a festival for the celebration of the event until the 4th century... since 274, under the emperor Aurelian, Rome had celebrated the feast of the ‘*Invincible Sun*’ on December 25. In the Eastern Church, *January 6*, a day also associated with the winter solstice, was in Italy preferred. In course of time, however, the West added the Eastern date as the *Feast of the Epiphany*, and the East added the Western date of *Christmas*”.

“The festivals of Rome are innumerable; but five of the most important may be singled out for elucidation—viz., Christmas-day, Lady-day, Easter, the Nativity of St. John, and the Feast of the Assumption. Each and all of these can be proved to be Babylonian” (*The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop, p. 91).

“Within the Christian Church no such festival as Christmas was ever heard of till the third century, and that not till the fourth century was far advanced did it gain much observance. How, then, did the Roman Church fix on December 25th as Christmas-day? Why, thus: Long before the fourth century, and long before the Christian era itself, a festival was celebrated among the heathen, at that precise time of the year, in honor of the birth of the son of the Babylonian queen of heaven; and it may fairly be presumed that in order to conciliate the heathen, and to swell the number of the nominal adherents of Christianity, the same festival was adopted by the Roman Church, giving it only the name of Christ. This tendency on the part of the Christians to meet Paganism half-way was very early developed ... Upright men strove to stem the tide, but in spite of all their efforts, the apostasy went on, till the Church, with the exception of a small remnant, was submerged under Pagan superstition. That Christmas was originally a Pagan festival is beyond all doubt. The time of the year, the ceremonies with which it is still celebrated prove its origin. In Egypt, the son of Isis, the Egyptian title for the queen of heaven, was born at this very time, ‘about the time of the winter solstice’” (Ibid., p. 93).

“Even where the sun was the favorite object of worship, as in Babylon itself and elsewhere, at this festival he was worshipped not merely as the orb of day, but *as God incarnate*. It was an essential principle of the Babylonian system, that the *Sun or Baal was the one only God*. When, therefore *Tammuz was worshipped as God incarnate, that implied also that he was an incarnation of the Sun*. In the Hindoo mythology, which is admitted to be essentially

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Babylonian, this comes out very distinctly. There, Surya, or the Sun, is represented as being incarnate, and born for the purpose of subduing the enemies of the gods, who, without such a birth, could not have been subdued.

“It was no mere astronomical festival, then, that the Pagans celebrated at the winter solstice. That festival at Rome was called the *feast of Saturn*, and the mode in which it was celebrated there, showed whence it had been derived. The feast as regulated by Caligula, lasted five days; loose reins were given to drunkenness and revelry, slaves had temporary emancipation and used all manner of freedoms with their masters. This was precisely the way in which, according to Berosus, the drunken festival of the month Thebeth, answering to our December, in other words, the *festival of Bacchus*, was celebrated in Babylon... *The Christmas tree*, now so common among us, was equally common in pagan Rome and pagan Egypt. In Egypt that tree was the palm-tree; in Rome it was the fir; the palm tree denoting the pagan Messiah, as *Baal-Tamar*, the fir referring to him as *Baal-Berith*” (Ibid., p. 96–97).

So How Did Christmas Get Into the Christian Church?

The *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* gives a clear explanation in the article on “Christmas”:

“How much the date of the festival depended upon the pagan Brumalia [December 25] following the Saturnalia [December 17–24], and celebrating the shortest day of the year and the ‘new sun’...cannot be accurately determined. The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence.... The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and in manner. Christian preachers of the West and the Near East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ’s birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia *accused their western brethren of idolatry and sun worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival*” (emphasis added).

The Roman Empire had been totally pagan, and prior to the fourth century, Christians were few in numbers and persecuted by both the government and pagans. Then the Emperor Constantine professed Christianity, placing it on an equal footing with paganism. Christianity suddenly became popular.

However most of the “converts” had been brought up in pagan customs, the chief of which was December 25. They enjoyed this festival of joy and merrymaking, and they did not want to give it up!

The pagan Manichaeism identified the SON of God with the physical SUN, giving the new “converts” an excuse to call December 25 (re-birth of the SUN) the birthday of the SON of God.

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, some Latins, as early as AD 354, may have transferred the birthday of Christ from January 6 to December 25, which was then a Mithraic feast or birthday of the unconquered SUN. The Syrians and Armenians who clung to January 6 accused the Romans of sun worship and idolatry, claiming the December 25 festival was invented by the disciples of Cerinthus.

Many “gods,” Same Birthday

Upon examination, we find there were many others who celebrated the 25th of December as the birthday of *their* gods before it was agreed upon as the birthday of Jesus. There are the people of India, who rejoice, decorate their houses with garlands, and give presents to their friends on this day.



Woodcuts from *The Two Babylons* showing the mother-and-child tradition from various cultures

The people of China also celebrate this day and close their shops. The pagan god Buddha is believed to have been born on this day when the “Holy Ghost” descended on his virgin mother Maya.

The great savior and god of the Persians, Mithras, is also believed to have been born on the 25th of December long *before* the coming of Jesus.

The Egyptians celebrated this day as the birthday of their great savior Horus, the Egyptian god of light and the son of the “virgin mother” and “queen of the heavens,” Isis. Osiris, lord of the dead and the underworld in Egypt, the son of “the holy

virgin,” was believed to have been born on the 25th of December.

The Greeks celebrated the 25th of December as the birthday of Hercules, the son of the supreme god of the Greeks, Zeus, through the mortal woman Alcmena. Bacchus, the god of wine and revelry among the Romans (known among the Greeks as Dionysus), was also born on this day.

Adonis, revered as a “dying-and-rising god” among the Greeks, miraculously was also born on the 25th of December. His worshipers held him a yearly festival representing his death and resurrection in mid-summer. The ceremonies of his birthday are recorded to have taken place in the same cave in Bethlehem which is claimed to have been the birth place of Jesus.

The Scandinavians celebrated the 25th of December as the birthday of their god Freyr, the son of their supreme god of the heavens, Odin.

The Romans observed this day as the birthday of the *god of the SUN*, *Natalis Solis Invicti* (“Birthday of Sol the Invincible”). There was great rejoicing, and all shops were closed while the people turned to fun and games. Presents were exchanged, and slaves were indulged in great liberties. Remember, these are the same Romans who would later preside over the council of Nicea (AD 325), which led to the official Christian recognition of the “Trinity” as the “true” nature of God, and the “fact” that Jesus was born on the 25th of December also.

Christmas is not the only “Christian” festival that was borrowed from ancient paganism and foisted upon the religion of Jesus. There is also the venerable day of the Sun (SUN-day), Easter, the Feast of St. John, the Holy Communion, the Annunciation of the Virgin, the Assumption of the Virgin, and many others. These all have their roots in ancient pagan worship, and have crept into professing Christianity today.

**Okay! So Christmas is a pagan festival!
But what if we just honor Christ and don’t
take part in any of these pagan customs?**

Let us allow the Scriptures speak for themselves...

The Scripture declares, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit *and in truth*” (John 4:24). “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6). God’s spirit is the spirit of truth (John 17:17) and the spirit of truth does not lead us to the truth through error, half-truths, lies, or false doctrine. Truth slices through and exposes falsehood *every time*. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Consider: Worshipping Christ through honoring His birthday on a day that is *NOT* His birthday, borrowing many pagan customs in the process, is *NOT* worshipping Him “in Spirit and in Truth!” On the contrary, it is actually taking His name in vain. “Howbeit *in vain* do they worship me,” Christ said, “teaching for doctrines the commandments of *men*” (Mark 7:7). God is supreme. It is *HE* who determines when and how He will be worshipped, not puny, sinful little men.

What Now?

If this information is new to you, your head may be spinning. You may be wondering, “How does this information affect *me*? What shall I do?” Perhaps you now find yourself in an impasse. If all this about Christmas is correct, then how should we respond? To ignore truth is obviously not a safe policy to follow, especially when it concerns the choice between *Baal worship* on the one hand and *obedience to the commandments of God* on the other. If you are intellectually honest, we challenge you to *go to the library and check it out*. Read as many encyclopedias, dictionaries, and other reference works as you can to see if these things are true. The Bible commands us to “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The inference is, if it is *not* good and true, do *not* hold fast to it; let it go. We prove all things by comparing what we hear with the Word of God, and if our beliefs and customs—however cherished they may be—do not agree with the Bible, we need to reject them. If they do agree with the Bible, receive, believe, and practice them. God does not require “blind faith.” Hearers of the Gospel are bound to inquire, examine, and judge whether what they hear is—or is not—according to Scripture. Any man or body of men who denies us this right, or hinders us from exercising it, is violating the revealed will of God.

When you have thoroughly studied the matter, you are left with a choice: We can either go along with the pagan festival of Christmas—or obey the Almighty’s commandments.

There really is no other option.

Compromise, continued from page 5

wresting Scripture (2 Peter 3:16), tradition (Mark 7:9), worldly philosophy (Colossians 2:9), and human reasoning (Mark 2:6). *They traded:*

- Sunday for Sabbath
- Easter for Passover
- The world's pagan holidays for God's holydays
- Tradition for sound doctrine

If followers did not accept the new changes, they were labeled “old school,” “unenlightened,” “rebellious,” and—horror of horrors!—“legalists!” How ironic! Should we not *want* to be legal with God, and not illegal?

And if one did not go along with their “new truth” paradigm, a spirit of division arose. Many felt as though they were left alone, abandoned, ostracized from old friends and family. The sheep instinct intimidated many into going along—compromising—with the biblical truth they once studied, proved, knew, and believed!

The result was a splintering, no, a *shattering*, of that organization into literally hundreds of quarreling splits and divisions. One of Satan's favorite tactics is “Divide and conquer.” Satan will come with a boatload of accusations, “alternate understandings,” and “new truth.” Beware of anyone who says, “The Bible doesn't really mean that,” as they try to shoehorn in their own interpretations. Don't tell me what it “means”—tell me what it **SAYS** and I'll *know* what it means!

The world—and false churches—will always attack the old-fashioned Bible believer—the Scripturalist—who takes a stand for the Bible and Jesus Christ no matter what! “Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:4).

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

To compromise the truth of God's Word means to arbitrate with the devil and concede that he is partly in the right. A case in point: Adam and Eve in the Garden. Nothing will blind the eyes of a man or woman quicker than a touch of compromise. The old life of sin does not look so bad when viewed through the eyeglasses of compromise. **COMPROMISE IS A CHRISTIAN'S DEADLIEST ENEMY!** Remember the story of the frog that was placed in a pan of cool water. As the water was slowly heated, the frog felt good—until he was *too weak* to jump out, and perished. The world's paganized holidays are just around the corner. Will you be pressured to compromise—to give in “just a little” so you don't offend anyone—or will we be strong and of good courage and take a stand for God's truth? Think about it.

Romans 12:2 warns, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

“And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, ‘Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues’” (Revelation 18:4).

The scripture comes to mind, “Thou shalt make no covenant [agreement] with them, nor with their gods” (Exodus 23:32) No compromise! A great rule of thumb is: When in doubt, don't!

It is good to be cooperative—when you can—but to sell your value system for riches, favor, position, or advancement is a greased slide back into the world! A Christian who tries to satisfy everyone ends up not pleasing anyone.

Spiritual Immunization

How do we immunize ourselves from the sin of compromise? You already know. It's found in Ephesians 6:13: “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” Too many only put on *part* of the armor of God and are therefore not fit for full spiritual battle. Remember, Satan is in the process of deceiving the whole world (Revelation 12:9), and he is out to get **YOU** personally (1 Peter 5:8). “For we wrestle *not* against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). We are no match for him. To go to battle with Satan and his minions without God's Spirit is like going to battle in your underwear and a plastic sword. “*Thou* [God] art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in Thy Word” (Psalms 119:114).

We are told in 2 Peter 3:18, “But *grow* in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” God's Spirit is not static—it cannot be “bottled up”!

“Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou *stir up the gift of God*, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6).

2 Corinthians 4:16 says, “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet *the inward man is renewed day by day.*”

When the Holy Spirit dwindles in a person, truth and the ability to resist error is **LOST** with it! We must go to God in daily prayer and ask Him to renew His Holy Spirit in us. We are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, “Quench not the Spirit.” There are at least two ways to quench or put out the Holy Spirit. We can deliberately reject Jesus Christ by saying, in effect, “That's it! I no longer accept You as my Lord and Savior. I want to live my life my way!” Or, more quietly, we can simply let it starve to death by inattention, lack of prayer, Bible study, and meditation.

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, **ADD** to your faith *virtue*; and to virtue *knowledge*; And to knowledge *temperance*; and to temperance *patience*; and to patience *godliness*; And to godliness *brotherly kindness*; and to brotherly kindness *charity*. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:4–10) Ω

Consider this...

Isn't it ironic that man's fascination with the mythological, the pagan, and the idolatrous have literally crowded out God's holydays?

Most professing Christians are totally unaware that God's plan for all humanity has been deliberately shoved aside, dismissed, or overlooked by today's clergy as being “done away” or “Old Testament.” Isn't it time you knew the *truth* about what God has in store for you? Our booklet, *GOD'S SEASONAL PLAN*, explains God's holydays in detail, straight from your own Bible. It's yours free for the asking. Just dial 903-939-2929 or visit our Website.

JAMAICA, continued from page 11

to understand our mind and its operation could cause us to vote against our professed priorities. Drawing on both the Bible and leading edge thinking on the brain, Mr. O'Connor showed how our unconscious prejudices, such as “confirmation bias” and “selection bias” can influence us in ways we might be completely unaware of. Deacon Derrick Alwood delivered what for many was the message of the Feast, titled *How to Avoid Spiritual Burnout*. His brilliant use of metaphors and stories weaved a compelling tapestry of spiritual enlightenment. “Your problems are for a purpose,” he said. “Always remember that the same sun which melts wax also hardens clay; you decide which you will be.” He asserted that the problem of spiritual burnout can only be solved by understanding that our problems are taking us somewhere where God wants us to be. Sermonette speaker Sean Goldburn also delivered a memorable presentation titled *Developing Spiritual Habits*. Like Deacon O'Connor, he drew from Scripture, scientific research, and practical experience to emphasize the power of habits in shaping our lives. He explained how habits are structured and how to take control of the habit loop consisting of cue-routine-reward, by nurturing strong desire to change and grow.

All the other sermons and sermonettes were of very high quality and delivered valuable insights and practical instruction for overcoming. Eliud Ramocan delivered an engaging multimedia presentation titled *Resurrection Time and the Millennium Mind*. Deacon Fenton Tracy delivered a much talked about sermonette on *Developing Unity in the Church*. As the Jamaican work continues to grow, it is essential for all the groups to work together in Christian love and harmony in order to be as effective as possible. Other speakers included Ricardo Hall, Stephen Scale, Jeremy McKenzie, Jordan McKenzie, and Toronto pastor George Ramocan, who closed off the Feast with two practical sermons on how to overcome in the Christian walk.

This year, the special Herbert W. Armstrong Memorial Speaking Competition was wrested from Kingston by an outstanding new presenter from Spanish Town, Mr. Allen. On the Last Great Day, Pastor Boyne and Deacon O'Connor baptized 13 new members into the church. This was the highest number of people ever baptized at the Feast of Tabernacles. More than 100 brethren turned up on the Ocho Rios Beach to share in the baptismal ceremony. Ω Submitted by Glenford Smith

Feast Reports, 2012

JAMAICA

The Jamaican CGI continued its record-breaking output at this year's Feast of Tabernacles, chalking up an high attendance of 416 and a baptism of 13 persons at its Feast site in Ocho Rios, St. Ann. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the *Church of God International* in Jamaica, and the 40th anniversary of Pastor Boyne's call to the Church of God. In 1982, the CGI began in his living room with five persons, including himself and his wife. The contrast between that image and the sight of a packed auditorium at the Ruins at the Falls, with over 400 jubilant Feast-keepers from four congregations, couldn't have been more telling. (The numbers are more impressive in light of the fact that the church lost a third of its membership in a 1997 split.) Veteran Feast-keepers and newbies alike from Kingston, Spanish Town, Ocho Rios, and Maroon Town started off the Feast on a high with an exciting session of special Bible readings, hymns, and praise and worship. All the brethren paid a special tribute to Pastor Boyne in honour of his 40th anniversary in the Church of God and for his role establishing the CGI here. In his brief greetings on the opening night, Mr. Boyne shared a few reflections on his journey and thanked God for sustaining him. He also commended all who continued to support the work which God had blessed from such humble beginnings. From the opening night, the brethren were in a festive mood, which carried over into the first day, conducted by the vibrant and creative worship leader Deacon Chris Hendricks. Special items of songs and dance were given by Aldith Smith, Janielle Smith, Tahlee Lee, the Group Promise, Kerrian Brissett, Paul O'Connor, Donovan Hylton, Delroy Parks, Cynthia Reynolds, Kelly-Ann Boyne, Trever Wright, Rene Miur, saxophonist Don Crosswell, Kimari Bell, Kaydene Wright, and the CGI Adult Choir led by Mr. Brian Scott. Throughout the festival, these performers enriched the brethren with inspiring and uplifting performances.

For the first time ever, Mr. Boyne did not deliver the opening sermon at the Feast, and in fact, didn't speak until the fourth day. Ministerial Apprenticeship Programme (MAP) candidate Pedro Hall, leader of the Spanish Town congregation, enjoyed the honour of giving the opening sermon of the Feast, a memorable sermon titled *Wanted: True Worshipers*. Noting that human beings have a particular penchant for self-deception, Mr. Hall stated that, as Christians, we needed to be careful that we don't fall into the category of false worshippers. Using the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, in John 4:21-24, Mr. Hall showed that true worshippers worship God both in spirit and in truth. He pointed out the fascinating incongruity of an adulterous woman on her sixth extramarital affair, whose pressing concern was the right place of worship. "She failed to realize that her focus was on the wrong priority. She didn't realize that being a true worshipper had more to do with how she lived rather than where she worshipped," he said. He cautioned listeners not to make the same mistake.

Pastor Roger King from the United States, who was keeping his 48th Feast, delivered the sermon in the second service on the first day. He expressed his pleasure at returning to the Jamaican Feast site after having done so several years ago. Sharing his increasing love and appreciation for nature, Mr. King explained how the Feast days showed the process through which God was going to put things back in order and usher in his Kingdom. He also gave another sermon titled *The Mirror of Nature*, in which he showed the importance of understanding what went wrong with God's creation which made the future restoration described in Isaiah 2 and Isaiah 11 necessary.

In my second-day sermon, I focused on *The Power of Decision* to shape our physical and eternal destinies. Pastor Boyne's much anticipated fourth day sermon and his fifth day follow-up were both captivating doctrinal and scholarly expositions on the book of Revelation. Commenting on Mr. Hall's sermon, he stated that, at the heart of the book, was the issue of true worshippers versus false worshippers, and that the Last Days would be a time to decide which category believers would choose. Noting that Revelation is often regarded as a mysterious book, filled with secret symbols and meanings, he said it was in fact, a "revelation." It was meant to be understood in the Last Days, and should be read and studied in light of prophetic events recorded in the book of Daniel. He explained that many scholars are now seeing, not just the Hebraic roots of the book of Revelation, but the fact that the Old Testament is critical to its understanding. The book of Revelation was structured around the Feast days, he asserted, a fact which makes much of the book incomprehensible to non-holyday-keeping denominations. His sermons, therefore, enlightened the attentive audience on the meanings of such themes as the seven spirits of Revelation, the identity of the two white horse riders in Revelation 6 and Revelation 19, the identity and role of the 24 elders, the sealed 144,000 remnant, and the seven seals. Deacon Paul O'Connor, another MAP candidate, presented an important sermon titled *Voting for the Kingdom of God*. In it, he showed how a failure

Jamaica, continued on page 10

Migori, Suna Migori, KENYA

This year we had the best Feast since we began in the year 2008. This year we baptized 10 brethren: Benta Akinyi, Rose Anyango, Joshua Odhiambo, Steven Okinyi, Charles Odhiambo, Julias Okello, Nimrod Ondigo, Joel Onyango, Juliet Atieno, and Philip Ouma.

Attendance was good during the Feast this year. We did not experience much rain, which would have interfered with our programs. In the afternoon hours, we had enough time for Bible studies and for teaching the children, who also had sufficient time for playing.

On the Last Great Day, we had two services, a morning service and an afternoon service. We closed by singing the songs *I Surrender All* and *God Be With You Till We Meet Again*. Mr. Manas led the closing prayer.

It was not easy for the brethren to depart because of the joyous time that we had, and it was hard to leave one another.

Submitted by Mr. Zablon Anyumba of the CGI Migori group. Baptisms were performed under the direction of The Church of God International, Tyler, Texas. Ω



Zablon performing baptism



Children at the Feast



Mr. Zablon Anyumba



Zablon on left with 8 of the 10 baptized

Mananasi, KENYA

Much Christian greetings from the Mananasi brethren. "We have been always eager to reach this festive season, [which is] now here with us," said Christ's servant, Isaac Gwaro Motanya, in his opening remarks.

Twenty-eight brethren left their homes to glorify our Lord in this year's Feast of Tabernacles in Fonmark Hotel in Kenya. It was all enjoyable with spacious rooms, hot showers, meals at affordable prices, entertainment, swimming pool, and all sorts of activities that made the Feast a success! Wonderful sermons were given as scheduled as the Spirit allowed. We are grateful for your prayers for this Festival.

Ω Submitted by Mr. Isaac Montanya

INDIA

I felt happy because our Festival of Tabernacles has been done very successfully by God's grace. Ω

Submitted by Elder Padma Rao

Notice

The deadline for articles, reports, and pictures for the spring issue of the International News is February 15, 2013.

Feast Reports, 2012

Ballina, New South Wales, AUSTRALIA



Herb Haupt

The 2012 Feast of Tabernacles in Australia was tremendous. It was held in Ballina, a small town on the eastern coast. It lies about 120 miles south of Brisbane at the mouth of the Richmond River, surrounded by rich fertile farmlands. It is one of the most beautiful places that I have ever kept the Feast.

I arrived the Sunday before Tabernacles began to be greeted in the Ballina airport by Herb and Tui

Haupt. I had been delayed a bit in my travel, having made a four-hour detour in New Zealand. Needless to say, I was exhausted after a full 24 hours of air travel. The Haupt's were great hosts, and made me feel very comfortable when I arrived at the house that we would be using as our temporary dwelling. Tui always creates an original painting for the Feast brochure, and she gives the painting to the visiting minister each year. It was truly a delight to receive such a wonderful gift when arriving.

We were right next to the Lions Hall where we had services on the first day. Herb Haupt, the local minister in Australia, gave a tremendous opening sermon about the meaning of the Feast. I gave the afternoon message. In between, we had a lovely catered meal of chicken, lamb, and other Aussie favorites. Every year when I go the Feast the new people I meet seem like long-lost relatives. This year was no exception. I quickly realized that I had a loving family 10,000 miles from home. The fellowship was truly amazing.

The next morning, the church had breakfast at Lennox Head, which is a few miles from Ballina. We were able to walk to the beach, and I was about to experience my first of many spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean. I grew up in the southeastern United States, and my only experience with the ocean has been the flat beaches of the Gulf of Mexico. The beaches here were entirely different. There were huge cliffs and beautiful rocks, with large waves. There were many people enjoying one of Australia's most popular pastimes—surfing. Later that morning I



was able to tour the "House With No Steps" farm, a tourist attraction run entirely by people with disabilities.

Services from the second day forward were at the Jockey Club in Ballina. There were a few mornings when I was lucky enough to see the jockeys training the horses that race there several times a year. Mr. Haupt, Bob Schofield, and I gave several sermons and Bible Studies throughout the Feast. I truly believe each message was inspired by God's Spirit, and the brethren were truly edified.

There were several wonderful outings the entire church participated in, including Bowling, Family Fun Night, and meals at some of the amazing restaurants in the area. One of my favorites was the Picnic Lunch at the park across the street from the house where we were staying. We had a fabulous time playing croquet, badminton, and bocce. There was also an eagle's nest with baby eagles on top of a pole in the park. This was only one of the diverse wildlife sightings I was able to



Jeff Reed

observe on my trip. I was also amazed by the flocks of parrots that flew around in the neighborhood. I saw several large lizards, dolphins, a brief glimpse of a whale, emus, and even fed hungry kangaroos at the Macadamia Castle Zoo.

After this wonderful time with all the great Aussie brethren, I was sad to return home. The day after the Last Great Day, I was scheduled to catch a flight to Sydney in the morning. After arriving at the airport, I was informed that my flight had been cancelled, and I would be leaving that afternoon. This ended up being a blessing, because I was able to take a short

trip to the lighthouse at Byron Bay located at the easternmost point of Australia. This was by far the most beautiful place I visited, and would have missed if my flight had not been cancelled. Standing next to that lighthouse on the mountain overlooking the beautiful ocean, I was reminded of what Jesus said in John 8:12: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Ω

Gaithersburg, Maryland

For the Feast of Tabernacles this year, we gathered near Baltimore, Maryland. Speakers included Mr. Robert Woodland, Mr. Mark Ellis, and Mr. Ray Hall, along with Mr. Mike James, Mr. Hopeton Anderson, and Mr. John Carnegie.

Mr. Woodland encouraged us daily with words and acts. Mr. Ellis gave a great encouragement to rejoice that could well have been much more than a suggestion. All messages were both edifying and instructive. Mr. James's *Edify* message had us on the edge of our seats with a version

seldom heard. Mr. James said the credit of research goes to CGI's Mr. Vance Stinson. Mr. Stinson cannot downplay his part in this heart-searching message to embrace the peoples of God. We must not marvel so much at the creation as we should be in total awe of the Creator!

We were renewed as we united in fellowship and in the hearing of God's Word. Ω

Submitted by Vivian Hall

Feast Reports, 2012

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

The beach was beautiful, with the gentle crashing of waves against the shore, a view of sand dunes and sea oats, and a few palmetto trees. There was plenty of sunshine, with some brief periods of rain. The temperatures were perfect. What a lovely setting in which to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

With the blessing of so much beauty outside, the meeting room presented a warm and welcoming atmosphere indoors for all who came. The room was, for eight days, transformed into a place of joyous worship and fellowship. Inside this room God's people came together and heard inspired messages presented by servant leaders and special music by men and women gifted with great talent. We prayed together and lifted our voices together in songs of praise before our great and awesome God.

As the Feast began, a theme began to emerge, a theme of unity and love. From the moment the first few brethren began to arrive, you could feel the joy of a family reuniting.

As is the tradition, we started off with a Hospitality Night. With finger foods and beverages, beautifully set tables, lots of hugs, conversation and laughter, it was a terrific beginning. The next day, the first day of the Feast, it was wonderful to see so many seats fill up with brethren. With a high attendance of 230 and 206 registered, we were blessed each day in our fellowship.

In addition to Hospitality Night, we also enjoyed other Feast traditions, the Family Dance and the Family Fun Show. With our own Feast band, plenty of refreshments, and a dance floor, we had the makings for a very enjoyable evening, and it was! The Family Dance has long been a favorite activity. The Family Fun Show is aptly named. It was full of fun for everyone, from those who shared their talent to those who watched from the audience. From songs, to dance, to a little comedy and poetry, it was a great time.

What is the Feast without abundant food? One of our favorite activities is the Senior Luncheon. Our seniors were able to enjoy a couple of hours in fellowship over a delicious buffet meal. The ladies looked forward to the Women's Luncheon and Bible Study, which featured a tasty buffet-style meal, along with their own opportunity to fellowship and get to know one another better.

Always a very special part of the Feast is our children—they are our future. To see them happy and learning about God's wonderful plan for us all, and to see them interact with the adults and the adults with them, is a true pleasure.

There is nothing quite as humbling and precious as the Blessing of the Children and the performance by the Children's Choir on Youth Day. This year a community service project was undertaken in the Sabbath classes, and the children decorated 50 large tote bags, which they filled with items donated by the congregation. *Infuse* magazines and notes from the children were also included. The bags were donated to a shelter for youth in the Myrtle Beach area. The ladies who volunteer to teach the children each year do a wonderful job. This is a dedicated group of ladies who tirelessly serve each year. For them, it is truly a labor of love.



**Family Fun Show,
Kelly Key performing**



Congregation, Charles Groce speaking

We were privileged to have *Infuse*, our youth program, in Myrtle Beach. The theme for *Infuse* was "Let Your Light Shine." With a team of dedicated young adults planning and organizing, *Infuse* offered a daily worship service prior to our main service, in addition to hosting many activities. The *Infuse* Kick-off Luncheon took place the first day of the Feast and set the pace for the activities to come. A Nutrition Seminar was presented with some valuable information regarding proper diet and exercise to combat many of the illnesses so many suffer with today. A Children's Carnival was organized and hosted by *Infuse* and several volunteers. With plenty of games, prizes, and refreshments, the evening was enjoyed by both children and parents. The *Infuse* Beach Volleyball and Cook-out made for a great afternoon, with plenty of food, sun, and several regulation volleyball nets already set up on the beach. Even if you weren't playing, it was a pleasurable time. With it being a big hit last year, *Infuse* once again hosted an Ice Cream Social just prior to the Family Fun Show. This year a sing-along was added as well, for those who wanted to participate while enjoying their ice cream. The sing-along was presented by brethren from our Hickory, North Carolina congregation—a wonderful evening!

There were many other activities that were enjoyed by everyone, whether simple family outings to the beach or the pool, dinner with family and friends, or a trip to the zoo. On the last day of the Feast, we welcomed two new members into the body of Christ. Tice Lockett and Storm Mitchell were baptized in the Atlantic Ocean under sunny skies, with brothers and sisters in Christ witnessing their commitment and welcoming them to the family. The Feast of Tabernacles should always be an uplifting and joyful time for all, a time to step out of the world and experience the unity and love of our spiritual family. It is a time of reflection and hope. We need to be united in God and in His love for us, in our love for one another. His promise is His Kingdom—the Feast of Tabernacles is but a taste of things to come. Our thanks to everyone who attended with us and helped make this Feast such a positive and joyous time. God be with you till we meet again. Ω

Submitted by Pamela Nolen

Children singing on Youth Day

Carolina congregation—a wonderful evening!

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Our thanks to everyone who attended with us and helped make this Feast such a positive and joyous time. God be with you till we meet again. Ω

Submitted by Pamela Nolen

What's going on in your local Church area? Combined services? Public Bible studies? Potlucks? Church activities? Celebrations? Memorials? Visiting ministers? Birth or death announcements? Plans for getting *The Armor of God* on a free Public Access television station in your area? Let us know, and perhaps we will publish it under "Church News." We'd love to hear from you!

The **deadline** for the next issue of the *International News* is February 15, 2013.

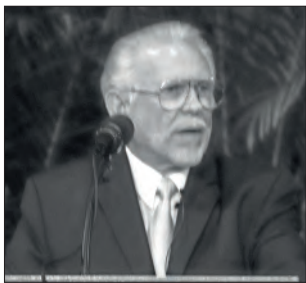
The Editor

Feast Reports, 2012

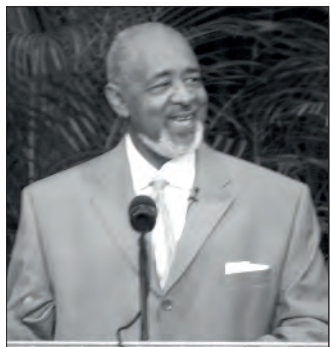
St. Petersburg / Pinellas Park, Florida



Bill Watson



Larry Sharp



Bronson James



Ben Faulkner



Sunny Faulkner



Margie Watson & Randy Rust

St. Petersburg / Pinellas Park was host this year again to Church of God members and visitors who came together to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Services were held everyday at the beautiful Pinellas Park Performing Arts Center, with its modern state-of-the-art lighting and audio system. All services and Bible Studies were broadcast everyday for anyone who could not physically be there with us.

The one thing that everyone seemed to be talking about was the inspiring sermons given by Bill Watson, Ben Faulkner, Charles Groce, Bronson James, Dwight Harrison, and Steve Miller. Sermonettes were delivered by Alex Fontao, Larry Sharp, Eloy Valdes, Bob Degana, and Ian Faulkner. Two well-attended Bible Studies were conducted by Bill Watson and Ben Faulkner.

Three mornings before services we enjoyed wonderful seminars presented by Ben Faulkner.

Seminar #1 was titled *The Tabernacle in the Wilderness*. A short video of the tabernacle, narrated by Ben Faulkner, provided a visual layout of the tabernacle, its curtain boundaries, items in the courtyard and within the tent of meeting, and in the holy of holies. The video provided images of the altar, table of shewbread, candlestick, altar of incense, and Ark of the Covenant, with its specifically named contents. The narration placed emphasis on how God gave Moses very detailed and explicit instructions about the Tabernacle's design and building materials. The seminar emphasized what these items represented spiritually, and how they foreshadowed much of the plan of God and the sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Seminar #2 was titled *Ecclesiastes (Value of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Context of the Feast of Tabernacles)*. Participants were directed and guided through the book. They read aloud significant verses from the book, chapter by chapter. They engaged in discussions about its major issues, including the knowledge Solomon gained through his personal experiences, the brevity of our human lives, and the safety and wisdom of following God's way of life. Participants received a short booklet of questions prepared expressly for this seminar, and aimed at guiding a continuing study of the book.

Seminar #3 was titled *Being a Light*. This seminar posted questions about practical issues in being a "light," including the emotional, social, and possible financial costs and benefits of being a true light. Discussions and attendee participation covered a wide range of many issues such as becoming aware of opportunities, effective communication skills, general attitudes about being a light, and the power of the Holy Spirit to direct and encourage us to be lights.

The children played an important part of the Feast. They sang exuberantly *B.I.B.L.E.* during Youth Day services, and also performing that day was a duet by Natan Flores and Nathan Desilus.

The Children's Sabbath School was very well attended. Classes were conducted by Pam Barnes, with the assistance of Patty Fontao and Mary Flores. The singing performance during Youth Day was followed by an ice cream party they all enjoyed.

Teen Bible classes were coordinated by Randy Rust, with several other men giving presentations to teach teens Bible-based principles.

Song services and special music were accompanied by pianists Margie Watson and Sunny Faulkner.

There was lots of time for physical fellowship during the many social activities, which included a Cookout at the Park, a Family Bowling Night, the BBQ Luncheon and Volleyball Tournament. As always, the highlight of the social activities was the Dinner Dance, with lots of music, fellowship, good food, and of course, lots of dancing.

The seniors were honored with a luncheon at Parkside Café where Bronson James delivered a message.

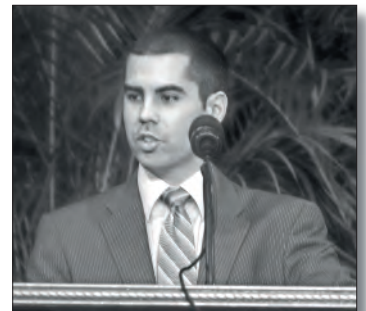
It was a great spiritual Feast filled with love, fellowship, and the opportunity of being together with old friends and getting to know new ones. What a wonderful way to look forward to the special time when we will be privileged to share this way of life with all mankind.

Thanks to everyone in attendance and to all who contributed and helped make this Feast a success. Looking forward to see you all again at the Feast of Tabernacles 2013. **Ω**

Submitted by Aleida Fontao



Charles Groce



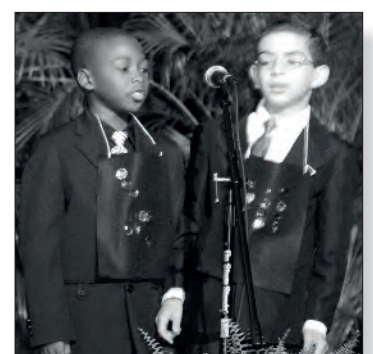
Alex Fontao



Eloy Valdes



Ian Faulkner



Natan Flores and Nathan Desilus



Youth Choir

Feast Reports, 2012



James Pollette



Ferrell Vincent



Tony Buchert



Bill Russ



Frank Baker



Fred Weed



Mark Schwarzkopf

Kentucky Dam Village

“All things are ready, come to the Feast!” And come we did, all 163 of us. No time was wasted. Ferrell Vincent gave a message on *Our God* and what will be happening in His Kingdom. There was one particular scripture that stood out—we are living stones, building a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5).

Bronson James wanted to know, *What Kingdom Are You In?* As Bronson said, there is a better world coming, and it won't be led by any mortal. He also gave us a little math lesson, sort of. Did you know there are six or seven demons for each living person? He also pointed out that in God's Kingdom, God will provide the land and the government. The third element of any kingdom, the people, will come from all places, all nationalities, the rich, the poor, the orphan, men, and women—God's children.

Our Change is Coming is how Wayne Hendrix assured us that time is coming, and that we were present at the Feast to act out the Kingdom of God. We exist to be like God in appearance and character.

Mark Skiba, Mark Schwarzkopf, James Pollette, Eugene Lucka, Frank Baker, Allan Graham, Fred Weed, Lloyd Cary, Archie Reynolds, Nathan Kelley, Marvin Wyke, and Tony Buchert all presented sermons that gave us guidance on getting through this life so that we can be a part of God's Kingdom.

We had two Bible Studies. Tony Buchert familiarized us with some of the despicable lies being said and published regarding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He then listed the truths that constitute an explicit record of known facts, accepted by all, against the conspiracies. He ended with the question, “Would you die for a lie?”

Wayne Hendrix gave a Bible Study on *The Accuser vs. Our Savior*. Just who is the accuser? Who gave him his power and authority? What will be his “reward” and from Whom will he receive his “reward”?

Between sermons and other activities, the congregation was treated to several Church-sponsored meals. We ate a delicious meal at the Lodge dining room. Although there was rain outside, there were only sunny smiles inside.

The weather caused a change in our picnic schedule. We asked the children to share their time for a Pizza Party with the *older* children. All of us enjoyed the food and then we had a sing-along. It was a beautiful day. We even had a fly-over of four vintage propeller planes. You will never guess who took credit for it.

There was also a Senior and Ministerial Luncheon. Following the Fun Show was a Family Dance, and of course, more food. There was a lot of talent in the Fun Show. The evening movie was enjoyed by both young and old. There were film shorts of the *Little Rascals*, the *Three Stooges*, *Abbott and Costello*, and many others. There was a little surprise for the Morehead congregation. Mark and Lisa Shoemaker arrived. We were surprised and very happy, because we were sure they would not get to come to the Feast, as Lisa had been in the hospital. We were concerned that Lisa may have traveled too soon, but she was showing improvement every day.

There was lots of special music from the Choir. Bronson James and Jim Byrd both sang solos. Jim also sang a duet with Priscilla Hawkins.

Another of the highlights was the baptism of Jim Byrd.

When the quality of the messages during this Feast is weighed and examined, it would seem the future of the *Church of God International* is in good hearts and minds.

Each year we make the same pronouncement, “This has been the best Feast yet.” It's always true, because they get better each year. And, it is always the people, with God's help, who make it so—all of those who contributed at the Registration Desk, the Golf Cart Transportation, the management of all events by James and Carol Pollette and their able assistants, the Shoemakers. Angie Buchert managed to wear two hats successfully. She taught Sabbath School and immediately moved to playing piano for each service. Thank you, everyone!

Another factor in the success of the Feast must go to the adorable children. They were well behaved, talented, polite, helpful, courteous, and very generous with their hugs. They were just a pleasure to be near.

We had a blessed Feast. Let us all pray it will be God's will that we can all meet again next year, and look forward to meeting and feasting with God's family from wherever they might come. Ω

Submitted by Alice Edwards Lauria



Bronson James



Wayne Hendrix



Marvin Wyke



Nathan Kelly



Archie Reynolds



Allan Graham



Eugene Lucka

Feast Reports, 2012

Osoyoos, British Columbia, CANADA

The Feast of Tabernacles 2012 found us at the Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort and Spa in Osoyoos, BC. It's a day's drive from our home on Vancouver Island, and when we began to see those brown, dusty mountains sparsely populated with scraggly trees, to be honest I wrinkled my nose a little bit. They are very different from the Rockies, which are green and majestic and snow-capped. So different and desolate these mountains were, and I didn't like them at first. Then, when we reached the town of Osoyoos, and saw the sun glittering off Lake Osoyoos, and the orchards and vineyards stretching away for miles through Canada's only desert (that before I didn't even know we *had*), green and lush and full of life in a land of tumbleweeds and rattlesnakes, I began to see the beauty of the place. It's rugged and unassuming and just a little dangerous.

Here at the southern-most tip of the Okanagan, where the Great Basin Desert ends, the Osoyoos Indian band call it "NK'MIP" (pronounced *in-ka-meep*), which means "bottomland," and is the name of the Cultural Centre, Conference Centre, wine cellars, and RV Park that make up this cultural and experiential destination. Other amenities included the Sonora Dunes Golf Course and the Mica Restaurant and Solstice Spa. Although the restaurant and spa were in a different building from our accommodations and required just a little bit of a walk, the weather was so gorgeous that I never minded walking it.

It was very different for me, having only ever been to a Feast site where the hotel is within walking distance of the bustling downtown of a big city, to be there in the middle of a very small town (it doesn't even have a movie theatre!) It was just a little too far to walk into the town proper from the resort (especially with the threat of rattlesnakes if you stray too far off the path), so for the most part we stayed on the grounds of Spirit Ridge. Mica Restaurant has a beautiful patio overlooking the pool, and the food was wonderful. They use fresh-caught fish and fruit from the nearby orchards, and were very patient with the smallest, messiest members of the congregation.

We were very blessed this year to have a variety of speakers, including Vance Stinson, who came all the way from Texas to be with us. He spoke to us about delayed intervals in prophecy; how John presents an "expanded" version of the Olivet prophecy found in Matthew, Mark and Luke; and the eighth day as a confirmation of God's universal salvific will. Rick Dubler reminded us that it takes time and effort to prepare a tool for its purpose and to appreciate the gift of hope that we have as Christians. Adam Dubler challenged us to see ourselves as the helpless traveler in need of the Good

Samaritan (Christ). John Coish informed us that evil dehumanizes its enemies, but good can win those in doubt, and discussed Satan's final deception. Doug Coish explored some "little white sins" and their consequences. Darren Connery appealed to us to build one another up—becoming a sanctuary together. We were also treated to a play performed by John Coish and the youth called *Heroes of the Bible or So Great a Cloud of Witnesses*.

Special music was as uplifting as ever, and included more talent than we are used to seeing in Nanaimo. Thai, Tia, and Angela Jantzen and Shane Pye graced us with their beautiful voices, and Pansy Alcorn and Jean Schellenburg accompanied the hymns on piano, which was a real treat, let me tell you. It was lovely to have so many people using their incredible gift of music to contribute to our worship.

The activities were well attended, as usual. We started with a Games Night on Monday, followed by go-carting and mini-golf at Rattlesnake Canyon. Wednesday was a delicious and very fancy luncheon on the patio of the winery, on a cliff overlooking the vineyards and lake, followed by a tour of the on-site NK'MIP Winery, where we learned how they made their signature wines and got to taste a few. That evening there was a rooftop BBQ (sunset over the mountains—stunning!) and a movie in the theatre room of the Conference Centre. The next afternoon, many of us went on a trail ride on horseback to a delicious meal on the lake at Rattlesnake Point and back. It was an hour and a half there and an hour and a half back, and by the end of it I think most of us were pretty sore, but boy was it worth it. Weaving through the sagebrush and wading through the lake on our horses was an exhilarating experience. Because the weather was sunny and beautiful, we were able to have an afternoon on the lake, with canoes and kayaks available down at the marina. Saturday night there was a Variety Show and Karaoke, and more board and card games played until quite late in the evening. There was poetry recited by young Jackson Dubler, music by Nicole Poulson, Thai, Jenny, and Amy Jantzen, and a psychological thriller recounted by Shane Pye. Mr. Darren Connery hosted the event. Sunday afternoon we had some free time after church, and then there was Bowling and Beach Volleyball.

All in all, I think this particular Feast site was a smashing success. Everyone I talked to had a wonderful time, and had a very encouraging, uplifting, and pampered week. I hope we get the opportunity to worship and fellowship there again together in the future. Ω

Submitted by Thai Jantzen

Tagaytay City, PHILIPPINES

Submitted by Rene Corpuz



Feast Reports, 2012

Midland, Ontario, CANADA

Festival Coordination Team:

Adrian Davis, Festival Coordinator
Zion Hezekiah, Assistant Coordinator
Murray Palmatier, Administration
Jan Kowalczyk, Auditorium

There is usually a momentous excitement among the people of God as we approach the Feast of Tabernacles. We sing, "All things are ready, come to the Feast..." Without exception, 133 persons responded to the call on the opening day of the Feast of Tabernacles 2012 in Midland, Ontario, Canada. The turnout peaked at 144 on the Last Great Day, and 133 persons was our daily average. It was also significant that approximately 100 persons attended the opening night service and also our afternoon service on the Last Great Day, both new additions to our regular Feast schedule in eastern Canada.

The Feast of Tabernacles 2012 in Midland provided excellent opportunities for learning to fear the Lord, which was emphasized in the opening message by Pastor George Ramocan. It was also invigorating and refreshing to hear from our Festival Coordinator, Brother Adrian Davis, as he did a survey of kingdoms of this world portrayed in Daniel 2 and 7, which culminates in the enduring and everlasting Kingdom of God—the hope of all humanity. Our visiting minister, Pastor Vance Stinson, reiterated the same theme, with emphasis on grounding members in proper understanding of the prophetic times, and teaching principles that are helpful for understanding and interpreting prophecy. All the speakers gave inspiring sermons.

Many attendees who made public comments about the Feast indicated that the Youth Day was the highlight of their Feast. Speakers for that day included Brother Jan Kowalczyk, who used personal family stories to teach the youth about doing their very best for the Lord. Earlier in the service, Carlos De la Cruz gave a poignant sermonette to his fellow youth and everyone about self control. He used his own struggles with addiction to video games, and showed how with God's help he was able to overcome it. There was also an interactive Bible Study for the youth led by Brother Adrian. The church cannot see the youth as its future leaders without preparing them. The Feast served as one such opportunity for them to learn and serve. Our children also made cards to invite seniors to their Luncheon and also served them, bridging the generational gap in the church.

The angelic hosts sang for joy in the manner Christ describes in Luke 15:10 as two individuals committed to the Christian way of life. Pastor Murray Palmatier (assisted by Brother Adrian Davis) baptized Carlos Delacruz, a young man who has been brought up in the church; and Sarah Silva, who has recently been attending CGI and spent this, her first Feast of Tabernacles, with her two children and her mother.

The Feast in Midland did not lack in fun. Everyone enjoyed the Family Day at the park overlooking the lake. Our Fun/Variety Show was indeed an entertaining night, highlighted by a Fashion Show coordinated by sisters Lola Ramocan and Alki-Merika Ramocan. Many also came out on day one of the Feast to enjoy our Family Dance, which was also a great opportunity for fellowship. Other social activities included Karaoke Night, Singles Social, Seniors Social, Tree Top Trekking, and two Church Luncheons.

Here are a few of the brethren who shared their impressions:

When I first heard of the Feast of Tabernacles and its importance, I really wanted to come, but my only obstacle was cost. I called the hotel and booked it in faith. Later, I found a card I had put away four years ago, and in it was \$300 I had put aside for something special, but forgotten. I said, "Thank You God!" This indeed was for something special. —Sarah Silva, Kitchener

The fellowship and sermons were all great, and I left in a high spirit. But more interesting for me is any discussion on prophecy, and Vance Stinson gave a revealing look at these end time events. And I also learnt a new word, "proleptic"—scenes of future events as if present. —Godfrey London, Toronto

The Feast was very well organized, the sermons were great and from the heart, singing was perfect; [overall] a God-felt atmosphere. We're pleased and glad we didn't miss this Feast. —Sidney and Mina Mac Eachern, Port Hood, Nova Scotia

Really enjoyed the Feast, the friendship of the people, the great sermon messages, and best of all the young children and teens—their level of understanding and how they participated in the services both on Youth Day and at the Youth Bible Study. —Edward and Annie Mercer, Newfoundland

We are all yearning for the next call to come to the Feast. We are assured that "all things are [always] ready." God willing, we look forward to the Feast of Tabernacles 2013!

Ω

.Submitted by Brother Louis Anane



Feast Speakers



Carlos, Sarah Baptized



Feast Group Shot



Youth Day

Church News

Prophecy 2012 Conference

On the weekend of Saturday, November 10 through Sunday, November 11, the Church of God International Toronto held our "Prophecy 2012" Outreach Conference. Organized by our evangelism ministry, led by Sister Beatrix Tanakis and Deacon Horane Smith, the conference was a great success. Praise be to the Most High God!



Bill Watson expounding the Scriptures

On Day One, our total attendance was 142 persons, and 110 for Day Two. This included a total of 52 first time visitors who were all presented with CGI welcome kits.

Our three presenters, CGI Pastors Bill Watson, Vance Stinson, and George Ramocan, each delivered two Spirit-filled, thought-provoking messages dealing with the subject matter of prophecy.

The conference began with a video presentation by Mr. Watson entitled *2012: Is It the End?* This was a perfect introduction that fittingly set the stage for our three Day One presentations. Our first presenter, Mr. George Ramocan, spoke on *The Mystery of the Seven Seals*. He gave the audience a much deeper insight into the perilous times ahead. He spoke about the seven seals not just representing God's wrath and punishment, but also signifying God's desire to bring mankind to repentance.

After our lunch break, all three of our presenters, joined by Pastor Murray Palmatier, conducted a very spirited, interactive open forum discussion. Church members and guests were given the opportunity to ask questions and get our pastors' biblical perspective on a wide range of topics. This was also repeated on Day Two, and to many, this was considered the highlight of their conference weekend.

As Day One of the conference took place on the Sabbath day, we commenced our afternoon session with songs of praise and worship to our Lord Jesus Christ.



Vance Stinson fielding questions

Our afternoon presenters, Vance Stinson and Bill Watson, wrapped things up with messages on *The Olivet Prophecy* and *The Rapture*.

Mr. Stinson examined the claim that the prophesied "great tribulation" of Matthew 24 occurred in AD 70, when Roman armies besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Mr. Stinson, citing works by several Protestant scholars, pointed out that this view is gaining popularity in the Evangelical world.

He called the audience's attention to the context, pointing out that Jesus did indeed prophesy the events of AD 67-70, both the desolation of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. However, he explained, when the Olivet prophecy is understood in light of many other prophetic texts, it becomes very clear that the "tribulation" that befell Jerusalem in AD 70 serves as a type of a future event that will occur on a much wider scale.

Mr. Stinson expounded prophetic principles such as the "kaleidoscopic" and "apotelesmatic" principles, and cited Daniel 11 and other passages to illustrate the importance of these principles in interpreting prophetic texts like Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

Mr. Watson's presentation was designed to refute the alleged claim that the Bible speaks about a rapture for God's people. First Thessalonians 4:13-18 was used to illustrate the fact that nothing is said about going to heaven or a physical place of safety.



Vance Stinson, Bill Watson, George Ramocan

On Day Two, Mr. Stinson led off with a presentation entitled *A Tale of Two Beasts*. He gave the audience historical context into the "tale of two beasts," which began in the first century and will conclude with the second coming of Jesus Christ. The governmental-religious system represented by the two beasts (or "beast" and "false prophet") existed when Revelation was written, and has appeared at various times through the subsequent centuries. There will be a final manifestation of this murderous, blasphemous system at the time of the end.

Mr. Ramocan's message entitled *The Church in Prophecy at the Last Days* was very well received by the audience of 110 folks. He talked about the fact that what most people regard as "the church" is really just a counterfeit system of Christianity based on man-made traditions. His main scripture of reference was 1 Timothy 3:15, where the apostle Paul attributes the church of the living God as being the "pillar and foundation of the truth." The Church of God International is founded on Judeo-Christian principles, and is faithful to the practices and beliefs as laid down by Jesus Christ and the apostles.

Mr. Watson concluded the prophecy conference with a message entitled *So, Where Are We in Prophecy?* This presentation was designed to illustrate that there are many things yet to occur. By using Daniel 11 and the invasion of the king of the north into the Middle East, pushing at the king of the south, he listed parts of the end-time puzzle that are definitely identified as evidence of events to come. He spoke about the United States of America and how they will continue their decline and eventually lose their position of geopolitical influence that they've shared with Britain for some 300 to 500 years. But regardless of all potential future events, Mr. Watson encouraged the audience that at the end of the day, the most important thing



Bill Watson making a point

for us to focus on is getting our lives right with God. One must repent and accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah and get baptized, beginning a lifelong journey of modeling the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 2:21).

This was the perfect end to a very successful conference weekend. Two of our first-time visitors were kind enough to share their feedback in terms of how the Prophecy Conference personally impacted them:

The prophecy convention was very educational and informative. I found the pastors to be very knowledgeable. They were able to back up everything [they] said with Bible verses. This was very impressive to me. —Ingrid Thomas

I just want to say thank you for a great weekend. A lot was said about what the Bible says regarding our future, which I found very helpful. The main highlight for me was the people in general. I know I can feel the Lord's presence in them. Thank you Jesus! —Michael Megna

Thank you to the CGI Toronto Evangelism Ministry, our three presenters who took the time to prepare and deliver such insightful messages, and to all volunteers who contributed to the success of this conference. And a very special thanks to all of our first-time and returning guests. Your presence was very much appreciated, and we look forward to connecting with you and serving your needs.

In all things we give our heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ all the thanks, glory, and praise. Ω

Submitted by Zion Hezekiah



George Ramocan greeting the public

Church News

In loving memory...

The Fighter Remembered

It was October 23, 2012, that we learned our brother in Christ, **Dale Caudill**, died at the age of 53 at his home in Ravenna, Kentucky. Dale and his wife, Karen, became members of the *Church of God International* and the Morehead congregation in August, 2009. Not too long after that, Dale learned he had cancer. He fought back, and God healed him for a time. But, as cancer often does, it came back more aggressively than before. Again, he fought valiantly. Dale wanted to live through the Feast of Tabernacles, even though he was only able to attend one service.

Any effort to tell you about Dale's life isn't possible without including Karen. They were inseparable. They were one. They were married as teenagers, and traveled and worked in other parts of the country. Dale began his career as a carpenter and stone mason. But it was his desire to know how and why things work that caused him to make a career change to electrician. After they decided they wanted to come home to Kentucky to settle down, Dale became disabled. While the family lived in a tent and a shed, they built their home. It has remained a work in progress, because Karen always had a new idea, and Dale knew it meant more work.

Dale liked to help. Stray animals were welcome, as well as the occasional homeless person. He had what some of us Virginia country folks refer to as a dry sense of humor. That means you are never quite sure whether he is serious or joking. For instance, when Dale was presented his Certificate of Baptism, he remarked, "Now I have permission to get in."

Dale is survived by his wife, Karen, sons Harley and Casey, and daughter Michelle (husband, Douglas), his mother Julia, a brother Malcolm, and four grandchildren. Dale loved God, his family, and nature. The family had fun doing it all—riding their ATV, scuba diving, etc. But it wasn't until they began studying the Bible that they really started to enjoy life. A new sermon on CD or any printed material was soon listened to or read. They couldn't get enough.

Dale fought the good fight. Through it all, there were two constants: Dale and Karen only asked for prayers, and Dale always wore a smile. He was a true example of faith and courage.

Rest in peace, our brother and friend.

Ω

Submitted by Alice Edwards Lauria



Mae Billingslea with husband, Tom

Dear Brethren,

My sister-in-law, **Mae (Sis) Billingslea**, passed away on October 28, 2012, from complications of pneumonia.

Sis never had any children of her own, but she was a mother to almost every child that she knew. There are many nieces, nephews, and great nieces and nephews.

Sis was a very loving, generous person, and rarely ever met a stranger. Sis very rarely got angry with anyone. She had a great sense of humor and loved to tell jokes.

Her husband of 32-1/2 years, Tom Billingslea, was at her side at the time of death. Your prayers for friends and family would be greatly appreciated. She will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

Ω

Submitted by Merle Amos



Feast of Trumpets

Excitement filled the air from the moment the church doors were opened in Bossier City, Louisiana. Fifty-five brethren from the Shreveport and Texarkana congregations met together in celebration of the Feast of Trumpets. The songs and prayers were uplifting and helped to create an atmosphere of praise and worship throughout the service. The offertory was presented by Mr. Ron Elkins from the Texarkana church. He explained to God's people the many ways an offering helps sustain the work of God. Mr. Dean Roberts gave "meat in due season" as he reviewed the past and future events that give credence to this day. After services, laughter and uplifting conversations rang out as the congregation savored a sumptuous potluck meal. The love of God and brethren was evident and abounded on this high holy day. Ω *Submitted by Linda Everley*



Alwelda ("Weldy") Meador

Alwelda "Weldy" Meador, of Cayuga, Texas, died on October 26, 2012, three days after her 80th birthday.

Weldy is survived by her son, Mark Meador (wife, Lanna); daughter, Virginia Smith (husband, Roy); three grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Graveside services were at Union Cemetery on October 29, Charles Groce officiating.

Weldy was an independent Whole Health Caregiver. She was associated with the Church of God for 35 years.

Ω

Submitted by Vance Stinson

Interesting Facts About the Bible

The Bible is universal and known around the world, but what makes it so different? The fact is, there has never been a book written like it ever before. The Bible is, in fact, written from actual human history. It claims to be the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) and His interactions with people and nations. The Bible is in reality a collection of books—some short and some longer. The authors were touched by the Holy Spirit to write the words (2 Peter 1:20–21). Here are some points to consider:

- The Bible was penned by over 40 authors from three continents—Asia, Africa, and Europe—written in different locations, including prisons, islands, while traveling—and at different times, covering 1,500 years, by shepherds, fishermen, kings, and diverse occupations—yet all in perfect harmony! These men wrote this Scripture as they were given inspiration by God (2 Timothy 3:16). Christ Himself declared, “The Scripture cannot be broken.”
- The Bible is the largest seller of all books ever published.
- About 50 Bibles are sold in the United States every minute.
- The Bible is also the most shoplifted book in the world.
- The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the New Testament was written in Greek; but now the Bible is written in 6,000 different languages around the world!
- The first translation of the English Bible was initiated by John Wycliffe and completed by John Purvey in 1388.

- The Bible was divided into chapters by Stephen Langton in 1228. The Old Testament was divided into verses by R. Nathan in 1488, and the New Testament by Robert Stephanus in 1551.
- The entire Bible divided into chapters and verses first appeared in the Geneva Bible of 1560.
- The word “Christian” only appears three times in the Bible.
- The words “trinity,” “rapture,” and “immortal soul” are nowhere mentioned in the Bible.
- The Bible is actually made up of 773,692 words, and takes an average of 70 hours to read!
- The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119, with 176 verses. The shortest chapter is Psalm 117, with only two verses.
- The longest book of the Bible is Psalms, with 150 chapters. It contains 43,743 words. The shortest book is 3 John, with only one chapter, containing 299 words.
- The longest verse in the Bible is Esther 8:9, with 90 words. The shortest verse is John 11:35, with only two words, “Jesus wept.”
- There are more than 3,200 verses of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible. But there are still more than 3,100 verses with prophecies yet to be fulfilled.



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