

Christianity Is a Way of Life

Lesson 12

What Is a Real Christian?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Those who are truly hungering and thirsting for righteousness will be studying God's Word for true understanding. They will be willing to change when they see they've been wrong, admitting their wrong beliefs, their mistakes and their sins. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God" (2 Tim. 2:15), wrote Paul to Timothy. "Prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21), Paul said to the Thessalonians.

4. Who did Paul say are justified before God—the hearers or the doers of God's LAW? Rom. 2:13. Did Paul make it plain that, even though the unmerited pardon of our sins is by the grace of God through faith in Christ's sacrifice, a Christian is nevertheless required to keep God's Law? Read Romans 3:31 and all of chapter 6.

5. Who did Jesus say will enter the Kingdom of God? Matt. 7:21. What did the Paul plainly say was most important for a Christian to be doing? 1 Cor. 7:19.

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

done it all for us.

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

7. Will God's love, which He imparts through His Spirit, lead one to keep the Ten Commandments—all ten of them? Rom. 13:8-10. In what way did God inspire John to confirm Paul's statement—what is the Bible definition of God's love? 1 John 5:2-3. How is God's love perfected in a Christian? John 2:5.

A Christian "Walks" With God

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

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

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

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

5. Was God also Abraham's friend and companion? 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Jas. 2:23. Did God talk with Abraham as a close friend would? Gen. 18:17-19, 23-33. (Recall from your previous studies that the "LORD" of Old Testament was in reality the member of the God Family who later became Jesus Christ.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COMMENT: A real Christian will no longer be able to conscientiously follow all the customs and practices of the society around him. Where he formerly "went along with the crowd," thoughtlessly participating in various social activities and business practices he will now begin to question his lifestyle. He will begin asking: "What is God's Will? How does God say I should live?" He will begin saying, with Christ, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done." He will begin to diligently search the Word of God to learn the Will of God and follow it.

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

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

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

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

COMMENT: A Christian has been conquered by God. His carnal, antagonistic attitude toward God (Rom. 8:7-8) is broken. He has to realize he has sinned against God, having broken His holy, righteous Law (1 John 3:4). Therefore, he cried out to God and asked His forgiveness for those sins through the sacrifice of Christ, and for a lifting of the death penalty, which every sin incurs (Rom. 6:23). Then he obeyed the command to be baptized, indicating to God his deep sincerity.

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

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

15. What does God call the person who claims to "know" Christ, but refuses to walk in His ways—refuses to keep His commandments? 1 John 2:4.

16. What will the one who says he is a Christian actually be doing? Verses 3, 5-6.

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

The Ten Commandments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. How did Jesus expand the keeping of the Ten Commandments? Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28. Did John understand this principle? 1 John 3:15. Did Paul understand the spiritual aspects of God's Law? Rom. 7:14.

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

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

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

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

8. How did Christ summarize the great Ten Commandment Law of God? Matt. 22:36-40. What is the basic characteristic of God's nature and character? 1 John 4:8, 16.

COMMENT: The Ten Commandments are expressions of the divine love of God because they reflect the very character of God, which is summarized by the word love. This love, as we learned in the previous lesson, is not just another of human love, but the divine love that comes directly from God through the Holy Spirit. (Gal. 5:22).

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

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

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

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

10. Could there be any truth in the widespread belief that love fulfills the Law of God in such a way that keeping of the Law is no longer necessary? 1 John 5:2-3; John 14:15; 15:9-10; 2 John 5-6.

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

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

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

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

"Remember the Sabbath Day"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Does the Bible plainly reveal that a real Christian is one who has become a spiritual Israelite—one of Abraham's "seed" through Jesus Christ? Gal. 3:28-29; Rom. 4:16; 9:4.

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

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

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

7. Is there biblical evidence that the early New Testament Church also observed the Sabbath? Acts 13:14-15, 42-44; 14:1; 17:1-2; 18:1-11.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And none except faithful Joshua and Caleb of that generation entered the Promised Land. But the next generation, the children born along the way during the 40 years, did enter with these two men. God had originally promised this land to Abraham for his descendants, and regardless of whether or not the Israelites sinned, God was bound to keep His promise.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Most English translations of the Bible have correctly translated Hebrews 4:9. Even the margin of the King James Version renders it: "There remaineth therefore a keeping of a sabbath to the people of God." The Revised Standard Version translates it: "So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God." The Jerusalem Bible states: "There must still be, therefore, a place of rest reserved for God's people, the seventh-day rest."

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

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

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

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

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

The Seven Annual Festivals

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As we begin this study of God's annual festivals to learn what they signify for Christians today, let's notice a few facts from history.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COMMENT: While instituting the new symbols of unleavened bread and wine, picturing His broken body for our physical healing (1 Pet. 2:24), and His shed blood for the forgiveness of our sins, Jesus gave a command, "This DO in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). The Passover is a memorial of Christ's sacrifice for our sins, which He wants Christians to especially remember every year.

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

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

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

6. What festival immediately follows the Passover? Lev. 23:6-8; Ex. 12:15-20.

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

COMMENT: At this point it would be well to distinguish between God's annual festivals or feasts, and annual Holy Days or Sabbaths. God's Master Plan includes seven annual festivals. Two of these, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles, are seven days long. There are also seven annual Holy Days which are Sabbaths of rest from regular work. Each of these Holy Days occurs on, or during, a festival (the Feast of Unleavened Bread has two). But the Passover, the first of the festivals, is not a Holy Day or Sabbath.

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

COMMENT: A study of these verses in 1 Corinthians 5 shows that the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which the Corinthian Christians were observing, pictures the putting away of sin. Leavening is a biblical type or symbol for sin (verse 8) because sin, like the leavening used in bread to make it rise, can not only cause a person to become puffed up with vanity (verses 2, 6), but can also spread throughout a group of people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

made the Holy Spirit available to the "first fruits" of the New Testament Church.

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

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

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

COMMENT: The Feast of Trumpets primarily depicts the triumphant return of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 11:15). You will remember that the first resurrection occurs at the Second Coming of Christ, which is announced by the tremendous blast of a trumpet (1 Thess. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:52).

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

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

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

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

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

Satan, who is called the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), and is described the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:12), being the father of sin (John 8:42-44), will be restrained by Christ from further deceiving and leading the masses of mankind into sin. No longer will he be able to "broadcast" his attitudes of vanity, lust and greed into people's minds.

At devil's "chaining" (Rev. 20:1-3), the symbolism of Leviticus 16 will have become reality. The minds of men, formerly deceived by Satan and his demon cohorts, will now at last be opened by the Spirit of God, and all humanity will be able to accept and receive forgiveness of their sins through Christ. For the first time, they will be able to understand God's Master Plan of salvation for them. Then, and only then, will mankind become "at one" with Christ and the Father, as symbolized by the Day of Atonement.

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

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

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

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

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

COMMENT: The Feast of Tabernacles was also called the Feast of Ingathering (Ex. 23:16; 34:22) because this seven-day festival celebrated the summer and early autumn harvest. The whole nation observed this feast after the main harvest had been gathered in (Lev. 23:39).

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

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

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

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

COMMENT: The Feast of Tabernacles is full of spiritual meaning for Christians today. The Feast pictures the wonderful World Tomorrow, the Kingdom of God, under the righteous rule of Jesus Christ—1000 years of peace, prosperity and joy for the multiple thousands of millions of people who will live in this utopian age. It is during the Millennium that the great "autumn harvest," of human lives will begin to be gathered into the Kingdom of God—born again as divine members of the Family of God.

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

Over and over God tells us that the Feast of Tabernacles is a time of exceedingly great rejoicing. For ancient Israel it was a time of rejoicing because the abundant harvest of grain was taken in just before the

Feast. But in the Millennium, the happiness, joy and prosperity pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles will exist worldwide under the enlightened rule of Jesus Christ. Obedience to God through keeping of His Law and following His revealed way of life will make the World Tomorrow a literal utopia!

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

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

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

20. But does the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles mark the end of God's plan for humanity? Is it God's will that all who have ever lived come to the knowledge of salvation? 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

22. Revelation chapter 20 holds the key to the meaning of the "Last Great Day." As we already know, verses 4-6 speak of the resurrected saints ruling with Jesus Christ on earth for 1000 years. But exactly what is said in the first sentence of verse 5?

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

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

The sentence "This is the first resurrection," refers to the resurrection of the righteous dead in Christ just before the 1000-year period begins. "But," John makes clear, "the rest of the dead"—those who never had a chance to understand God's truth - would not come up in a resurrection "until the thousand years were finished." This resurrection, which occurs after the 1000 years are finished, is the second resurrection.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus gave enough examples of generations of people living at different times in history to prove that most of humanity will be alive, together, at the same time on this earth. There be pre-Flood men and women, all 12 tribes of Israel, those who lived during the Middle Ages, and everyone living even now who

will not have had the opportunity to come to Christ—simply because they were not called by God to receive their opportunity for salvation during their first lifetime. (See John 6:44, 65.)

This group includes all people of all times everywhere on this earth, except of course those who will be in the first resurrection of the dead—or those relatively few incorrigibly wicked who will be resurrected in the third resurrection to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13-15). This latter group understood God's truth and had the opportunity to receive eternal life, but willfully rejected it!

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

This vast resurrection to mortal life opens their period of judgment—not sentencing. (Sentencing is merely the final act in the process of judgment.) A decision must be rendered based on how each individual responds to the Word of God. (This same judgment is now upon Christians who have been begotten by God's Holy Spirit—1 Pet. 4:17.) And since every individual will be given an opportunity for salvation, each will in effect be rendering his own verdict by the choices he or she makes during this period of judgment.

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

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

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

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

In this lesson, we learned that God's annual festivals not only teach us His Master Plan of salvation, they point us directly to our Savior Jesus Christ. He is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7) It is by "putting on" Christ that we put sin out of our lives, as pictured by the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

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

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

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

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

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

Tithing and Giving in a New Spirit

We have seen that the annual festivals and many other Old Testament laws are now observed by Christians with a new and different spirit and approach (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28). We are about to see that God's law of tithing also takes on new meaning. Remember the Apostle Paul wrote that God has "made us able ministers of the new testament (or the New Covenant)." (2 Cor. 3:6).

Christianity is indeed a way of life. It has everything to do with the way we live our daily lives—our day-in, day-out association with others, our business practices—even the way we handle our money.

Remember that God is Creator, Owner and Proprietor of everything we see around us. God therefore has a prior claim to ownership of all that has been produced out of the earth. As David wrote: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they therein" (Ps. 24:1). All the gold and silver belong to God (Hag. 2:8). God created everything, and by virtue of that Creation, He owns it all-including mankind. There is really nobody that can "reimburse" God for what He has done for us as our Creator.

So why should one give a tithe—a tenth—of his income to God? Tithing is a part of God's "give" way of life. God wants us to learn how to give and share for the good of others, and for our own good!

God uses the tenth He claims for Himself for financing our attendance at His Festivals, especially the Feast of Tabernacles. For lack of this knowledge, the world, including most churches, has been under a CURSE!

God's law concerning what we produce and earn can be compared to a contract. He wants us to understand that we are working with Him in a partnership. God allows us live and work on His earth—to cultivate the land and produce the food we eat. He allows us to cut down His timber to build the houses we live in, and to use all His resources in producing thousands of products for our own use.

But God is a very generous partner. He basically reserves only 10 percent for His servants on earth to use to attend His annual festivals.

In the Garden of Eden, God reserved just one tree for Himself. That remained His. He never gave that one tree to Adam and Eve for their use. They had no right to eat of its fruit. When they reached out and took the fruit of that forbidden tree, they sinned—they stole from God.

Today, the same Satan that deceived Eve would gladly have, you believe that all of your income—or all the produce of your land—is yours. But don't you believe it! Let's understand what the Bible has to say about tithing.

1. How did the patriarch Abraham honor the Creator, Owner and Sovereign over all things? Gen. 14:17-20; Heb. 7:1-4. To what extent did God bless obedient Abraham? Gen. 13:2.

COMMENT: Some claim that Abraham was a tither. Beyond the fact that he gave a tenth part of the spoils of a battle to God, there is no record of his having tithed in the scriptures. The context of the verses in

Genesis chapter 14 clearly shows that God received His due before any further disposition of the captured goods to others was made. Abraham thus acknowledged that God was the source of all his blessings- including his victory in battle.

Abraham became an exceedingly prosperous man because he was mightily blessed by God. And the biblical record shows that he continued to obey God the rest of his life (Gen. 26:5).

2. Was Melchizedek God's priest? Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:1-3.

COMMENT: Tithing is revealed in the Bible as God's system for financing His Children's annual trips to celebrate His festivals. Prior to the Levitical priesthood and the Old Covenant, the ministry was that of Melchizedek. As God's representative on earth, Melchizedek received the tithes from God's faithful servants at that time.

Melchizedek, "having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, abideth a priest continually" (Heb, 7:3). This verse indicates that He probably was High Priest even from the time of Adam! Some claim that the ancient, patriarchs financed a ministry of God on earth by the tithing system. But, there is no record of that in the scripture. This set of verses in Gen. 14 are often used by those wishing to take God's tithes and prevent their being used for the purpose which God has intended.

3. What did Jacob promise God he would do with all his increase? Gen. 28:20-22. Was he prospered? Gen. 30:43.

COMMENT: Jacob promised to give God a tithe of his increase from that time forward. There is no record of his having tithed prior to that. There was most certainly no "ministry" to receive those "tithes" in existence at that time which is mentioned in the scriptures. It is POSSIBLE that Melchizedek continued to sit as the High Priest of God, but there's no record that Jacob ever took any tithes there.

Over the years of his life God did bless him a great deal of his faithfulness. Jacob was blessed with much cattle, many servants and other possessions.

It is assumed that Jacob continued as a life-long tither, never forgetting the One who had caused him to prosper (Gen. 48:15).

4. Before the time of Moses, it is assumed that the tithe had been paid directly to Melchizedek. We know for sure that Abraham gave 10 per cent (the word "tithe" is an old English word meaning "a tenth"). We don't know how or where Israel/Jacob delivered the "tithe" he promised but it is possible it was given to Melchizedek. But after Israel's deliverance from Egypt, who did God say was to receive the tithe? Num. 18:21, 24. To whom were the Levites to pay a tithe of the tithes they received from the people? Verses 26-28.

COMMENT: These verses are often taken out of context to indicate that God gave the Levites "the tithe." The problem is that God has much to say about the tithe that needs to be considered. As we will see, this "tithe" was a tenth of the tithe collected for the Children of Israel to go to God's Festivals. As we will see, when the Israelites arrived for the festival, they were to give a tenth of their tithe to the Levites, who had no inheritance in the land.

God had set Aaron's family in highest authority over the Levites (verses 2-3, 6). As priests, they were to receive a tithe of the Israelite tithe distributed to all the other Levites.

5. What use was to be made of the priests' tithe during the Levitical priesthood? Num. 18:21.

COMMENT: Melchizedek, the member of the God Family who became Jesus Christ, selected the Levites to be His ministers. God's ministry through the Levitical priesthood was a material, ritualistic ministry of

reminding a carnal nation of their failure to keep the laws of God.

So Christ (Melchizedek) is said to have ordained a change in the tithing law—apparently turning the tenth He had it is claimed He always personally received (without any real evidence except as noted previously) over to the Levites, thereby transferring receipt of the tithe to the Levitical priesthood for their support. We know that A tithe was given to the Levites, but was it THE tenth held back by the Children of Israel for festival attendance?

Some claim that a "commission to proclaim the gospel to the world" mandates that the tithe was to be turned over to the "church." This claim is fabricated from thin air and conjecture.

God's plan for that dispensation merely called for the Levites to teach the people the letter of the Law, and to administer the physical rituals and sacrifices as reminders of sin. Therefore, the tithe of the tenth set aside for Festival attendance by the people was to bring to them mainly for their support.

Hebrews chapter seven, it is claimed, shows that tithing had long been an ongoing financial law by the time God formally instituted ancient Israel's civil law through Moses. What we have seen is that Abraham is only known to have given a "tithe" once, after his defeat of the kings, and that Israel only gave tithes after his promise to God.

Paul makes it clear that tithing is not Levitical (of the descendants of Levi) or "ceremonial" verses 5, 8-10). It did not begin with the administration of the Levites and therefore could not have ended when the need for the Levitical priesthood ceased to exist. This is true because the need for God's Children to attend His Festivals has not ceased to exist.

Rather, according to verses 11-17 (it is claimed), God changed the priesthood back to the spiritual priesthood or Melchizedek. The Levitical priesthood was superseded by the priesthood of Jesus Christ—the Melchizedek priesthood restored! And so, in a quantum leap of illogic, it is claimed that there was also a change as to who should now receive the tithe (verse 12). This might be true if those with designs on God's tithe were to admit that it is a tithe of a tithe that the Levites were to get, coupled with freewill offerings brought by the Children of Israel.

Christ has not authorized those claiming to be His New Testament ministry to receive the tithes in order to do any work except to feed the flock and provide for festival locations worldwide. At that, the only "tithe" they are authorized to receive is the tithe, 10%, of what the Children set aside for the annual Festivals. To fulfill the commission He gave to His Church (Matt. 28:19-20), the ministry is to teach the brethren how to be a light to the world as Christ stated, and to accept the tithe of the Festival tithe for use in providing for Festival locations. It is no longer a Levitical requirement that ministers are not allowed to have an "inheritance in the land." Instead, God's ministers can, and should, hold other jobs to support their families.

The New Testament era was ushered in when Melchizedek (Christ), who abides as our High Priest continually (Heb. 7:3; 4:14-16) became a mortal man so He could be sacrificed for the sins of all mankind. He also made the Holy Spirit available to those whom God calls.

Christ came to this earth to inaugurate a NEW kind of ministry—a spiritual ministry. It is a ministry of SALVATION—a ministry of PROPHECY—a ministry of WARNING, as well as of GOOD NEWS. Christ's commission to all His true servants is, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). And, referring to our day, He said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end (of the age) come" (Matt. 24:14).

Jesus Christ came to show to us that we can resist Satan. And He came to train servant messengers who would proclaim to the world His return to restore the Kingdome of God on earth.

Christ personally chose His original twelve apostles, or ministers, to carry on the work of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, Today, the true ministers of Jesus Christ. are fulfilling that commission on a worldwide scale!

As the end of this age approaches, the true ministers of God are fulfilling Christ's commission with POWER. They are making plain the GOOD NEWS of the soon-coming Kingdom of God. They are explaining the laws of that Kingdom, as well as making plain the hundreds of prophecies referring directly to this end time.

In these chaotic days approaching the end of the age, just before Christ's Second Coming, the work of God's true ministry is an effort that is reaching MILLIONS of people, making disciples of them as Christ ordered. It is a huge undertaking, for sure, and should be supported by the offerings of the Children of God, but it does not require the taking of God's Festival tithe to employ "hireling shepherds."

Some think that radio broadcasts, airplanes and paid ministry is a proper use of God's tithe. But, we know that no man can come to Jesus unless God calls that man (or woman). The taking of God's tithe for those things is theft (Mal. 3:8).

6. Does the Bible show that both nations and individuals can literally steal directly from God? Mal. 3:7-12.

COMMENT: Can anyone afford to rob God? Stealing from God is a very serious. None of your income is really yours. It all belongs God. But God claims only a tenth of it. He has reserved the first tenth unto Himself. It is only after we acknowledge God's prior claim over that first tenth of our income that we have a legitimate claim to the other nine-tenths.

7. What does one come under when he or she breaks this fundamental financial law of God? Mal. 3:9.

8. What is God's simple solution to our problems? Mal. 3:10. Does He challenge us to put Him to the test—to "prove" Him—to see if He really will bless us? Same verse.

COMMENT: God does not offer us complex, hard-to-be-understood solutions our financial problems and curses. The solution is simple. Return to God that which He claims for Himself and He will bless us. God has a thousand ways of making what we do pay off bigger. If we work diligently, and are faithful in giving Him His portion, He works with us, blesses our effort by causing our partnership with Him to produce and earn more!

Those who faithfully give God His tenth find that, what is left seems to go further than the full amount of their income ever did before. Thousands of tithers have remarked that there seems to be an unwritten Law that be put down in a budget—a law that, causes their money to always stretch further when they tithe faithfully. (Read the following scriptures in connection with this principle: 1 Kings 17:8-24; 2 Kings 4:1-7, 42-44; Matt. 14:17-21, 15:34-38; Heb. 13:8.)

9. What should be our attitude in giving offerings to God's Church? 2 Cor. 9:6-7.

COMMENT: A generous attitude is foundational to God's "give" way of life. God is a generous giver! He wants His children to reflect a similar generosity, within their limited means. Apostle Paul made this crystal clear: "The point is this: he who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:6-7 RSV).

The giving principle is elsewhere stated in the pages of the Bible. Jesus showed that a giving spirit brings an automatic boomerang-like effect. "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure

you get, back" (Luke 6:38. RSV).

Solomon reiterates the very same truth in his writings: "Cast, your bread upon the waters, you will find it, after many days" (Eccl. 11:1-2 RSV). God's blessing WILL come in God's own time and God's own way. Again: "One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. A liberal man will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered" (Prov. 11:24-25 RSV).

These verses repeat in different words the time-tested principle found throughout the Bible: You reap what you sow (Gal. 6:7).

10. In what way did Jesus uphold the law of tithing? Matt. 23:23. Notice the last part of the verse. It is clear that Jesus said we should be tithing. But, our responsibility in setting that tithe aside is to use it as directed by God in the scriptures.

COMMENT: Isn't that clear? Jesus said that spiritual qualities such as judgment, mercy and faith are more important than carefully paying tithes on every little plant that might grow in your garden especially when that strictness leads to self-righteousness. But Christ said "not to leave the other undone," not to fail to pay your full tithe as God requires.

11. Is tithing a kind of worship, as well as an expression of faith toward God? Heb. 11:6; Jas. 2:20.

COMMENT: Tithing is an act of worship to God—a demonstration of love, gratitude, respect, honor and esteem for the Creator—a sign of submission to the will of God, an acknowledgment of His lord-ship and dominion.

Tithing is also an act of faith in God. As such, it is the heart and core of what Christianity and conversion are all about. Tithing is deeply personal act of worship when done in faith. It is an acknowledgment that God is there—that He REALLY EXISTS—and that He is able to "supply your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

There is no way anyone can prevent God from blessing those who step out on faith and tithe to attend their Creator's annual Festivals and Sabbaths. Experience has proved there is an automatic blessing for obeying our great eternal God if that obedience is coupled with faith.

Remember you tithe to God, not to any man! When you tithe, this act of obedience to God shows you recognize that God has placed a prior claim on your income. You recognize that He exists, and that He is a "rewarder of them that diligently seek him"! Yes, tithing is an act of faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

The individual's responsibility is to set aside God's tithe as He has required.

12. Should Christians be "fellow helpers" to the truth? 3 John 8. Are they "fellow laborers" in spreading the Gospel? Phil. 4:3; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1.

COMMENT. The amazing growth in the power and effectiveness of God's Church over the years has been possible only through the combined efforts of thousands whom God has called to help financially support the work of His Church through their offerings. Sadly, many churches laid claim to God's tithe in violation of His commands. That should not have been and would not have been had we been truthful with the Word of God.

In the earlier years of this era of God's Church, only few hundred people could be reached with the Gospel. But as the number of dedicated members and co-workers has increased, so has the scope and

power of the Church's work.

The collective efforts of many whom God has called to share in the glorious opportunity to be "fellow laborers" make it possible for people around the world to hear and read the true Gospel of Christ today.

God's way is to give, without charge—His truth to any and all who ask for it. By involving His "fellow laborers," those who contribute offerings to help further the preaching of the Gospel, in this awesome commission, they share in the blessing of helping to bring others into the Family of God.

Truly, it is "more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). By honoring God with our substance, our own material needs will be supplied, for God promises: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

The Christian Fight!

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

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

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

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

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

3. Is the Christian's warfare against physical armies? Or is it a spiritual warfare? 2 Cor. 10:3-4. Just what is a Christian to fight against? Verse 5.

COMMENT: The first enemy in the Christian's daily warfare is his human nature with its inordinate lusts (Gal. 5:19-21). This nature in us rationalizes cleverly, sometimes producing deceitful and degrading impulses—vanity, lust, greed, etc. We are enticed to sin, to break God's spiritual Law, thus cutting us off from Him. Our nature destroys us spiritually, unless we resist its wrong impulses that lead to sin.

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

COMMENT: The Apostle John is speaking about this worldly system around us— this "cosmos." It is from the Greek word *kosmos*, translated "world" in 1 John 2:15, that English words such as cosmopolitan, cosmography, cosmopolite, etc. are derived.

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

5. Should Christians strive to avoid the evil that is in the world? 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Rev. 18:4. Does this mean that they should move away from populated areas? John 17:15-18. Notice especially the first part of verse 15.

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

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

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

6. Do people always appreciate the person who tries to live according to God's Law? 1 Pet. 4:3-4; John 15:18-20, 16:33. How should a Christian respond to those who might be antagonistic toward his life in Christ? Matt. 5:43-47; Rom. 12:20-21.

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

7. What, or who, is the third great enemy of every Christian? 1 Pet. 5:8-9; Jas. 4:7. Isn't Satan the devil ultimately responsible for inspiring the inordinate characteristics of human nature and the evil in this world? 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2. Has he indeed deceived world? Rev. 12:9.

COMMENT: Satan the devil, formerly known as the archangel Lucifer who was originally created perfect in his ways (Ezek. 28:15), developed his satanic nature by his own reasoning and choice. As we learned in Lesson 9, humans have in turn acquired Satan's nature, which we call "human nature." Notice how Paul described this natural state of mind: "...the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

But once the Holy Spirit of God is added to a mind, he then has the power to resist the attitudes of self-centeredness, lust, greed, vanity, jealousy, envy, resentment, competition, strife, bitterness and hate, which are broadcast to the mind by Satan.

No person is compelled to respond to and obey these impulses from Satan. The devil has no power to force anyone to think or do wrong! But the unsuspecting automatically do so without realizing what is taking place in their minds. Most people just drift along, responding to emotions and impulses that often find expression in their fleshly drives and vain pursuits.

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

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

COMMENT: Conversion does not shield you from Satan's "wavelength." He continues to broadcast the attitudes of his nature. When Jesus spoke of overcoming, He referred to overcoming these ways of Satan, which are contrary to God's Way.

Those who have turned from Satan's way are fighting to OVERCOME his subtle urgings, and are striving to remain true to God's way—the way of submission to God. They are the ones Satan hates.

He is especially interested in destroying them! But with God's protection and restraining power over Satan, which He promises to give us if we remain close to Him, we can overcome!

While Jesus Christ walked the earth as a human, He had to show us how to withstand Satan's severe temptations. That supreme struggle is recorded in the fourth chapter of Matthew. Notice how the devil attempted to deceive and influence Jesus Christ to sin against God.

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

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

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

10. Are Christians today also to resist the devil with the truth God has revealed to them? 1 Pet. 5:9. What must the devil do if resisted steadfastly? Jas. 4:7.

11. What instructions on fighting against the impulses and attitudes of the devil does God give us through Paul? Eph. 6:10-12. What are Christians to put on in order to fight this spiritual battle? Verses 11, 13. Of what does God's spiritual armor consist? Verses 14-20.

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

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

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

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

shows us what the enemy is up to.

The final thing Paul mentions in fighting Satan and his wiles is "prayer." Christians are to draw close to God in persevering prayer (I Thcss. 5:17) praying for all of God's people, the ministry of God's Church and themselves.

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

Why Overcoming Is so Important

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

1. Did Jesus Christ become perfect? Heb. 5:9; 2:9-10. Notice especially the last part of verse 10. What did Christ say He expects of those who would claim to be His followers? Matt. 5:48. Who are they to become like? Eph. 4:13.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Does 2 Peter 1:5-9 also show the need for continual growth in the virtues of Christian character as long as a person lives? Do verses 10 and 11 imply that those who don't continue to grow and overcome will not make it into God's Kingdom?

TO Become Inheritors With Christ

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

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

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

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

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

COMMENT: True Christians are now the begotten children of God. They are heirs—joint heirs with Jesus Christ—destined to inherit and help rule EVERYTHING God has created!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

they can eventually inherit "all things" with Him!

Qualifying to Rule With Christ

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Christian life, then, is one of overcoming, preparing for service through ruler-ship in the Millennium, as well as serving others here now!

2. What will the saints be doing in the Kingdom of God during the Millennium? Rev. 3:21; 2:26; 5:10; 20:4-6.

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

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

COMMENT: We learn to rule by being faithful—conscientious—in whatever we do. We must put into practice in our daily lives the principles and laws we learn from God's Word. Even the person who considers himself to have only a little ability and natural talent can qualify to rule in God's Kingdom. We learn to rule in the World Tomorrow by learning to

manage our own affairs and responsibilities no matter how small they may be.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You CAN Overcome!

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

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

AND SO CAN WE!

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

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

COMMENT: Immediately upon initial conversion, Christians have something they must begin to do, not only then, but, for rest of their natural lives. The Christian life involves "works," it involves doing something! Christians must put forth the effort to overcome. Christ said: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). God's way of life is one of productivity, growth and exciting challenge.

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

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

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

Benjamin Franklin, one of the five principal founding fathers of the United States, once set himself to attain the goal of moral perfection. Here is an excerpt from the [Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin](#), part II:

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

But before long, Dr. Franklin found the task no easy one. Continuing with his autobiography:

"But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined. While my care was employed in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another; habit took the advantage of inattention: inclination was sometimes too strong for reason, I concluded, at length, that the mere speculative conviction that it was (in) our interest be completely virtuous, was not sufficient to prevent our slipping; and that the contrary habits must be broken, and the good ones acquired and established, before we can have any dependence on a steady, uniform rectitude of conduct" (emphasis ours).

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

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

Of course, Paul did overcome. Shortly before his death, he wrote the following words to his young protégé Timothy: "The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day (the resurrection at Christ's Second Coming), and not only to me but, also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8, RSV).

Notice how Paul succeeded in overcoming.

4. What, or who, is the KEY to Christian overcoming? Phil. 4:13; John 15:5; 1 John 4:4; Rom. 8:37.

COMMENT: Jesus Christ, who has already defeated Satan (Matt. 4) and ready to become "King of kings and Lord of lords," will help Christians defeat Satan and this world's influences through the indwelling the Holy Spirit! He told His disciples to be of cheer because He had overcome the world (John 16:33). John further testified that the One who dwells in every true Christian through the Spirit of God is greater than Satan (1 John 4:4).

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

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

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

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

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

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

COMMENT: The Bible very plainly shows that each individual Christian has a part in the salvation process. Nevertheless, many professing Christians have been taught that Jesus lived a good life for us—that He obeyed God's law in our stead.

But, we have seen that a Christian is not excused from overcoming, growing in spiritual character, and enduring in spite of all opposition or temptation to quit. These scriptures make it crystal clear that having faith does not excuse us from having spiritual works.

This is a great mystery to those who don't understand. Since we must do these things to be saved, yet are utterly unable to do so of ourselves, it is natural to conclude that either God sent Jesus to do it for us

and thereby excuse us from obeying God, or else to become discouraged and be tempted to quit trying!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Repentance is toward God and means that we have decided to change the entire course of our life to quit sinning against God and sincerely desire to begin living by all of His commandments.

We utterly abhor not only our old sinful way of life, but also the inclinations of our carnal mind, which has been swayed by the devil (Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:2), the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4).

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

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

13. Once we receive God's Holy Spirit, must the faith that it imparts grow? 2 Thess. 1:3.

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

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

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

Good friends spend a lot of time together in conversation. They discuss life, their goals, problems, and listen willingly to each other. If you are a close friend of God, then you will want to talk to Him. You will also be listening to Him talk to you through the pages of your Bible. And you will often think about and ponder His words. Notice What

Christ said about this two-way conversation that all true Christians are to have with God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We are to keep God's law and live the Christian life as if we were doing it all through our own effort, but because "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," God makes up the necessary difference. Like Paul, who

was mindful of his own human limitations, look to God for the help to accomplish His purpose in us—"for my weakness makes me strong in him" (2 Cor. 12:10, Phillips).

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

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

So can you!

Are You Qualifying?

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

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

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

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

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

But if you have not yet begun to learn to control and constructively guide even these little powers in your care, then how could God entrust you to handle far greater responsibilities in the Kingdom of God?

If you are not faithful even in the use of your present income, who will entrust to you' the riches and the great power at God?

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

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

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

Preparing to rule in God's Kingdom begins with submission His rule now. God will not save any person He does not govern. So learn God's laws. Study them. Think them. Live by them. And with the help of God's Holy Spirit, grow in the very character of God by overcoming your human nature, the temptations and

sinful pulls of the world, and the wiles of Satan the devil.

Seek God by drawing closer to Him in prayer and Bible study. Change! Grow spiritually. Continually build the character of God until death, or until the moment Jesus Christ returns and instantly changes our weak, physical bodies into powerful, sinless, glorified spirit bodies! (Phil. 3:20-21.) Then you will be ready to rule with Christ—to fulfill your awesome destiny of helping to rule the earth and the universe beyond as a member of the God Family!

It's a breathtaking, exciting, incredible calling! A glorious, wonderful future! Have you begun to qualify for it? To learn how you may contact one of God's ministers in your area. Contact us at our CONTACT PAGE on the website www.houston-church-of-God.org and we will help you to get in contact with our congregation or another church in your area.