



Shepherd's Voice[®]

Fall 2015

The Gospel Proclaimed to the Whole Earth



Managing Editor: Jim Patterson
Editor: Norman Edwards
Assistant Editor: Jean Duperreault

Contributing Writers: Norman Edwards
Dave Havir
Jim Patterson
Jim B. Petersen

Webmaster: Jeremiah Patton
Circulation: Norman Edwards
Layout & Design: Marcia Nicol

All contents of Shepherd's Voice Magazine unless otherwise stated are property of the Chicagoland Church of God.

Copyright ©2015

The writers of the articles and photographers of photos in the Shepherd's Voice Magazine may own copyrights to their work.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the King James Version (public domain) or from the New King James Version®, Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Shepherd's Voice Magazine is a production of the Chicagoland Church of God in a cooperative effort with other individuals and church organizations in the Sabbath-keeping community in the United States and Canada. This magazine is distributed and made possible by tithes and offerings of the readership and of those who support this work.

Shepherd's Voice Magazine publishes entries from regular and guest writers from a diverse range of people within the Church of God community, and covering a variety of subjects. While we invite or select our content, it may not necessarily reflect the position of the magazine or of the members of the Chicagoland organization.

COPYRIGHT FAIR USE NOTICE:

In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, any copyrighted material contained herein is distributed for nonprofit educational and other fair use purposes including, but not limited to, teaching, scholarship, research, news reporting, criticism, review, or comment.

Photos: iStockphoto.com, GoodSalt.com

Front Cover: View of Europe from space

Editorial mailing address: Shepherd's Voice Magazine
PO Box 858
Plainfield, IL 60544-0858

Circulation office: Shepherd's Voice Magazine
PO Box 474
Port Austin, Michigan 48467-0474
SVM@portaustin.net (989) 738-7700

Canada Office: Shepherd's Voice Magazine
PO Box 74
287 Tache Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R2H 3B8

Email us at: info@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org

Send Ask Norm! questions to:
asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org

Visit our web site: www.shepherdsvoicemagazine.org

Periodical mailed: 954 Other mail classes: 103 Internationally re-mailed: 171 e-mail: 799. Identification Statement: Shepherd's Voice Magazine is published quarterly (4 times per year). Issues are regularly sent free to people who requested the publication and are genuinely interested in it. Shepherd's Voice Magazine is published by the Chicagoland Church of God, 11308 Highland Dr., Plainfield, IL 60585; circulation office: 8180 Port Dr, Port Austin, Michigan 48467. CCOG reserves the right to refuse service to anyone for any reason. Periodical postage paid at Plainfield, Illinois and other mailing offices (USPS 016-995). Postmaster: send address changes to Shepherd's Voice Magazine, PO Box 474, Port Austin, Michigan 48467-0474



Shepherd's Voice.

Feature Article



An Outreach that Works –
Perspectives on Evangelism.....4
Jim Patterson

In This Issue



The Woman in Revelation 12.....9
Jim B. Petersen



Spiritual Oomph!.....10
Norman Edwards

Aquarium-Dipping Is Not
Really Evangelism.....14
Dave Havir



Calgary Ministry.....15



Feast Reports 2015.....20

Regular Features

Personal

Managing Editor.....3

Ask Norm!

Norman Edwards.....16

PABC Update:

Norman Edwards.....22

Greetings!

What is the solution to all the turmoil and stresses that face the world today? As I write this editorial, the recent terrorist events in Paris are continually in the news. If it is not one threat it is another—be it warfare, terrorism, the economy, the state of our health or the environment to name the top few. People are looking to their governments, its resources and institutions to provide them security through it all. Security itself is being threatened.

I am reminded that when *Shepherds Voice Magazine* started just over 5 years ago, we made it our mandate to limit weighing in on matters such as these. If there is a need to discuss world events in light of a Biblical perspective, there are other publications and Internet sites better equipped to do so. However, I have asked the question also if Jesus Christ were here today, would He use such news and political climates to further the Gospel?

I have noted also that the Church is not immune to being excessively caught up in the events in the world. Conversations are full of speculations, conspiracy theories and the voice of Chicken Little. There are those who claim to be a “voice in the wilderness” through the noise and confusion, taking advantage of a collage of news events in some visual capacity to proclaim the gospel.

To look at this from another angle, Jesus Christ Himself did in fact give us some advice on what not to pay attention to in anticipation of His coming, and if you do not mind, I would like to embed a little bit of interpretation for us in His words:

“The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, ‘Look here! (check out this link)’ or ‘Look there (see this video)!’ Do not go after them or follow them.” (Luke 17:22,23)

What Jesus is telling his very own disciples is to not be drawn to these things because it is futile to investigate them. When we become overly anxious, analytical and speculative about world events they can be a distraction and an energy drain. We should rather pay attention to what He has asked us to do while we still have time to do it.

I believe the answer to the questions we ask above is simply the Gospel, and our part is to get the Word to others. This answer is simple and effective until human wisdom enters into the effort. The Gospel has power (Romans 1:16), and that power is used to overcome barriers and exact change. When human wisdom enters, the message loses its power. So in the article *An Outreach that Works – Perspectives on Evangelism*, we examine some of the pitfalls we have fallen into when we allow ourselves to get in the way, and also to encourage those who are willing to reach out to others. God must get the glory and the credit, and that happens if our outreach efforts are done the right way with the right motivation.

Complimenting our article on outreach, we recognize the need for *Spiritual Oomph!* In this article we discuss how God has the willingness to give us the power to do His will in all areas that pertain to the work. We are to use these gifts to serve, and we should not be afraid of them.

As we customarily do, included are a few Feast reports, including from our friends in the Philippines. The brethren there are working with us at *SVM* to distribute the publication there.

In this issue there is another look into the interpretation of the *Woman in Revelation 12*. The presentation should not be interpreted as *SVM* doctrine, but the symbolism given surrounding the woman should suggest she does more than represent Israel. As in the previous article from the last issue, *The Events at Mount Sinai (SVM Spring 2015)*, the article can be weighty, but prove to be an insightful read.

We trust that the content of this publication will continue to edify the readership. We are continually grateful for the support we receive from the many brethren supporting this work. In the end, this Gospel must be proclaimed to the whole earth, and we hope we are doing are part.

In Christ's Service
Jim Patterson





An Outreach that Works – Perspectives on Evangelism

Jim Patterson

I have had group discussions recently with brethren on the subject of evangelism and personal outreach. The discussions began with some exploratory questions such as:

- What is it?
- What are the elements of it?
- How can it be done?
- Who should and can do it?
- What is your attitude towards it?
- Why would anyone be motivated to do it?
- What are the barriers we face?
- How do you overcome the barriers?

We would like to address some of these questions at least in part in this article.

Before we explore the answers it has often been good in my experience to step back and examine a few fundamentals for a bit of framework and context. We just seem to forget some fundamentals when caught up in the times and circumstances we live in. We do not realize some of our personal biases we have developed over the years.

God knows He is working through finite human beings with varying levels of revelation and talents. He knows He is working with people who often need structure, a sense of vision. He knows discouragement is there, He knows the circumstances. He knows that we stumble in our carnal approaches to His will. Yet, until we are told otherwise, the expectation is always still there:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Though He was at the time departing them, He promised His continued presence and authority when they undertook the great commission. We should take Him at His word that this is still the case, and this is the foundation of the Work to be done in His name.

He has also given us vision:

*Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are **already white** for harvest!* (John 4:35)

In the book of Revelation, John is witness to the Lamb of God being found worthy to open the scrolls that would unfold the balance of history on the earth and the heavens. It is significant Jesus Christ is depicted as the Lamb of God being found worthy, for He has the power of intercession combined with the power and authority over the world in His hands. He has taken responsibility for the world, and we need to recognize this authority in any outreach. When we have this we can operate out of this strength, and not out of a sense of hopelessness. We are not to think that the true message does not have strength behind it. We can only get in the way by lack of faith.

Before We Start

Before we start we should ask ourselves a personal question — how do I feel about the world we live in? This is not a question regarding our thoughts and opinions on the conditions of the world whether it be the environment or the people, but a question on how we feel about people in general and God’s creation.

Those who “*sigh and cry over all the abominations*” (Ezekiel 9:4) are not the many who are scandalized by the world, but those who long for its salvation, as those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6), and there are not so many in this later category as there is in the former.

John 3:16 has often been a keystone scripture for many and it speaks volumes about the motivation of God, although widely misused as well.

People are lost and are in need of a savior. They do not need your condemnation or discrimination, and this includes your least favorite politicians, newsmakers, terrorists and purveyors of immorality to name a few. Your righteousness is not buoyed by your anger towards

sinners and the undeserving; in fact it can be an unattractive trait in those involved in the work.

Timothy was called an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). Yet, Paul earlier felt it necessary to remind him not to discriminate. Timothy was an upstanding individual from his youth and had the potential for being judgmental and discriminating as to who can and who cannot be saved.

We find in 1 Timothy. Paul gives Timothy some advice, which we need to break down a little bit.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth (1 Timothy 2:1-7).

Paul placed high emphasis on prayers for secular leaders. Providing a peaceful and orderly society was the state’s domain. Yes we would like to lead peaceful lives in a peaceful society, but Paul recognizes that prayer for authorities was to ensure the best possible conditions for spreading the gospel. Prayer for this is fundamental for the evangelistic mission.

Paul reminded Timothy that “although you admire me now, I persecuted the Church, and was an insolent man” (1 Timothy 1:13). Moreover God wants everyone to be saved. How about you? How do you feel about the 1000s, tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands that live in your area? Do you feel them to be unreachable? Do you feel that your church’s doctrines about the Sabbath, Holy Days, and Unclean meats too strange for others to believe?

Bottom Line: Do not discriminate.

If there is going to be any discrimination, leave that up to God and His wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:26, Matthew 11:25).

Evangelism is a Work

We see in nature that whenever a work is done, anywhere and anyhow, energy is expended. That fact does not escape the reality in the work the Lord has given His church to do. It takes time and energy to reach out to others, it takes time and energy for the transformation process to occur. It is not a waiting for something to happen, or some kind of slow absorption of ideas (see also *Active Waiting*, SVM Fall 2012).

When asked about being able to do the works of God by some motivated disciples, Jesus responded this way:

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29).

These words tell us it takes work to believe. It takes work for us to believe what God says to be true, it takes work to help others to believe God is true; God Himself is working to reveal Himself (John 5:17). It also takes work to even believe in the work!

It would appear evident God has a lot of energy. So we don't see an issue there. I do not see an issue with His commitment.

Our part in this is Faith and Commitment. With faith and commitment we will take the time and use the energy at our disposal. Perhaps we stumble on the process and our expectations, but this does not necessarily define our efforts. We will look at this now.

The only Work that God truly accepts and blesses is His own, that is, in His Own Name. When work is done in His name, it means He is involved and welcomed, and He "approves this message". He is the centerpiece of the work. The Work of the Church no matter how small or large is to Glorify God in the process. Works outside of His name have a temporary value and significance, but may be

lasting if God does intervene and bless it if it is correctable. Failure to glorify God is a serious problem, and in our zeal we may lose sight of this and begin to glorify the Work, our own works, our own plans and high profile individuals involved. I recently was asked to listen to a corporate message where the speaker outlined the churches plan for growth, stating their organization will be the envy of other churches. This is not the example we are called to emulate.

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise (2 Corinthians 10:12).

For evangelism to be successful, we need divine favor, the blessing to go forward. In His passion to glorify Himself He will bless those who are doing His Work in His Name. This does not mean we are perfect and doing it perfectly, for God is glorified in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We must always have God's glory in mind (1 Corinthians 10:39). If the language of leaders and followers becomes about denominational growth, growing finances, or an exorbitant amount of rhetoric about their own authenticity, and other's lack of credibility, it is not for God's glory. A correct doctrinal message may get out, but the fruits of these efforts may not last.

Circumstances Dictate Nothing.

If we look to our circumstances and our resources, we are going to find ourselves coming up short. The first thing to do is to Praise God for that. Thank Him for His wisdom in this, for this is an amazing thing. Jesus did the same (Matthew 11:25). We realize this is a paradigm shift, for we know that resources are absolutely needed. We do not often have control over our circumstances. But this is the reality.

So what are the circumstances?

The message of the Church of God is a small voice in a sea dominated by the message of mainstream Christianity and secular ideas for a good life. But those who are involved

with mainstream Christianity are not the enemy (see *Learning From the Samaritans*, SVM Summer 2014), and there is still good in the secular message for living well. We are not called to fight against a false Christianity like it was an enemy to defeat for the sake of the gospel. The success of a false Christianity has not happened without the foreknowledge and control of the One worthy of opening the first seal:

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer (Revelation 6:1,2, See also Matthew 24:5).

The wisdom behind this may be beyond our comprehension, but He has taken the responsibility for His own purposes. We are called to stand against false doctrines in the Church that turn attention away from the Truth that saves, which is an entirely different subject. Much of what the first century church had as challenges we no longer face today. The idea of a crucified Christ is not abhorrent anymore. Movies are made of it now. The Bible is largely accepted as the Word of God and easily accessible in many countries. In some countries, mainstream Christian values provided the foundation for the freedoms we now have for the church to operate without fear of political retribution or worse.

But the above is a technical argument in overcoming the circumstances. Repeatedly, God has demonstrated to His servants that He embraces such circumstances as an opportunity to show His strength in Salvation. God does not change. The circumstances should factor little in a work done in faith.

What is the Message You Deliver?

Delivering the gospel is not about getting people to see things as you do, it is about facilitating in God's efforts to have their minds open to see as God does. He is looking for people to worship Him (John 4:23) not a new set of doctrines, and

“Delivering the gospel is not about getting people to see things as you do ...”

especially not someone’s personal slant on doctrine. The gospel message is not about getting people to join your church either.

We start out our discussion this way as too often we interpret things for God and seem to want to decide for ourselves a presentation of the gospel most suited for our personal leanings. We can perhaps classify some of these as the political gospel, the prophetic gospel, the secular gospel, and any combination of these.

Too often as a substitute to the gracious words of the gospel, some resort to focusing their attention, and therefore the attention of others, to secular issues or to the evils of the world. In speaking out against these things, they can fall into a trap unawares.

There comes the idea that the nation(s) and their leaders or the establishment needs to repent, which is not going to happen. The negative energy that surrounds their substitute gospel drives people away, including the converted. Higher order thinking becomes difficult (such as called for in Colossians 3:1-3), and the righteousness they have is no longer of God, but of themselves, no matter how well we humbly disguise it. The gospel is not about worldly awareness. When an individual or group turn to this kind of secular gospel with some God in the mix, spiritual discussions that elevate God become harder to do to the point of being non-existent.

This secular gospel is mixed with commentary on the misguided establishments. There is emphasis on health, natural medicine, and criticism of big business, big medicine and politics, feeling that is part of the calling. This gospel is an easier default due to the vast amounts of information available. Unfortunately, the material that exists is readily available and made

attractive. It becomes a personal zeal, and these cares of the world choke out the Word.

If the gospel is political, the message will be attractive depending on the political climate and the political leaning of the hearers, but when the political climate changes, and the feared and predicted things do not come to fruition, there is disillusionment. It is like the gospel is about some thing bad is going to happen so it is about being justified when it does. These political messages command repentance of nations, impending national judgment and related ideas. This requires constant refueling and refreshing with the reporting of world events and predictions. This fuels fear and not faith.

The prophetic gospel carries much of the above with it. This presents the gospel as all future and largely ignores the present experience God offers. The prophetic gospel says we should be ready to be accepted and vindicated. But those who have accepted the true gospel have already entered into acceptance. We are being asked to go through an entrance now. We have been saved, we are now children of God (1 John 3:2).

If your gospel includes doing good works, make sure you do it in His Name. If not in His Name, He does not get the credit. Those who are benefiting from your efforts must know it is Jesus Christ, and who He is, that they, the recipient(s) should be thanking. All good works need to glorify God. Some have abandoned the idea of preaching the gospel of the kingdom believing that a good work goes farther than any kind of preaching, having been jaded by past experiences. To them, kindness and charity is the gospel, and is valued over the expense of outreach efforts, be it through publications such as this

one or other programs.

What Really Works

What really works brings a message that connects with those who the Father draws near. Your message will resonate with them. They will find amnesty; they will encounter the same from others near to you. Your passion will be addictive. Evangelism is a work that must be done with the Spirit for which it was intended.

Their questions will be answered as Jesus described the good scribe:

*Then He said to them, “Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his **treasure things new and old**” (Matthew 13:52).*

Remember you are ultimately introducing Jesus Christ, not a doctrine. There are those looking for correct doctrine especially related to the Sabbath and Holy Days, but the substance is Christ (Colossians 2:17). Conversion is by the Person of Jesus Christ, and it is He you must expound upon. If they do not see Jesus in you, then the process will be hampered.

We asked at the start the question as to why would you reach out to others. The right motivation is important. The closer your vision of the gospel is that of God’s, the more attractive and effective will be your words and efforts. Sharing the vision of God is the passionate motivator. Jesus brought a message of amnesty and attracted sinners. You rejoice in seeing the lights turn on in others. Rejoicing is a personal thing, it manifests in a quiet gratitude for being part of something so much greater than yourself, to something much more audible and visible.

“... you are ultimately introducing
Jesus Christ, not a doctrine.”

*Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, **that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.** For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, **and you have entered into their labors**” (John 4:34-38).*

Out of his Heart

“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

This is a significant verse, and commentators find it hard to believe this is not specifically indicating God Himself, but is in reference to an overcoming Christian. Rivers of living water speaks to the life of the message to others. It will have the balance of amnesty and correction. It will highlight the goodness of God which brings us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).

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

Being a light goes beyond living well and being an example. A light in the darkness attracts attention. Christ wanted us not to hide the light that is in the Christian so He can utilize it for His purpose. He will draw people near to you and you will point them

to the Savior and away from things that detract.

All of this sounds very good of course. By God’s design some are more gifted than others. But the simple instruction is to ask God in His Name that His will be fulfilled in your present state, and that you can share in His vision. If you get the sense in someone or a group that they are doing the work in His Name, try to associate yourself accordingly. Be an encourager, not speculator and judger, as there are so many in the latter category in an effort to justify themselves.

Practical Guidance

Make yourself known!

Making yourself known in the modern world is obvious and fundamental. Local congregations need an internet presence with relevant material and sermons. This has been a very effective method reaching those that God has put in their hearts to seek the truth. It is on the pages of the website where people will first encounter your expression of the gospel.

Does your webpage reflect the message of the gospel that is true, or does it convey a different message such as the ones we have identified above just to attract attention? The idea here is not to entice with what might lure people over, or to criticize other efforts (see article *Aquarium Dippers* this issue).

Talk to Search Engine Optimization (SEO) experts or take out internet ads to help improve your website ranking in internet search engines. Have a YouTube channel with video sermons.

Associate with other congregations in the nation who are like-minded. There are groups of congregations that exist that may have more resources to share and support

your local efforts. It would appear the best model for churches is interdependency. Avoid those that are furthering their own ministries as discussed earlier.

Pray always without ceasing. Prayer brings results and surprising ones at that.

Your Congregation

I am persuaded that God will draw people to a congregation that will look after them and is sensitive to the needs of the newly converted. Evangelism is not about “building church”, but a self-examination of a congregation is worthwhile if there is a desire to reach out to others and invite guests. In the article *Spiritual Oomph!* this issue, spiritual gifts are the discussion. Spiritual gifts are given for the welfare of the church and when used can cultivate the right environment for growth. So much can be said here about the benefits of spiritual gifts.


Lastly, Do you still believe in the Work?

We asked this question before above, but we should revisit it. As we talked about earlier, the work is a divine work we are called to do, it is God who is truly doing the work. If we no longer believe in the work with the idea God is not calling anyone like He used to, or the Church no longer has the large front of personalities or media presence, then we are not believing in God either. I think this is serious business.

Every bit of work in His name matters. Do not think that any effort is too insignificant to make a difference or unworthy for God to bless (see *Left Overs and Little Things, SVM Winter 2014*).

“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42).

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10).

Let us start even if it is doing the least. 

THE WOMAN OF REVELATION 12

Another Look at the Woman and Her Seed in this Mysterious Chapter

Jim B. Petersen

One of the many documents collected by the new church was that of the Revelation, written by John on the Isle of Patmos during his exile there. It was a document that differed from the others in that it was a post Temple writing. All other works were historical, or New Testament letters that dealt with the problems and troubles of a church moving into a new system, but this one was a prophetic book directed to the church about the future. In it we find for the church the clear instruction to flee persecution (Revelation 12:6) which was wise advice that was also given to the Apostles for their survival (Matthew 10:23, Mark:13:14). As instructed to in Revelation 12:6 the first century church did flee, but where? None seem to know. One can only search and look for clues and from those form a picture of what might have happened. One thing we first understand is she fled because she was not to be a part of the governments of this world, for she is part of the kingdom of God.

In Zechariah 4:1-14 we learn of a great symbolic candelabrum with seven lamps fed by oil from two olive branches. This same symbolism is presented to us in Revelation 2:20 "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels (aggelos = messengers) of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches". From this we learn that the seven churches have a duty to enlighten the world with a message delivered by the messengers of God. If that job is not being done properly the candlestick will be removed and the church will die (Revelation 2:5).

The seven churches of Revelation leave us with information as to how God works in this world, and what he expects of those who receive the symbolic oil by the hand of His messengers. God expects that His church be a moral influence and a spiritual window for this world; one that reflects the will of the Father. Like the moon and stars they are to be the light that shines in a dark world. It would be impossible for His church, which is preparing to be in His government to come, to be found working with the governments

of this world in political cooperation. Paul sternly corrects the Corinthian brethren on this point when he said "Do not "hetrozugeo"(be employed in two armies, see Adam Clark) be wrongly involved with this world" (1 Corinthians 6:14-18). The context of this passage is squarely on the danger of participation in the Roman Imperial cult. Being part of that Empire would immediately be grounds for the removal of a candlestick. Revelation 18:4 "Come out of Her" is the command to Gods people about the counterfeit church/ the harlot church that is in league with the kings of this earth. Since history concerning the New Testament era is largely made of the reports on this worlds political activities the non-participating church of God simply didn't get written up. The false Christian church that did not flee sought its place with the governments of this world. Since they once had the Roman approval to practice a religion in their Jewish roots, it seemed only natural that they should have it once again. They did not comprehend that God had prepared the Church a place where they would be safe. The order to flee persecution should have been instruction enough, but some thought it noble to stay and die for a cause.

When Jesus came it was to pay the debt of sin for mankind and reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom of God held secret from the beginning. Through His many parables He laid these things out for those who had ears to hear and eyes to see with. The New Testament era brought about a time of revelation. The first revealing experience the church had was in dealing with the changes it faced moving from an old sacrificial system to that of faith in the sacrifice of Christ.

All of the New Testament scriptures dealt with understanding the transition into the new covenant except one, the book of Revelation. This book was the only post Temple document directed to the New Testament era of the people of God. Not only did it provide instruction and correction, but also a vision that would carry the church in its mission for the next two millennia. Under this new covenant things would be different, with the nation of Israel no longer effective and the sacrificial system gone, the church was set free into the world where she now must take the gospel to all who would be attracted by the gospel message preached and published world wide.
continued on page 24

Spiritual **Oomph!**



Norman Edwards

Many Christians have faith in God. They understand that Christ died for their sins, they know they have been forgiven, they remember receiving the Holy Spirit and they know that God answers their prayers. Yet they still feel the full power of His Spirit is not present in their lives—not like it was in the New Testament. They are looking for some spiritual oomph! So let us go to the Bible to find it! It is there! (The bright imagery of the New Living Translation is used throughout this article, except as noted.)

*All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms **because we are united with Christ** (Ephesians 1:3).*

*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well **to serve one another** (1 Peter 4:10).*

*A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can **help each other** (1 Corinthians 12:7).*

*Now you have **every spiritual gift you need** as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7).*

God has given us these gifts already!

He has also given us a purpose for them: to serve each other, not to serve ourselves. Spiritual gifts are not a badge of righteousness; they are an outgoing blessing. Sure, the last quote, above, says that we need spiritual gifts while we await the return of Christ. But Christ taught that those who reign with Him at His return would be serving others while they wait (Matthew 24:3, 44-47; 25:31-46; Luke 12:42-48). It may not be enough to ask God for a spiritual gift so that it can be used as a blessing to others someday. We may need to use whatever abilities we have now to serve others, so that God will know that we will use greater spiritual gifts for Him. This principle is also expressed like this:

“So pay attention to how you hear. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what they think they understand will be taken away from them.” (Luke 8:18, Similar teaching in Matthew 13:12; Mark 4:25; and Luke 16:11-12; 19:25-26).

We Can Ask for More!

While God says that he has given each of us a spiritual gift, we can always ask for more. More *oomph*, if you will. Whether it is wisdom, prophecy or some other gift, God is interested:

*If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. **He will not rebuke you for asking** (James 1:5).*

*Therefore, brethren, **desire earnestly to prophesy**, and do not forbid to speak with tongues (1 Corinthians 14:39, NKJV).*

*So you should **earnestly desire the most helpful gifts**... (1 Corinthians 12:31).*

*So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. **We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding** (Colossians 1:9).*

*Do not neglect **the spiritual gift you received through the prophecy spoken over you when the elders of the church laid their hands on you** (1 Timothy 4:14).*

*Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but **we give spiritual riches to others**. We own nothing, and yet we have everything (2 Corinthians 6:10).*

In the last three verses, Paul was asking for spiritual gifts for other believers. Again, our purpose must always be outward. We ask for gifts to serve others,

My Personal Experience

In studying the Bible to write this article, I realized I had never focused clearly on this point before: Spiritual gifts are for serving others. In times past, I had prayed for spiritual gifts and not received them. I have known many other believers who have done the same thing with the same results. This has led some people to conclude that spiritual gifts were for the first century church, but not for believers today. But the Bible teaches no such thing. Spiritual gifts are an integral part of the church (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12 & 14; Ephesians 4:11-15; 1 Peter 4:8-11).

Twenty-four years ago, I really wanted to know if it was all right with God if I left the big church denomination wherein I had been baptized and fulfilled the requirements for a degree in theology. Some of my friends had similar questions. We had been taught never to leave that church, but we were finding conflict between its teachings and the Bible. I read how God answered people in the New Testament, and prayed that He would show someone through a dream or vision so we could know. I volunteered to do the job if necessary, but I did not care who God prophesied through as long as I could know the right thing to do.

This prayer was on a Sabbath. I awoke the next morning with an overwhelming dream that helped me understand that God was leading members of that denomination out of it, and that the new members would not be well-prepared to take care of themselves yet. I wrote the dream down and what I understood to be its interpretation. As the years went on, I understood the interpretation of parts of it better. I wrote down my 86th dream the morning that I finished this article. Some have helped me know what to do in my ministry, others have been corrective, some mostly encouraging, and a few I am not sure I understand. The important thing, however, is that this gift was given in a very serious effort to serve others.

Later on, I had a conversation with the leader of a smaller, newly forming, church denomination. We discussed the issue of spiritual gifts, and specifically whether or not God might grant gifts of healing within the church. The leader responded by saying that if God granted him the gift of healing (he seemed to assume that any such a gift would be given to him), that he would get lots of people to join his church. As Ephesians 1:3 says, gifts are for unity with Christ, not to promote a certain denomination.

Along a less dramatic line, when I was a new Christian, I looked down on old people, handicapped people and “unsuccessful” people. I was prideful about how much I could do. Nevertheless, I saw the love that Christ and the apostles had for all people in the scriptures, and I began to pray that God would give me a love for everyone. I actually wondered if God could do it—“personal accomplishment” seemed to be such a big part of “who I was.” But over the years, especially after ministering to homeless people, he has given me that love and now it feels natural. Again, this was a gift given to serve others.

or we ask the gifts to be given to others. Recently, this writer watched a video presentation of a street evangelist who often started conversations by asking people if they had any sickness or problems for which they would like prayer. He frequently received yes answers, and sometimes several people would gather around while he talked. The evangelist would sometimes pray, but if there were other Christians in the group—even though he just met them—he would ask for them to pray. His point: it was not his words that were to produce the healing, but God’s. God can hear a new Christian as well as an old evangelist.

As evils and chaos increase throughout our world, spiritual gifts will become essential for each Christian to preach the Gospel and to provide for the physical needs of many. **Prophecy** continues to work when the Internet is down and the news media lies. **Healings** work when the hospitals are full, the food is unhealthy and insurance is unaffordable. **Miracles** feed and house people when there is no food. **Wisdom** allows one to make peace with or escape invading armies. **Faith** gives us peace no matter how difficult the situation. We need to be spiritually minded to think about how others will escape the difficult times to come, as well as ourselves and our families. Praying for these gifts, for others and for ourselves, is critical. Do we do it? We can do it! We need to do it!

Two Wrongs Do Not Make a Right

Many Christians are hesitant to ask for spiritual power and gifts—either for themselves or for others. Why? For some, the technology and economic wealth of our western societies seem to make such gifts “less necessary”. But the godless use of technology and wealth have brought the spiritual and moral disasters that we see in our world today: broken families, suicides, addictions, etc. Servants of Christ need to show His power as a viable alternative—so people will look forward to the return of Christ, not be afraid of it. When some Christians think of “spiritual gifts”, they think of uncontrolled “charismatic” or “Pentecostal” religion with hundreds



For some, the technology and economic wealth of our western societies seem to make spiritual gifts less necessary.

of people speaking, falling backwards, rolling on the floor, etc. all at the same time. They do not want any part of that confusion—and rightly so. Paul concludes his teaching on spiritual gifts like this:

In this way, all who prophesy will have a turn to speak, one after the other, so that everyone will learn and be encouraged. Remember that people who prophesy are in control of their spirit and can take turns. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God's holy people.

...³⁷ If you claim to be a prophet or think you are spiritual, you should recognize that what I am saying is a command from the Lord himself.

But if you do not recognize this, you yourself will not be recognized. So, my dear brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and don't forbid speaking in tongues. But be sure that everything is done properly and in order (1 Corinthians 14:31-33, 37-40).

Simply because some congregations

do not follow this scripture does not mean that there is not a proper use of spiritual gifts today. Think about this. Almost all of us would agree that we know of another church denomination or congregation that teaches erroneous doctrines. But does that error stop us from teaching the Bible? It should not.

Similarly, many people do not attend church congregations because they have experienced corruption there before. But should that stop us from continuing to meet in congregations as the Bible instructs?

Two wrongs do not make a right!

Simply because some congregations that promote "spiritual gifts" do not follow all the scriptural teaching on it, does not mean that dedicated believers can abandon these vital gifts. It becomes all the more important for godly people to do it right. The number of false prophets compared to the number of true prophets does not matter. Elijah went up against 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. The power of God destroyed all the false prophets (1 Kings 18:17-40). Spiritual power is not in conflict

with the teachings. As Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 14:37, cited above, those who claim to follow Christ ought to acknowledge the teaching of the apostles. They also ought to recognize the law is also spiritual and good:

*So the trouble is not with **the law, for it is spiritual and good.** The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin (Romans 7:14).*

Salvation is not possible by keeping the Old Testament law, we are human. But the law does show us the righteous mind of God.

Spiritual Things are Wonderful Things

We must not look on spiritual power as a burden. Supposing someone has fasted and prayed a whole day for a sick friend, and the friend did not get well. If we pray for the gift of healing, does that mean that we will now have to fast and pray for a week or more so friends can get well? Probably not! Spiritual gifts rarely work like that. Jesus and the gifted apostles

generally spoke only a few words and the people were healed. Now, they may have spent hours in prayer and fasting seeking God's will before they engaged in their ministry—but once the gift was received, it was a wonderful blessing to use.

Using spiritual gifts is much more concerned with letting ourselves and human organizations get out of the way, and letting God work. The following passage, 1 Corinthians 2:12-16, tells us just how wonderful it is:

And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. For, "Who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:12-16).

Does not this sound like Paul is talking about an important part of His experience as a believer? Does he want these things for the Corinthians to whom he writes? Does not God want them for you?

Put the Spirit to Work Now

Some might be asking, "Where and how would I use spiritual gifts if I had them right now? I am not a church leader and nobody would ever expect me to have any gift from God. Nobody would listen or care." Remember that Moses said something like that when God sent him to talk to pharaoh. You will be amazed what He will do if you let Him. But fortunately, we have two verses addressed to all believers that gives them a chance to use the power of the Spirit. Please read them first, then we will go through it a phrase at a time.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2, NKJV).

"Brethren" – This verse is addressed to believers. Every believer needs to listen.

"if a man is overtaken in any trespass" – How many people do you know who are greatly struggling with addictions, anger, lust, greed or any of the other biblical sins? If the answer is "none", this author would like to vacation in your home. It seems that everywhere one goes, one meets people who are burdened down with one or more major problems.

"you who are spiritual" – There we go! This is our chance to put the Holy Spirit, and spiritual gifts to work. This is the only way you will be able to accomplish this work. Most people do not want others to notice their sins, much less be corrected for them. But Jesus and the apostles frequently pointed out the sins of others. Sometimes that was appreciated, sometimes they were nearly killed. Different situations will require different gifts. But when your goal is to truly help somebody else, God is listening.

"restore such a one" – The goal of this process is restoration, helping the person to overcome the sin and escape the bad results from it. The purpose is not simply to condemn the sinner, nor is it to only tell him that Christ can forgive the sin. The purpose is to restore—which often includes both physical and spiritual healing.

"in the spirit of gentleness" – In our carnal culture, we usually point out the sins of others when they hurt or irritate us. We don't expect a thankful answer; we expect a fight or to be ignored. This is the opposite. The believer should be gentle, recognizing that he or she is a sinner, too. The believer may need to take some time to become a better friend to the person before they can deal with the main issue. Sure, the response may still be negative, but the believer has not done their job

unless they remain gentle throughout. Again, that requires the Holy Spirit.

"considering yourself lest you also be tempted" – Again, we need some spiritual *oomph* here. If we are helping an alcoholic, we will not help if we get drunk too. If we are helping a thief, we should not let him take us to dinner with the money he has stolen. We should not let our efforts to restore one person cause us to fail in our commitments to another. And no matter how we are treated, we should not let the "stress" of the mission let us become an angry, sinful person toward the one we help, toward our family or toward anyone else.


"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." – Christ has given us the task of bearing other's burdens, even though that can be very difficult at times. He has left us very broad fields to work in, and he wants to see what kind of work we will do (1 Corinthians 3:10-16). While getting involved in someone else's difficulties is generally unwise from a human standpoint, it is a mission to accomplish through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Seek Spiritual Fellowship

It is not good to do this kind of spiritual work alone. Christ himself gave different gifts to different members of the body (Ephesians 4:11-13). You will need encouragement from others who are serving in the same manner. You may find you need someone who has a gift that you do not have. Ask God, and He will show you how you can proceed. May God bless you and grant you His Spirit in power! (Oomph!)

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere (Ephesians 6:18).

Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance (1 Thessalonians).

This is why I [Paul] remind you [Timothy] to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you (1 Timothy 1:6). 

Aquarium-Dipping Is Not Really Evangelism

Dave Havir

This article is from the “Edifying the Body” section of the Church of God Big Sandy’s Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Aug. 3, 2013.

BIG SANDY, Texas—Many people in church organizations love to talk about evangelism. But it is amazing how much of the discussion is all talk without any discernible evidence of fruit.

Unfortunately, the emission of hot air is not the worst trait of this exercise in futility.

A few traits

Here are some of the traits that are often descriptive of people who promote personal evangelism:

- A holier-than-thou attitude. They often view themselves as having the answers, and they view other people as not being as dedicated as they are.
- An approach to try to change other people. They often feel justified in attempting to elevate other people to their high level of righteousness.
- Hypocrisy. They often talk about evangelism without being very successful at it.
- Aquarium-dipping. In case this reference is new to you, aquarium-dipping is stealing members from other Church of God groups. This is obviously not evangelizing society.

Supporting service projects

The congregation where I pastor is blessed to associate with like-minded sister congregations around the world.

Allow me to mention three perspectives that many of us share.

First, most of the people in my circle of life happily support the right of a

group or individual to engage in religious service projects.

By service projects I include religious television, radio, books, booklets, magazines, Bible studies, seminars, retreats and camps.

Many of us think that such service projects can be beneficial. If done properly, these projects can be helpful to the audience and to the participants.

However, notice the next two perspectives.

Deluding themselves

Second, most of the people in my circle of life recognize the folly of people who believe that their nice little service projects are in some way fulfilling some biblical directive.

Just because a service project can be helpful to an audience (and the participants) does not mean it is fulfilling scriptures in the Bible.

It is not wise for people who do service projects to ruin their ultimate value by exalting themselves. (Remember Matthew 23:12.)

Some people don’t realize how foolish their proclamations make them appear to other people both inside the Church of God and outside the Church of God.

Deluding others

Third, most of the people in my circle of life recognize when other people use their rhetoric about their service projects to control other people.

What is the purpose for people to try to control other people? Power. Money.

Some leaders seek to convince followers to view them as extremely important. Therefore the service projects

must be advertised as more important than they really are.

Of course, religious salesmen do not rely only on positive advertising. They use negative advertising to influence the audience to view the service projects of others as inferior.

Sometimes they even resort to belittling other people doing other service projects.

The Father sees it

Back to the idea of aquarium-dipping: Remember that aquarium-dipping is stealing members from other Church of God groups.


Let me conclude with the following two truths:

- Since each believer is free to attend wherever he wants to attend, he is not doing anything wrong when he switches congregations.

The members of a congregation are not the property of any group or any person. (Remember Acts 20:28.)

- However, it is sleazy and dishonorable for religious people to seek to build a following by fishing in the ponds of other groups.

Our Father in heaven knows those who have been doing aquarium-dipping naively. He will help people recognize their error.

Our Father in heaven also knows those who have been doing aquarium-dipping deliberately. Just because He lets it continue does not mean He has not noticed (Ecclesiastes 8:11). 



Calgary Canada

Independent Church of God - Winnipeg (Calgary Ministry)

Calgary has, since 1968, been a vibrant and colorful city in terms of the Church of God.

Set in Southwestern Alberta, in the foothills of the Canadian Rocky Mountains, along with God's Holy spirit, an entrepreneurial, cowboy-esque mentality has resided there as well. Not unlike most North American cities, Calgary has survived various congregational splits that have occurred throughout the years.

This very much outlines our feeling of being survivors.

With a Positive Outlook

Unweakened, and not discouraged, this current group came together in early 2011, and became a sister congregation (if you will) to the Independent Church of God Winnipeg in 2014. We refer to ourselves as the "Calgary ministry" of such. With the help of long time pastor in God's church, Alex Kennedy, and the entire congregation, Calgary has grown from a small group of 8 or 9, to a weekly core attendance of just under 30. We continue to grow with a healthy mix of young families with small children, teens, young adults and seniors. The 30 and 40 something age group making up the rest.


With God's help, growth has taken place, not only with the participation of those with long years of experience and service in the Church of God, but rather with new people seeking a relationship with Jesus Christ. This is a tremendous blessing, as it has added a fresh perspective for those who have been in attendance for (in some cases) upwards of 40 years. It has also provided an opportunity for the experienced to encourage new brethren in the sharing of the responsibilities and functions of the day-to-day, week-to-week building and expansion of God's church family.

At the time of inception, Haggai 1 & 2 came to mind as we set about attempting to again build God's house. Therefore, we believe that God has blessed this small flock, and we seek to serve Him by focusing on Christian living, serving one another and avoiding the pitfalls of looking negatively in the rearview mirror. Instead, we have made great strides in trying to be a friendly and welcoming place for brethren to come and worship. To date, our reputation (thankfully) has been just that, a congregation more concerned with how someone is doing, rather than where one has been, recognizing that folks will from time to time visit other congregations.

Originally meeting for Sabbath services and Holy Days in a small room at the Acclaim Hotel, we have met for last year and a half at the Berean Church of God located at 1111 - 33rd Street NE, Calgary. (Saturdays @ 1:30 PM MST)

Part of our growth has been the development of an experienced team of gentlemen providing the speaking and sharing of sermons. Our belief is that live speakers are an asset to any congregation, and endeavor to feature them nearly every week. With this in mind, we have also been pleased to welcome guest speakers from other congregations, including pastor from Chicagoland Church of God and *Shepherd's Voice Magazine* managing editor Jim Patterson.

If you happen to be visiting Calgary, or live here and were unaware that we were here, we bid you welcome - We'd love to see you.

We can be reached by email at icogcalgary@gmail.com or by phoning Darren & Keri Connery at (403) 366-9993 for directions to services etc. We can also be found on the web at cogcalgary.org and on Twitter at @icogcalgary. 

The Shepherd's Voice® is a free offering.

It is made possible by the tithes and offerings of the Chicagoland Church of God members, participating churches, and individual contributors. Donations are welcome and may be tax deductible.

Ask Norm!

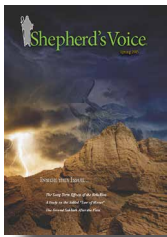


asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org

October 12, 2015

Dear Brethren:

The articles in the spring 2015 issue of Shepherd's Voice Magazine. The Long Term Effect of the Rebellion: A Study on the Added "Law of Moses" offered the best examination and explanation of the subjects that I have ever seen or heard anywhere. I have read and studied through it and plan to go through it again while the subject is fresh on my mind. There is a lot of confusion in this area. People seem to know the Ten Commandments are still valid, but founder on "the law". Baptists, etc. know one is saved by grace, not "works of the law". Even so, they will all honor the Ten Commandments (Sabbath excepted, but that is another lesson).



These companion studies do much to sort out the confusion and open up understanding of why we do what we do and how we might explain it, if someone asks.

Thanks for all these helps. Enclosed is a small offering to help with expenses.

—Sincerely, M. M. K.

Dear M. M. K.,

I learned a lot from Everett W. Leisure's article as well. Resolving the different emphasis of the Old and New Testaments has always been an important point of study to me—and I am still learning.

Christ and the apostles constantly quote and refer to the Old Testament. One website lists 937 times: <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txh/ntot.htm>. It is obviously important. But are all books of the Bible or all topics quoted equally or proportionally to their size?

No! The material quoted is far from equal. The most frequently quoted books are Psalms and Isaiah. The other prophetic books, for their size, are frequently quoted as well. The first five Books of Moses have a big influence, but the references are primarily the lessons of faith and the principles of justice, not the details of offerings and other priestly matters. There are few quotes from the Historical books: Joshua, Judges, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah. It is primarily the spiritual and prophetic teaching of the Old Testament that is quoted, the added "Law of Moses" is almost never quoted.

All the Bible is valuable, but some parts are more valuable than others. When Jesus was asked what commandment was most important, He did not say, "It's all important", but "You shall love the LORD your God

with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind' and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-39).

Since it has taken many years for people who study the Bible to understand these issues, we should be patient with those who are still coming to an understanding as well. I am in the process of studying all the places in the New Testament where believers or a congregation as a whole had to be corrected by Christ or the apostles. There are hundreds of corrections made. Yet, with only a few small exceptions, these brethren in error are treated as members of God's Church.

We need to study so we can grow in knowledge of every word of God, but we must never forget that the greatest spiritual attribute is love (1 Corinthians 15).

June 26, 2015

Hello Norm,

In Everett's article on the so called 'added law' he seems to have concluded that the Law of Moses is that written in the book of Deuteronomy. I certainly agree that all this needs a rethink, but I feel he has missed the point and made the whole subject far too complex. Israel agreed at Sinai to keep all that Moses would say to them. That agreement covered the period Moses was alive—forty years. The reason Moses reiterated and added to what was covenanted at Sinai was because the children of this second generation

who were about to enter the land hadn't ratified that first covenant. Their parents had, but they were too young at the time to do so. Therefore God required another covenant from them before they entered the land, and it had additional info because they were now about to live there.

However, the intent of the first covenant was always to do everything Moses said, so it was open ended. God could add whatever He liked.

Paul says in Galatians 3:17-18 in answer to the question, Why the Law [which he would term the 'added law'] that it came 430 years after a Covenant God ratified with Abraham. If Everett is going to say that the 'added law' was the Law of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, then that was 480 years after the Covenant with Abraham. This idea that the law can be divided into parts like he is trying to do is stymied by what Paul is saying. Anything given after this 430th year, which seems to be the whole point of his paper, is rebutted by Paul who says 'the law' came in this one single year.

"Now this am I saying; a covenant, having been ratified before by God, the law, having come four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not invalidate, so as to nullify the promise. For if the enjoyment of the allotment is of law, it is not longer out of promise. Yet God has graciously granted it to Abraham through the promise" (Galatians 3:17-18, Concordant Literal Version).

So, this cannot be what he means by the added law. The Law he is talking about came in one year. The same year Israel left Egypt and arrived at Sinai. The same year they ratified the Covenant.

So, unless he can satisfactorily explain how the Law of Moses [what you are calling the 'added Law'] came in just one year and that being the year Israel arrived at Sinai, then all he has said doesn't make sense.

Look closely at what Paul said. He said 'the law'—the one which most of the COG's, including yourselves, try to divide into parts in order to explain how some of it can be done away—came in the 430th year after God's covenant with Abraham. That's where you need to start to refigure all this because what you and he are saying is not right. Paul is calling 'the law' here the Covenant agreement. He's not talking about individual laws

within this agreement, but that this agreement is faulty and temporary and will be replaced by a New Covenant which relies on Christ to make us righteous, not our own efforts or works of law.

I have a series of papers on all this if you care to read them.

Regards,
Graeme McChesney

Dear Mr. McChesney,

I believe the reason I and many others have not understood the covenants in the Old Testament is because they are complex and efforts to oversimplify them prevent adequate explanations. It is not that every believer must understand this, but those who have studied the Word and are gifted with knowledge should teach it as it is. The added "law of Moses" did not start in the book of Deuteronomy, but in Exodus 32 at the incident of the Golden calf. This was about 40 days after the giving of the Ten Commandments and other laws that formed the initial covenant between God and Israel. In Exodus 32:10-14, God intended to destroy Israel and make a new nation of Moses, but He changed after hearing Moses' impassioned speech. Nevertheless, there were many consequences for Israel because of their sin (verses 25-35). Both God's law and the Law of Moses began that same year.

When compared to the first four books of Moses, the book of Deuteronomy repeats some laws, changes a few laws (like Exodus 20:8-7; to Deuteronomy 5:12-15) and adds some laws. This is true both for the laws of God and for the "Law of Moses". It is possible these additions and changes were given during the first year and then written for preservation in the Book of Deuteronomy many years later. It is also possible that the additions were not made until later. In any case, the language of Galatians 3:17, does not exclude later additions. The "perfect tense" of the Greek verb *ginomai* is used in, "the law, having come four hundred and thirty years afterward". The perfect tense refers to a past action that may have a future completion. There language does not require the entire law to be given in one year as you suggest. Certainly both laws began 430

years after the covenant with Abraham.

The covenant with Abraham, God's law given at Sinai and the "Law of Moses" are three different things. Abraham's covenant was described in Genesis 12:1-4 and Genesis 17 which required Abram to:

- 1) leave his family;
- 2) move to the place that God would show him
- 3) walk before God blameless,
- 4) change his name to Abraham,
- 5) circumcise every male child born in their houses throughout his generations on their eighth day,
- 6) change Sarai's name to Sarah,
- 7) call Sarah's son Isaac.

In return, **God promised to:**

- 1) make him a great nation;
- 2) bless him;
- 3) make his name great;
- 4) multiply his seed exceedingly;
- 5) make him a father of many nations;
- 6) cause kings to come from him;
- 7) continue His covenant with his descendants;
- 8) be their God;
- 9) give them the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession;
- 10) make Sarah the mother of nations kings and peoples and
- 11) give Sarah a son about the same time next year.

While some might say the "Old Covenant" began with Abraham, we see little here about commandments, laws or judgments. We simply see following God, in faith, as Paul says three verses before your quote, above:

"that the blessing of Abraham may be coming to the nations in Christ Jesus, that we may be obtaining the promise of the spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14)."

Salvation does not come through keeping the Law of God or the Law of Moses, but by yielding our lives to Christ in faith (Romans 3:20, 28). Are laws still useful? Yes! They show us the righteousness of God and what sin is (Romans 7:12; 1 John 3:4)

We do not know how much of the Ten Commandments or other biblical laws were revealed to Abraham. The

following verse shows that he obeyed some of them, but the first thing mentioned is Abraham's obedience to "My voice" and "My charge"—whatever God was telling him at the time.

"because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:5).

I needed several months of study on this issue to understand the concepts and accept them. In the end, you and I both agree that salvation does not come by the works of any law, but by faith in Christ.

Too take a practical example, what should be done with a child in a family or an adult in a community caught with property they have stolen? Asking them to restore double, according to God's law in Exodus 22:4 is a very practical thing that both teaches them not to steal and reimburses the victim—much better than jail-time, which the Bible does not teach. Should they also offer a "sin offering" as in Leviticus 4? That is a part of the Law of Moses, for which God has ended the priesthood. People would be better off to keep only the spiritual intent of that law, and accept the sacrifice of Christ for their sins, and "bring the sacrifice of praise to God." (Hebrews 13:15).

November 9, 2014

To Ask Norm!

Christ tells us if we wish to be the children of our Father in Heaven then we are to "Love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, forgive—even unto seventy times seven!" "Let not the sun go down on your wrath." "Overcome evil with good," says Paul the Apostle. Yet, when we come to the horrific punishments reserved for the "baddies" in the final "round-up": "Eternal damnation, blackness of darkness forever, fire that shall never be quenched where their worm does not die, and the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever" (take your pick), we find that our Father is unable or unwilling to "walk the talk" or "practice what He preaches," in spite of what He expects of us, as His children."

Matthew 26:24 is a tricky one—suggest you do some research on it via Rotherham—Luther's version or even Douay version of Catholicism.

W. J. Nicklin, QLD, Australia.

Dear Mr. Nicklin,

These are very good questions. Thank you for asking them. I would not bring them up to a new believer, but if a person has the question, then a mature believer should seek to answer it by the Spirit of God.

Let me put this in perspective by asking a couple of questions:

- Is a parent being hypocritical by commanding his or her children not to strike each other, but then occasionally spanking them as a punishment?
- Is our legal system being hypocritical when it charges a man with kidnapping when he locked a woman in a room, against her will, but then goes on to punish him by locking him in a prison cell for some legally specified number of years?

God is asking the same thing of us that parents would ask of our children. Parents want them to dwell in peace with each other; when necessary, parents will take care of the punishments. In the Old Testament, God authorized men to carry out the death penalty against people who worshipped idols and blasphemed God (Leviticus 20:2, 27; 24:14-16; Deuteronomy 13). But when one reads the history of what the Old Testament kings did, one sees that they punished true believers more than idolaters. Similarly, the religious leaders of Jesus' day executed him for blasphemy, and the big organized churches of the last two thousand years have frequently persecuted faith-filled, Bible-believers for "heresy"—which meant any doctrine that differed from theirs, even if it was clearly taught in the Bible. Mankind has not done well at all when it comes to handing out justice—especially in religious matters (Isaiah 10:1-2; Ezekiel 22:29; Amos 2:6-7; 5:12; Acts 7:52)

For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:30).

There are dozens of other scriptures that show God is a righteous judge, and that He will judge each person righteously (Genesis 18:25; Deuter-

onomy 32:4; Psalm 11:5-7; 98:8-9; Isaiah 11:1-4; Jeremiah 23:5; Revelation 16:7; 19:2, etc.). God asks us to deal in love because he will judge the evil ones for us. Jesus Christ "walked the talk". He set us the example of love without vengeance (Matthew 12:18-20). He died a miserable death that He did not deserve. Because of this, the Father has committed all judgment to his Son (John 5:22, 27; Romans 2:16; 2 Timothy 4:1). Jesus goes on to promise that those who have suffered with Him—loving their enemies rather than avenging themselves—will reign and judge with Him at His return (Psalm 149:5-9; Matthew 19:28; 1 Corinthians 6:2; 2 Timothy 2:12; Jude 1:14; Revelation 2:26; 3:21; 20:4).

God is a God of love. Jesus laid down his life for the sins of mankind, and many Christians have laid down their lives taking His Gospel to the world. But God does not intend to continue laying down lives forever to those who persist in evil.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries (Hebrews 10:26-27).

About the "baddies": Firstly, many evil people need massive correction. After working with homeless people for five years, I have met a few who have knowingly killed and injured innocent people—with their government's blessing. I have met children who were sold as slaves and tortured for someone's perverted pleasure. You can study history or today's media and find thousands of other evil people. These are "baddies" who need judgment!

But if these people exuded evil for 10, 50 or 100 years, is God going to torture them for trillions of years? Is that justice? The words "eternal" and "forever" and "ever" in your Bible quotes come from the Greek

ation, which is where we get our word “eon”. It does not mean an infinite length of time, but till the end of an age. We can see this in Jude 1:7 which says that Sodom and Gomorrah were “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire”, yet we all know their fire is no longer burning—it burned out at the end of “the age of Sodom and Gomorrah”—when they were completely destroyed physically. Even so, they will be raised from the dead, and their will be others judged worse than they (Matthew 10:15; 11:23-24; Mark 6:11; Luke 10:12; 17:29).

Similarly, the “unquenchable” fire mentioned in your “baddie” verses is from the Greek asbestos which can also come to an end. The fires burning in Gehenna (a garbage dump near Jerusalem—translated “hell” in some older Bibles) have now burned out—and the worms that ate the bodies are now dead and gone. Josephus uses the same Greek word for the “unquenchable” flame that burned in the temple—which went out when the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.

The numerous punishments in the Old Testament were designed to correct the sinner, not just make him suffer. A thief was to restore two, four, five or seven times as much as he stole, depending on the circumstances—so he would learn that “crime does not pay. Similarly, when God talks about punishing nations, he frequently has a specific multiplier, between two and seven, that He will punish them compared to what they did—not infinite (Leviticus 26:18, 21, 24, 28; Isaiah 40:2 Jeremiah 16:18; 17:18). Even Babylon, whose smoke of her torment goes up “forever and ever” (Revelation 14:8-11) will not receive an unending punishment, but double the trouble she dished out to others (Revelation 18:2-6).

God, like a father, is raising his family. He does not want to lose His children any more than any good human parent does.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2, NIV)

There are these and many other verses that indicate that eventually God intends to bring nearly all mankind to salvation. That is a longer subject than can be covered in this short answer. I do not understand all that God is going to do and how, but I know that He is just and righteous (Deuteronomy 32:4 and dozens more), so I am not worried about the eternal destiny of myself, you or anyone else. If anyone yields him or herself to God, there is a reward in the first resurrection (Luke 14:14). For those who are not ready, God has other resurrections and judgments right for them.


Is it possible that some people will never be saved? That seems to be the case with Judas, as you cited Matthew 26:24, which says, “*it would have been good for that man if he had not been born.*” It seems that if Judas is to inherit eternal life someday, then it would seem his physical birth was a good thing, even though his life was troubled. My best guess is that Judas will not receive eternal life. Just as every crop usually as a few plants that do not bear fruit, maybe there are a few people who are so far from God that they will never receive eternal life. I do not know for sure, but I am confident that God

does and that it will be the best thing for everybody. I really do not want to condemn anyone to eternal death, because I might be wrong and the Bible teaches “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2).

In our ministry to homeless people, we sometimes have to send people off of our property not knowing where they can or will go. We do it because they are a danger to themselves and/or others and because they are not learning from our gentle teaching. We hope that they will learn that their actions have caused them to lose this resource and that they will learn from the hardship we are imposing. God does this on a much grander scale—and He does it perfectly!

Mr. Nicklin, I would highly encourage you to read the book of Job and realize that we as humans really do not have the capacity to judge God. Your statement, “our Father is unable or unwilling to ‘walk the talk’” does sound like a judgment on Him. Yes, there have been times when I have felt angry at God, but I was wrong every time. I should have been asking Him for peace and understanding, rather than telling Him He was wrong.

If we are sure that God is wrong, we should consider creating our own universe and life-forms, implementing our own improved set of laws and judgments. But we really cannot do that, can we? Because God is God and we are His creation. So I think our time is better spent learning to understand why He is right, rather than trying to prove Him wrong.

Even so, thank you for this letter! I am sure there have been others with the same questions. 

“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

2015 Feast Reports

Wooten Woods Feast—“Just the Way I Like it”

The Feast in Wooten Woods, Tennessee was just the way I like it:

- a beautiful wooded setting with lots of wildlife
- messages flowing from the scriptures and the hearts of the presenters
- music of all kinds, planned and impromptu
- lots of brethren fellowshiping with and ministering to each other
- three home-cooked meals per day served at the site
- So much to do at the site that one can become worn out trying to do it all

The Feast started with God’s awesome display in the heavens: the moon gradually shrinking then turning blood red. Everyone attending went outside to watch and read the three scriptures about the “moon turning to blood”. The original prophecy is in Joel 2:21-3:21. A fulfillment is mentioned at Christ’s first coming in Acts 2:14-40 and we now look to a future fulfillment in Revelation 6:12-17.

The first day of the Feast, we built a *succah* or tabernacle (Lev 23:40; Neh 8:15-16). We used a kit and locally cut branches for the roof. Rod Koozmin brought a sample of the four species of trees mentioned in the Bible. The tabernacle symbolizes our bodies, which are temporary dwellings, until we are raised to eternal life. The tabernacle was taken down on the seventh day, as the dead

in Christ shall rise during the 7000th year of man’s existence.

Norman Edwards brought messages about the meaning of the first and last day of the Feast, the day when Christ came “in the middle of the Feast” and the eighth day. Leo Bredehof taught on the importance of Scripture, Mark Hughes explained what the Bible teaches about music and worship. Kim Edwards gave a message on grace and a seminar on worship artistry. Several feast-goers made their first acrylic painting ever. Wooten Woods professional musician staff members Dave Boisvert, David Welsch and Roy Wooten gave seminars on *Improving your Musicianship*,; *A whole Language Approach to Learning and Communicating with Music*, *Your Career in Music*, *The Emotion of Music*, *Music and the Hero’s Journey and Rhythm*.

Kim Howell, with lots of volunteers, ran the kitchen. Conversations were lively every meal. Some chose to eat some meals at the area restaurants. A few of the Feast-goers only left the site for one afternoon hymn-singing at a local rest home. It was very well received.

The basketball, soccer and other sporting facilities saw little use, but many people took walks in the woods and to the river. Young people frequently brought in bugs, plants and other wildlife.

In all, 33 people attended at least part of the Feast, with 22 posing for the final picture on the Eighth Day. What a wonderful celebration God has prepared for us!

–Norman Edwards



2015 Feast Reports

Feast in the Philippines

For the first time, the 2015 Feast site for the Church of God at Imus City (Cavite, Philippines) is truly Filipino in motif and setting. The cottages are built of native bamboo and lumber while the meeting hall has a thatched roof and only curtains for walls (no air conditioning). Tagaytay Farm Hills is nestled on a windswept, rustic hill on the outskirts of Tagaytay City, a healthy distance away from its noise. The lack of modern facilities, the absence of two ladies due to sickness, and the unexpected landing of a storm in the middle of the Feast didn't dampen the rejoicing of the brethren and their feasting on sumptuous physical food (they cooked their own meals) and the spiritual meat of the messages. Among these is the wonderful, happy life in the Millennium and the transformation of all qualified human beings into spirits before the descent of God the Father, the New Earth, and the New Heavens; and God's eternal kingdom as one of music.

- Max Noble

Editors Note: The Church of God in Cavite is a Chicagoland Church of God sister congregation. We are working together for the distribution of Shepherds Voice Magazine in the Philippines.



The Brethren Assemble for a Group Picture



A Cottage built of the Native Bamboo



PABC Update: *Time for Twins*

Some of the most recent guests to come to Port Austin Bible Campus are the two-week old twins pictured below. Of course, their mother is with them. She spends nearly all of her time feeding, rocking, changing and otherwise taking care of them—one of the most dedicated mothers ever to come to PABC.

How does one become homeless with such tiny babies? Why was not there some better plan in place? As in most cases, there were problems and there were plans, but the problems overwhelmed the plans. The mother had a good job, but had to quit toward the end of her pregnancy to go into the hospital. Without income, she could not pay rent, so she put her things in storage and planned to stay with her mother after the babies were born. She would have help with the babies and hoped to return to work as soon as possible.



The babies were healthy and this plan worked out all right for a couple weeks. But then her mother's landlord demanded that she leave. About

half of the people who come to our homeless ministry, come from a similar situation.

In Michigan, and many other states, if the landlord is aware of people living in his rental unit for over a month, they become tenants at law and the landlord must go through a legal eviction process to remove them. This takes time and money. These laws were passed to protect tenants from unscrupulous landlords who might otherwise not sign leases with their tenants so they could refuse them due process in any disputes. But the negative effect of these laws is that landlords must require people to quickly leave if they are not on the lease. If they do not require this quick exit before they are legally tenants, they may have a very difficult time evicting them since they may not know their full name or other important information.

Even though babies, mom and grandma were getting along great and paying the rent, mom and babies were given a day to leave the premises. So they called several places, and only PABC could take them. A previous PABC family had been required to exit, but had not yet come back for their belongings. Two PABC staff-members spent the afternoon packing them up and making room for mom and twins that night.

While this is the first set of twins to come to PABC, we are now at our 100 mark for total children who have lived here. The average length of stay for a child is 28 days. In Michigan, if law enforcement or other government workers find parents with children without shelter for even one night, they contact Child Protective Services who will take the children away from the parents. It often takes months for the parents to get their children back—which is extremely traumatic for the children. We are presently in the process of bringing another building into operation so we can house more families. We have had to turn down some.

Local Christians Provide Marvelous Support

In February of this year, some concerned Christians started the Bible Church Homeless Coalition to provide support for our ministry. They have helped to provide mentors

and other services to PABC. They have staffed our yard sale and put on two fund-raisers for us, a big-band concert in the Park and a dinner at the local Kinde Pasta House. Several thousand dollars were raised in the efforts, and dozens of people are now bringing supplies, saleable items and other help.

We have had help from a wide variety of denominations—they are serving God and their fellow man, not an organization. As we teach our homeless guests in our daily Bible classes: *Every person is made in the image of God.* PABC helps them because God loves them and cares for them. Our educational system teaches evolution and “survival of the fittest”—from which one might conclude that the poor and less-capable people should die off so the strong can reproduce. But if we believe in God, then everyone is important because we all can receive eternal life. Once we realize God's love for us and how important we are to Him, then it is time to start reading the Bible so we know what He expects of us and how we should live.

Church Chicken Court Caper Concludes

Readers of previous PABC Updates will remember we were found guilty in court for having Chickens in a Business zoning district, so they had to “cross the road” to the part of our property the Township had zoned “Industrial”. We attempted to raise the issue of whether zoning applies to churches that are not corporations, but neither the district court nor the circuit court in our appeal would write an opinion on the issue. Our appeals to the Michigan Court of Appeals and Michigan Supreme Court were declined without a hearing.

We considered taking the case to the United States Supreme Court, which we had the right to do, but realize that only about 2% of such appeals are heard. Ours was probably even less likely to be heard as there was no clearly written opinion to appeal, and we had not done the necessary research to show how this is an important issue in other states. Should this issue or a similar one arise in the future, we will know much better how to deal with it and how to preserve the important legal questions on the court records. 🙏

2015 Feast Reports

Penticton, British Columbia, Canada

Observing the Feast of Tabernacles in Penticton, British Columbia has indeed become a popular trend in recent years. The festival in 2015 was no different!

Penticton has historically been a scenic and welcoming location for the Feast. Situated between Okanagan and Skaha Lakes, extremely warm and sunny conditions were enjoyed by roughly 90 attendees this year. Toward the midway point, attendance averaged in the mid 70s as some people moved on to visit brethren at other sites in the Okanagan Valley.

Throughout the Feast, those in attendance enjoyed vocal and instrumental selections for special music during services, as well as a congregational hymn sing along. All was done in accordance with Psalm 29:

Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in holy array (Psalm 29:1-2).

Rejoicing was most definitely the underlying theme this year. Brethren from a number of different organizations, and cities on both sides of the Canada/U.S. border participated in that rejoicing while enjoying a congregational luncheon, a potluck dinner, a dance (fully catered with a DJ), and the ever popular bowling night and pizza day. The latter was topped off by 25 large pizzas being consumed in seemingly short order! Of course brethren took advantage of the local restaurants, attractions and nearby shopping to round out their Festival experience.

There were 2 baptisms at the Feast this year. It is always a blessing when the body of Christ is added to! Unique to Festival 2015, there was a ministerial ordination. Brethren in attendance witnessed as Alex Kennedy officiated the ordination in the laying of hands on Darren Connery of Calgary to the ministry of Jesus Christ, joined by Duane Nicol, Jim Patterson, Jeff Patton and Frank Bean.



Brethren pause for a photo.



Many opportunities to socialize.



Ordination of Darren Connery of the Calgary Church

Darren has served for the last 4 years on behalf of Independent Church of God Winnipeg (Calgary Ministry) with the help and support of his wife Keri, their teen-age children Evii and Ghus, as well as the Alberta, Winnipeg and Penticton brethren. You may read more about the Calgary Church in this issue of *SVM*.

God indeed blessed the Feast in Penticton this year, and we anticipate the same for 2016. Feedback from young and old alike has been positive to say the least, as everyone had a most enjoyable experience meeting new people and re-connecting with old friends.

The Day's Inn has been reserved again and God willing, we hope to see you all next year!

- Janice Kennedy



continued from page 9

Vulnerable and persecuted, the new church embarked into the world armed not with sword or dagger (as was the counterfeit) but only with the promise of the Holy Spirit, the Helper that would not leave them orphans. Driven by the violent storms of political and religious warfare this new church disappeared from view only to slowly emerge again in glimpses of vague revealing shadows. The passage of thirteen hundred years went by as the church was not visible with the exception of small challenges to religious strongholds here and there. By the fifteenth century a new world (the Americas) opened its doors to persecuted peoples. The spiritual organism which answers to the Woman (bride) was in the midst, as some evidence does show for the first church in the new world was a Sabbath keeping one on Rhode Island. She had survived the twelve hundred and sixty days, and emerged into this blossoming time of freedom, a more gospel tolerant world. Faintly visible as it was to historians the truth was still alive, the church had maneuvered through the tumultuous storm tossed seas of time with its treasure for the most part intact. She had been protected by God, and was benefited by the Helper the Holy Spirit, a special gift of divine help for this age.

It is in the Book of the Revelation to John that we read of this church and her journeys. Who she was, where she went, who she is and what should become of her is one of the mysteries of the age.

REVELATION TWELVE, AN OUTLINE

The 12th chapter of Revelation is a basic outline of what happens to the people of God from it's old covenant maturity and delivery of the messiah, down to the end time just prior to the return of Christ. In Revelation 12:1 there is pictured in symbolism a woman, and her identity is vital to understand. Some have identified her as being Israel, for out of her came the messiah into this world. A closer look at her symbolism will give us more insight, for while she came from Israel, she is much more. This book of revelation is highly symbolic with intent to instruct and guide the people of God until the end time.

A WOMAN

The first thing we observe is that she is a woman. The title "woman" is used to identify a great religious order in this same book in Chapter 17:1-6. This other woman is shown to be an harlot in a relationship with the kings of this world. She is

a woman, but neither a bride nor a wife, she is a harlot. In contrast we see the woman in Revelation 12 as a virtuous woman. One who in symbolism is mature and delivers a messiah to this world (Revelation 12:6). Her identifying symbols bear Royal markings. Because the symbols are the sun, moon and stars, we quickly identify her as being from the household of Abraham. The divine vision of Joseph (Genesis 37:9) shows us in symbolism the same special royalty invested in the household of Abraham as it is passed down upon his family. Joseph being made manifest as the recipient of some of those promises. The woman of revelation bears the same symbols.

More than just an Israelite she is the spiritual church of Israel now matured, upon whom the spiritual promises have been bestowed. She is the sum collection of the first fruits of God from the old covenant, shown here fulfilling her duty of preparing for and delivering the Messiah to this world. She is the antithesis of the woman of Revelations 17; she is the spiritual body of Christ.

CLOTHED WITH THE SUN

In Malachi 4:2 we find described in traditional Old Testament symbolic language the advent of the promised

Messiah for Israel. He is described as coming with healing in His wings, the sun of righteousness. This language under the eyeglass of post Messiah events tells us this: The messiah paid the debt of sin, purged the conscience and paved the way for cancellation of the penalty of eternal death. He also was the one who made possible the status of righteousness that bathes the repentant recipient in purification, giving him that suitable covering. His sacrifice sealed that condition in the high court of heaven once for all men in both old and new covenants by paying all lists of debts held there and repented of. This woman is clothed in that righteousness showing that she is made up of those first fruits out from the household of Israel. We see some of them mentioned in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Like the tabernacle in the wilderness and David's temple for God, this spiritual entity is built and furnished only with the finest materials. It is the spiritual Temple of God, that which is revealed in the New Testament as being the body of Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Corinthians 3:16:17). The foundation of this temple was made up of those called under the old covenant, the rest of the temple for the most part, will be made up of those called as New Testament saints.

Clothed with the sun is symbolic of being a recipient of the gift of righteousness provided by the sun of righteousness mentioned in Malachi 4:2. It is the healing offered for the penalty of transgressions. The sun symbolized Jacob, in Joseph's dream. Rachel symbolized by the moon, and the sons of Jacob by the stars of heaven (Genesis 37:9,10). These symbols show divine selection for the purposes of God. In this case it was the choosing of Abraham's descendants as the representative peoples of God. These symbols naturally are attached to this woman because of that family line. But here they bring more meaning, revealing in symbolic terms the spiritual purpose behind the physical calling of the people of God. Being clothed with this sun of righteousness is different than being the sun of righteousness. Even as Jacob was represented by the sun, and Rachel by the moon (which is clothed in the light of the sun) so in representation is this woman in reflecting the righteousness of God.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Righteousness is different from Godliness as the scripture shows: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die" (Romans 5:7). This understanding is played out in David's affair with Bathsheba. Though David was repentant and justified by God, Ahithophel (Bathsheba's grandfather) understandably would not give his life for him in spite of being one of his chief counselors. In Ahithophel's mind (and others) David was not a good (Matthew 19:17, Godly) man, but a sinner. David was a justified sinner, or a righteous man, for God had clothed him with righteousness. The woman of Revelation 12 bears this status of righteousness, that which is only possible from the source, the sun of righteousness, Jesus the Messiah.

A CROWN OF 12 STARS

A crown (Greek *stephanos*) by its definition is a badge of royalty, or a prize won as in the Olympic Games, a symbol of honor. The twelve stars in this crown represent the 12 tribes of Israel. This woman has won the honor among these 12 tribes. Symbolical she is the collection of first fruits garnered from the household of Abraham. She is that which Enoch the seventh from Adam witnessed as the assistant which comes with the promised messiah Jude 1:14 "behold the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints". Symbolically she is the bride and wife to be of the Messiah. The kingdom of God is made up of many offices, but all men are called into it through the household of Abraham. The 12 tribes of Israel factor significantly in some of the special offices that will be assigned. The woman shown here is being represented as an old covenant entity that has matured and is about to deliver the promised messiah. Naturally she is made up of those first fruits garnered out of Israel under the old covenant system.

THE MOON BENEATH HER FEET

The woman is pictured having the moon beneath her feet. The moon

brings light to the dark side of the world, and in symbolic fashion this woman being the custodian of the truth brings the light of the gospel message to a dark world. Isaiah 52:7 ("How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, that publishes peace; that brings good tidings of good, that publishes salvation; that says unto Zion, thy God reigns") is a prophecy that all of Israel looked to at this time in history. The symbolism spoke to them without doubt that the man-child who was delivered was indeed the Messiah, and the message of peace was alive. It was not all of Israel that published the good tidings of salvation, only those who were the servants of God and were persecuted for it. Most of Israel had failed in their agreement with God. This woman represents those saints who held fast to the promises of God and did the work, they are the likes of those of whom we read of in Hebrews the eleventh chapter, men and women of faith. This list is but a sample of those saints that are in the "whole cloud of witnesses" because it was made up of those whose experiences were readily identifiable for the target audience (the Hebrews). To say that it was only this hand full of first fruits that were garnered over four thousand years of hard work is a bit short sighted. There were many that were faithful and engaged in the spreading of the gospel message of that time period.

OLD COVENANT ASSIGNMENT FINISHED

In Revelation 12:2-4 we see how vulnerable this woman is at this point for she is with child and being persecuted. In this symbolic portrait we also see the maturity that this woman has attained in her old covenant assignment from God. She has fulfilled her duty to prophesy and publish good tidings of salvation and is about to deliver on the promise of a Messiah. Symbolically this child is the first of many first fruits that will be garnered into the spiritual kingdom of God. The rest will await their time sleeping in death. Her journey was hard and difficult, similar to Israel's journey to the promised land, many fainted and failed to enter into her numbers. The rest of her journey in the next stage would prove to be just the same.

For the woman it was an expectant time. Her years of prophesying about and promising delivery of a Messiah were coming to full term. When the Messiah was born, no temple officials were invited to witness the event. None came to visit the newborn king when the news was spread about. Only an illegitimate king of the Jews sought his whereabouts, and that for nefarious intents. Messianic expectations ran high at this time due to the prophecy's of the woman over time, but none expected He would come from the grass roots of Israel.

A NEW WORK BEGINS

Symbolically this child (the Messiah) was the first of the first fruits to be raised up from the earthly realm into the spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:23). After the woman delivers the Messiah she continues on to do another work, for the gathering of first fruits harvest must go on. In this new work she enters a new agreement that entails taking the gospel message to the entire world.

Revelation 12:2-5 describes the situation as it unfolded in this transition period. Satan (v3) is shown to be prepared having anticipated the delivery of the Messiah. He has recruited his army and gathers at the place where He would be born: the nation of Israel where the people of God live in exile in their own land. The evidence of this situation is clear and obvious for demon possession was at a high at this time, purposely and not coincidental. Satan was there and ready! This event is not connected to any historic event where Satan supposedly takes one third of the angels from heaven in his great rebellion. This event is symbolic of what Satan was doing at the time of the first Advent and the reference to stars is simply to show that he has not come alone, but with many of his demons.

By the time the woman of Revelation 12 comes to deliver the Messiah the temple in Jerusalem had become a den of thieves (brigands, or in short evil opportunists there to take what was not rightfully theirs), and there was a demon possessed king of the Jews ruling the captive people of God. If one thinks he was not demon possessed we need only to read Revelation 12:4 where the

Dragon seeks to devour the child, then read about Herod's evil actions in Matthew 2:1-18. (It would be good to bear in mind just how Satan works in the physical realm, for if he used humans to do his work then he certainly will do it now).

When the plan with Herod failed, Satan moved on to another, and in the end was instrumental in backhandedly helping Israel to perform their ultimate Passover sacrifice, that of the crucifixion of Messiah Jesus. No authorities from the Temple were invited to His birth, and none stood by Him when He died, they sought only His life from birth to death.

CHURCH FLEES IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION

Revelation 12:6 describes what happens when Satan fails to devour the child. He turns his attention to the persecution of the woman but the woman flees to the wilderness where she has a place prepared for her. This flight of the woman is a major clue in determining what happened to the first century church. Those who did not flee or take refuge from view became those who made up the core of a false Christian system. Not to flee or hide meant integration with the ruling powers; it was flee, hide, die or integrate.

In this place prepared of God she is nurtured and fed for 1260 days. History is scant on the details, and for good reason, she was hiding from the intense persecution against Jew and Christian of that day. The birth, death and resurrection of the Messiah had turned the world upside down. It threatened the logic and rationale of the Imperial Roman cult religion. Rome fought back with all its brutality and the Church laid low. A three hundred year battle ended with a marriage between those Christians who did not flee and the Roman Government.

Revelation 12:7-8 covers a battle that spans some considerable time. We know this because history reveals it; the kings of the earth were at war for ages. We learn much about the spiritual behind the scenes alliances when we read the book of Daniel where angels were at war with evil spirits manifesting through human

kings and rulers. It is no different today. God allows these struggles to carry on for the trying and testing of humans on earth.

A COUNTERFEIT IS BORN

The war that broke out in heaven was over the New covenant church and its mission. Satan tried to destroy it, and when that didn't work he developed a clever counterfeit to divert the world's attention. This took time, and as he made his moves here on earth it was not without constant argument, complaint and battle with the heavenly realm of God's government. Satan fought for what he wanted a New Testament church of his own liking. This struggle for power and authority engaged human and divine forces, it established a counterfeit Christianity and isolated the true church. Nepotism, marriages of convenience, forged alliances, entrapment and trickery were the tools cleverly used behind the pious facade. The true people of God understand that God looks to those of a contrite heart and tremble at His word, those who are not fearful to change when confronted with the truth and are willing to lose all in this life for the will of the Father.

The true church, after lying low, finds opportunity when the warring kings of this earth begin destroying each other. Mixed in this deceptive battle is the counterfeit Church, a church that deceives this whole world and is in league with the kings of the earth badly corrupted and failing the preaching of the kingdom of God. Many of these things spanned the time the woman is in the wilderness.

THE EVIDENCE THAT FORCES THE VERDICT

True to Satan's habitual way, he continues to come before God's throne with accusations against the people of God, some true, some trumped up and many false. As we find in the book of Job these accusations are useful to God in working with His people. The battle covered here in Revelation 12:7-9 is long and difficult and spans a period of time from the flight of the woman up to the time when God casts Satan out.

Tracing the first century church and

her activities in this time is difficult for she left no artifact evidence behind, she was a commandment keeping church which did not believe in idols or images, neither did she worship men. She was quite unlike the false Christianity that is in league with world governments and did leave behind its idols.

SATAN CAST OUT

Throughout this time (of Revelation 12:6-8) the true church somehow manages to continue preaching the Gospel to this world. Though wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove it is subject to suffering at the hand of those who seek its life. The church endures accusations, battles against false brethren and teachers and flees persecution and takeovers from infiltrators. These things are manifestations of a greater spiritual battle behind the scenes where Satan takes every opportunity to find fault with and destroy the church. This is a time of trial and testing for those called, not unlike that which was put upon Israel as she journeyed to her promised land. Rev. 12:8-9 shows that in this battle Satan comes to the end of his welcome before the God of the universe, and is cast out. He is no longer allowed to accuse the brethren of the people of God. The trying and testing of the first fruits draws to a close. This is a time we await.

Revelation 12:10-11, the loud voice that makes the declaration *“Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ”* is the same loud voice we read about in Revelation 11:15, *that makes the same declaration. The timing is that of the third woe* (v:14).

The people of God have prevailed and overcome (mikao - gained victory over) Satan, his accusations against them have been dealt with in the same manner that Job and David had theirs dealt with, through the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony (v:11 Marturia ...evidence given, record, report, testimony, witness). They are justified through their repentance and acceptance of Jesus sacrifice and are declared righteous by the great judge of the court of heaven based upon the evidence they have

provided. In the face of this, Satan is defeated, for the calling of first fruits for the bride of Christ is over and the door to the beginning of God’s calling of the final harvest of humans in that great harvest of ingathering begins. There are only so many called to be the bride of Jesus, and this calling must end prior to the time He comes to marry her. All who are called after the marriage of the Lamb cannot be the bride. The word church is the Greek word ekklesia (a calling out, a community of members) Ephesians 5:25-27 that which Jesus prepares as first fruits. It is the body of “Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17), or those who are His at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:23).

In Revelation 12:12, when Satan is cast down the inhabitants of the world mourn. It is a time of global trouble. This casting out of Satan is a chronological event even as his coming was when the Christ child was born. Some have tried to connect this event with another which Jesus commented on when talking to His disciple*“I saw Satan fall as lightning from the heaven”* (Luke 10:18). This comment of Jesus was a caution to His disciples on having the proper respect for that power and authority. Satan had misused it and was instantly demoted and he fell from that lofty office as suddenly as lightning falls from heaven.

When Satan is finally cut off from the privilege of going before God’s throne he immediately takes occasion to try to destroy the church. The church flees once again, and goes to a place with some divine help where she is once again nourished for a period of three and a half years. This is a place that is away from the face of Satan. All of these events unfold during a time we would understand as the third world war.

TRYING AND TESTING OF THE SEED

Failing this attempt to destroy the woman (verses 15-16) He turns His wrath upon the remnant of her seed. Some have thought that this is part of the Church (meaning the first fruits, or bride of Christ) but the Greek words used here for the translated English expression “remnant of her seed” are loipoy sperma which means simply a portion of her seed. The Greek word

loipoy means residue and sperma means “something sown, issue or seed. It is something that is suitable for planting. Indeed God will plant seed in the new age of the harvest of ingathering. To plant for this new earthly millennial reign of Christ and His wife God needs suitable seed; seed tried and tested and purified.

The people spoken of here in verse 17 are those who have received from the gospel message the understanding of the commandments and the testimony of Christ. They are Godly people but not called for the purpose of being part of the bride for Christ, but for another calling. Their story is covered in another chapter of Revelation. The word “saints” (Greek hagios) simply means sacred, blameless, religious, consecrated. They are called (sanctified) but in need of being tried and tested even as the first fruits have been tried. We witness the churches entrance into tribulation in Revelation 13:7 where Satan is given occasion to persecute them and overcome them. The church comes under attack in the end time and her power is broken (Daniel 12:7). Revelation 12:12-14 shows that the wrath of Satan is unleashed upon the inhabitants of this world and he also mounts an assault against the Church but by divine means, in hauntingly similar words to that of Israel’s flight from Egypt (Exodus 19:4), she is taken on the wings of a great eagle to a safe place (v:14). This leaves the seed behind.

In Revelation 12:17, we see Satan go to war against the “seed” of the church (Godly people) and they now must look to God for deliverance. Their deliverance from captivity comes with the disposal of Satan and his system. This period of time will see some of the people put to death but for the most part the seed like the church are protected. For the seed it is their time to walk into the Promised Land. 📖

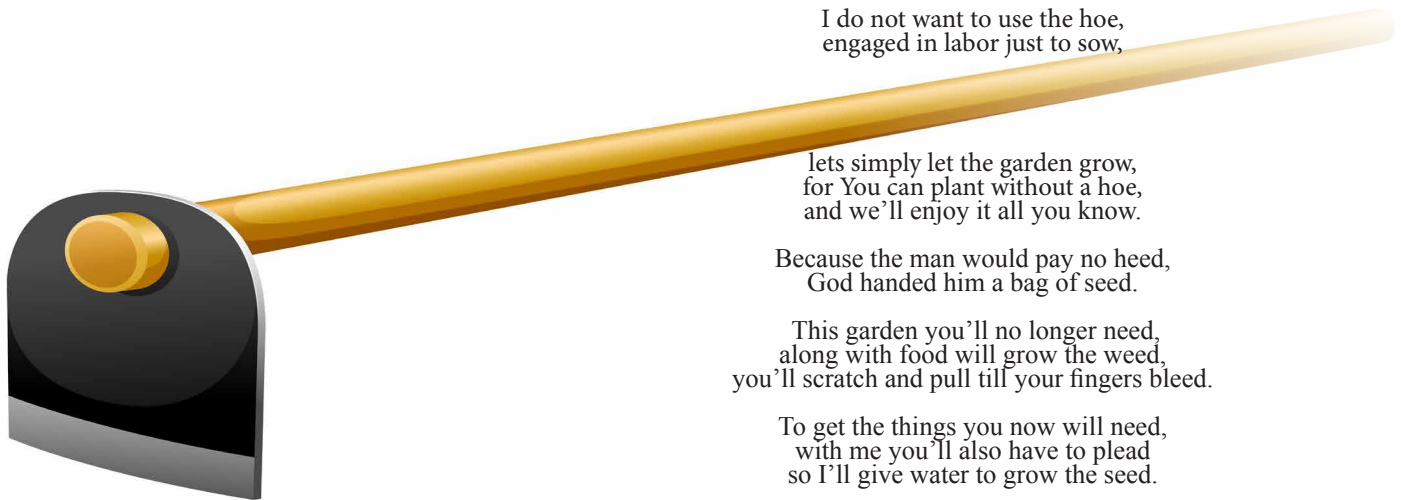
Shepherd's Voice Magazine®
PO Box 474
Port Austin, MI 48467-0474
USA

Shepherd's Voice Magazine®
Fall 2015

Periodical Postage
paid,
USPS 016-995,
at Plainfield, Illinois
and additional
mailing offices

THE GARDEN HOE

Jim B. Petersen



In a garden lush and green,
God handed man a hoe.

With this, he said, you'll have to take
and make this garden grow.

You'll find it quite a handy thing
no matter where you go.

Now go, teach your children how to hoe,
show them how to sow, planting row on row,
and it will feed you all, you know.

Spread this garden round the world,
and make your work an art to show.

Now take the hoe and go.

The man he looked upon the hoe,
Oh no! No, not a hoe!

I do not want to use the hoe,
engaged in labor just to sow,

lets simply let the garden grow,
for You can plant without a hoe,
and we'll enjoy it all you know.

Because the man would pay no heed,
God handed him a bag of seed.

This garden you'll no longer need,
along with food will grow the weed,
you'll scratch and pull till your fingers bleed.

To get the things you now will need,
with me you'll also have to plead
so I'll give water to grow the seed.

All this because you wouldn't heed
and take the hoe I knew you'd need,

Where ever now you chance to go
and try to make a garden grow,
the wind will blow, you'll fight the crow,
the ground will freeze beneath the snow,
and all those seeds will strive to grow.

So now I tell you what I know,
you'll still need some kind of hoe.

Sow, take the hoe and go!