
DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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Excitement building for October youth conference

Co-sponsored by Berean Call & Discernment Ministries



We are pleased to announce that October 17-18 there will be a Discernment Conference at Pastor Jeffrey Whittaker's Michiana Assembly Church in Niles, Michigan. Niles is just north of South Bend, Indiana off of Interstate 80, about an hour east of the Chicago area. This conference is for youth and anyone else “young at heart” who is serious about the faith that was once delivered to the saints! Participants will learn how to stand in these perilous times. The theme verse is young Solomon's prayer, “*Give... thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad....*” (1 Kings 3:9a). Speakers for this upcoming event include:

- Tom McMahon, president of Berean Call
- Larry DeBruyn, retired pastor, author
- Jeff Whittaker, pastor and missionary
- Dr. Martin Erdmann, historian and theologian

- Jewel Grewe, president of Discernment Ministries
- Gaylene Goodroad, writer and speaker
- Sarah Leslie, editor of the Herescope blog.

Topics will cover how to discern, significant events in recent evangelical history, evangelism versus the “missional” social gospel, how to recognize Eastern mysticism and the New Age, how to resist manipulation and marketing tactics, the Bible according to Hollywood, and how to stand firm in the faith.

No pre-registration necessary. Freewill offering. Watch this newsletter for updates. To order flyers, posters and other materials promoting the conference, contact Hester at Discernment Ministries, 903-567-6423.

Ruth Gonzalez with the Lord



We were saddened to hear of the passing of our dear friend Ruth Gonzalez. She went to be with her Lord and Saviour on March 31, 2014. Every month she would send her offering to Discernment Ministries with a precious personal note. It meant so much to hear from her so faithfully. Ruth was a solid and sold out believer in Jesus who would and did pray most of the family into the kingdom.

Shadow and Substance: Jewish Feasts & Christian Reality

By Professor Johan Malan

Introduction: *A large number of believers do not pursue the blessing of sanctification in the correct, biblical way and then, as a substitute, revert to the law with its rigid structures, symbolic acts and multiple ceremonies and feasts. Many of them are so enchanted by their new experiences that they are fully convinced of the authenticity of their Torah-oriented expressions of faith and ritualistic way of drawing closer to God. Refraining from secular activities on the seventh day (the Jewish Sabbath) is a core aspect of this dogma. Some of them even think that the use of Hebrew terminology affords a heavenly character to their activities and utterances—so much so that the Hebrew rendering of personal names is becoming a popular practice. There is certainly a serious deficiency in the contemporary presentation of the Gospel if this is the way in which believers react to the upward call of holiness unto the Lord.*

The extensive range of types and symbolic acts which form part of the Old Testament law were of major prophetic significance during the period prior to the crucifixion of Christ. It served the purpose of preparing Israel on the fulfillment of these rituals and sacrifices when the Lamb of God would be slain for the sins of the world, followed by His resurrection and ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the evangelization of the world, the return of Christ, the glorification of His saints, the judging of His enemies, and the establishment of His kingdom on earth.

The moment when Christ laid down His life as an atoning sacrifice for sinners, many of the preceding prophetic shadows were fulfilled by the wonderful reality of the cross. The foundation was laid for the new covenant in the blood of Christ, which replaced the old covenant: *“The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.... By calling this covenant ‘new’, He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear”* (Heb. 8:8, 13). This statement also applies to the institutions and ceremonies of the old covenant which have all expired after fulfilling their preparatory role.

The Old Testament dispensation of the law was completely replaced by the New Testament dispensation of grace: *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes”* (Rom. 10:4); *“... for you are not under law but under grace”* (Rom. 6:14). The old dispensation paved the way for the new, and was finally replaced by it.

During the final phase of the dispensation of the law the Lord Jesus said: *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill”* (Matt. 5:17). The word “fulfill” (Gr. *pleroo*) means “to finish (a task or period)”, and may also be rendered “complete, end, expire...” (*Strong’s Concordance*). This statement helps us to better understand the relationship between the old and the new, and should never be used as justification to perpetuate the dispensation of the law by mixing law and grace in an effort to establish a symbiotic relationship between them.

Paul describes the preparatory role of the law in Israel as follows: *“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterwards be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor”* (Gal. 3:23-25). The law convicted Israel of sin, but it could not change the depraved hearts of the people—neither could they be delivered from their sins by the repetitive animal sacrifices prescribed by the law:

“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. ... For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. ... We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:1, 4, 10).

Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (the entire Old Testament), and through faith in Him alone are we enabled to live lives which are pleasing to God. In the new covenant, God instills His law of love in the hearts of all who receive Christ as their Savior. In this way they are spiritually regenerated and receive the very nature of Christ. They are to maintain a relationship with Christ—not with the law.

The love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), and we are called to be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:14-19). If we are rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, we will be enabled to reach higher standards of spiritual growth and moral purity than those demanded by the law: *“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Rom. 13:9-10). The love of God constrains us to conform to the principles of His righteousness.

The demands of the law are fulfilled through faith in Christ. Every trespass mentioned by the law is also an act which is contrary to Christ’s righteousness, and therefore sin. However, the Holy Spirit (not the law) convicts us of such sins as these deeds constitute breeches in our relationship with the Savior. The measure for our holiness is the sinless life of Christ, and our main objective is to follow in His footsteps and become conformed to Him.

It is important to fully realize that *“the letter [of the law] kills, but the Spirit gives life”* (2Cor. 3:6). The law is imposed from the outside and condemns all people who are contravening any of its injunctions. Contrary to this, the Holy Spirit regenerates our heart and instills God’s love in it. He also enables us to honor the dictates of divine love. But if we do fail, the atonement of Christ on the cross is always available to forgive and cleanse us. Because of this, we are worthy to enter the kingdom of God—much more than the legalistic Torah observers of the old covenant.

Christ said to His disciples: *“Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 5:20). The law cannot save you – it can only instill a guilt consciousness in you as well as the need for a Savior to forgive and cleanse you. The imputed righteousness of Christ is the only way of obtaining remission of sins and a changed heart. The same message was conveyed to the Pharisees, who only judged themselves in terms of the law: *“Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3). If the principles of God’s agape love govern our hearts and minds we are truly children of God who walk in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, motivated by a divine disposition to willingly serve Him through the power of the Holy Spirit—not through efforts of law observance.

The blessings of the new covenant are not produced by the law but by Christ’s finished work on the cross. These blessings are appropriated by faith and not earned by the works of the law. The newness of life in which we now walk is based upon the sufficiency of Christ’s atonement, the love of God which governs our hearts, and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Together these divine attributes constitute the new man which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24).

Any effort towards adding to the all-sufficiency of Christ’s redemptive work and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, e.g. by associating it with the works of the law, is motivated by serious misconceptions and grave deception. The Galatians had fallen prey to this kind of deception. Paul denounces the synthesizing of law and grace in the strongest possible terms and says that those who proclaim this false gospel should be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

Paul also criticized his fellow-apostle, Peter, who initially subjected Gentile believers to some of the ceremonial laws of the Jews: *“... why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no*

flesh shall be justified.... I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal. 2:14-16, 21).

Despite Paul’s very clear preaching on the grace of Christ by virtue of His atoning death, the Galatians nevertheless heeded the teachings of Judaizers (so-called Messianic Judaists) who mixed law and grace. Paul equated this very serious deception with bewitching—something which can only come forth from the spirit of error: *“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith [in Christ]?”* (Gal. 3:1-2).

Paul’s counsel to those who were delivered from the yoke of the law is clear: *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage ... You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace”* (Gal. 5:1, 4). Walvoord & Zuck (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*) says the following on deliverance from bondage:

“Paul declared that Christ was the great Liberator who set people free from bondage. The apostle then appealed to the Galatians to stand firm in that liberty, for having been delivered from slavery to heathenism, they were in danger of becoming entangled in slavery to the Mosaic Law.”

The works of the law which Paul regarded as obsolete under the new covenant were not only confined to circumcision but to the law in its entirety: *“I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself to be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law”* (Gal. 5:2-3). The Mosaic Law also included the numerous festivals which were only a shadow of things to come (Gal. 4:9-11). Christ is the substance of these feasts (Col. 2:16-17), and this fact demands that uncompromised Christian expression be given to fulfilled prophecies.

Complete identification with Christ

The question needs to be answered whether the extensive range of ceremonies and feasts which are prescribed by the law only played a preparatory role and then completely expired when Christ came? The festivals and other institutions indeed expired in their original, shadowy form, but they served an extremely important function by fixing people’s attention on the fulfilled spiritual realities and institutions which are foundational to the new covenant. As such they are the prophetic promises of what we believe and practice in the New Testament—almost like a grain of wheat that germinated and grew into a life-giving plant.

Consider the following New Testament realities (the substance of our faith) which were introduced by the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:

- Jesus or Yeshua (derived from “Yahweh Saves”) is the epitome of God’s salvation—the Lamb of God who came in the fullness of time to be crucified for the sins of the world. Faith in Him is the key to sharing in His salvation.
- He is our Sanctification. The sinless life of Jesus is the highest expression of God’s holiness and divine morality, and through the Holy Spirit we can all be renewed in the spirit of our mind and *“put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness”* (Eph. 4:23-24).
- He is also the heavenly Judge with piercing eyes like a flame of fire (Rev. 1:14; Acts 17:30-31), and before Him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:9-11). He will condemn all people who refused the salvation which He freely offers to all people on earth.

In the New Testament we have a relationship with Christ which is not maintained by the slavish observance of multiple rules, laws, sacrifices and ceremonial feasts which have been appointed for specific times or seasons of the year. Our relationship with the Savior is maintained on a daily basis under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and He convicts us of all sin which may disturb this relationship. Jesus Christ is the ultimate objective of our faith, and full identification with Him is the highest ideal we can pursue. What are the full implications of this bond of unity with Christ?

- We identify with the crucified Jesus who died for the sins of humanity. That is why we confess the atonement on Golgotha and daily take up the cross through which we have died to the world and to sin (Luke 9:23; Gal. 6:14). Our identification with the cross commits us to a life of absolute sanctification and the overcoming of sin, and the crucified Christ is also our message to the world (1Cor. 2:2).
- We identify consciously and on a daily basis with Jesus who dwells in our hearts together with the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 14:23). The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth so we can follow in the footsteps of Jesus (John 16:13). His law of love is the spiritual and moral basis of our lives (John 13:34-35). Through frequent prayer and Bible study we actively maintain this channel of communication and also strengthen our faith.
- We identify with the Son of God who was, since His first coming, rejected by the majority of people everywhere in the world, and this fact also accounts

for the persecution which we experience (John 15:18-20). Because the devil is the driving force behind the depraved world and its antichristian lifestyle, New Testament believers are intensively involved with spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10-12; 2Cor. 10:3-5).

- We identify with Jesus as the Savior of the world who has come to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10). He expects of His disciples to fulfill this mission by being His witnesses in evangelizing the world (John 20:21), and to this end the power of the Holy Spirit was promised to us (Luke 24:45-49; Acts 1:8).
- We identify with Jesus who is the Judge of believers as well as unbelievers (2Cor. 5:10; Acts 17:30-31). He will test the works of His disciples to reveal the degree to which they lived victoriously in Christ and heeded His commands (1Cor. 3:11-15; Luke 19:15-26).

It is obvious that our association with Christ adds qualities to our lives which are far beyond the demands and objectives of the law. As a first step, the law only kept Israel under guard until the coming of the Messiah, after which the worldwide proclaiming of His saving grace would commence. The conflict with the world and the kingdom of Satan would reach a new level of intensity, but the enabling power of the Holy Spirit would be at the disposal of all disciples of Jesus to perform their duties in the midst of adversity. Israel did not, through faith in God’s promises, render themselves worthy to receive the Messiah and to be His witnesses. This commission was afterwards only given to a small group of the Messiah’s disciples, and subsequently it became the responsibility of believers among all nations.

The purpose of the feasts

The sublime Christian fulfillment of the seven annual feasts which are discussed in Leviticus 23 should be duly considered, as well as the fulfillment of the weekly Sabbath. In the light of these facts the relationship between law and grace will be obvious:

Passover

This feast was instituted during Israel’s exodus from Egypt, when the paschal lamb had to be slaughtered and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts of homes in which the Israelites lived (Ex. 12:5-7). The Messianic nature of this feast is very obvious as Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt is a clear type of their spiritual deliverance from the bondage of sin. The paschal lamb doubtlessly pre-shadowed the coming Messiah. Isaiah says: *“The chastisement for our peace was upon Him... and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.... He was led as a lamb to the slaughter”* (Isa. 53:5-7). In the New

Testament, Christ is called *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29), and Peter says that we were redeemed *“with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1Pet. 1:18-19).

Jesus was crucified during the Passover feast of 32 AD, thereby fulfilling this feast and concluding it in its original form. The night before His crucifixion the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper as the New Testament continuation of Passover. Paul says: *“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes”* (1Cor. 11:23-26).

It is clear that the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion) is not an institution in terms of the law, and also not confined to a specific season or day of the year. It can be celebrated as often as we wish, by using the signs of unfermented wine (new wine or grape juice—Heb. *tirosh*), and unleavened bread as symbols of the untainted blood and sinless body of Christ.

After the crucifixion, no reason whatsoever remained for the continued celebration of the Old Testament Passover, of which the historical focus was Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, and its prophetic focus the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb of God. However, orthodox Jews keep on celebrating this feast, thereby formally rejecting the fulfillment of this feast during Christ’s first coming. During the Seder meal they even leave a chair open for Elijah to herald the coming of the Messiah.

Although a prophet such as Elijah will indeed come to prepare Israel on the second coming of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6), John the Baptist fulfilled a similar role during the first coming of Jesus (Matt. 11:13-14). However, the Jews also rejected his ministry and completely failed to notice the fulfillment of Passover. There is a grave danger in this situation, as the “other Messiah” on whose appearing they are inevitably now waiting will be the false messiah. Jesus warned them against this serious consequence of rejecting Him: *“I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive”* (John 5:43).

Those who know and serve the true Christ will celebrate the Lord’s Supper, thereby proclaiming His death until He comes. They do not continue to relive prophetic shadows that were fulfilled almost 2 000 years ago. By denying the fulfillment of Passover they open the door to “another Messiah” who will not be from the Lord (cf. 2Cor. 11:4).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

This feast was closely associated with Passover, and observed for a whole week following Passover. Literal yeast (including crumbs of leavened bread) had to be removed from Jewish houses during this feast. Yeast represents sin and should therefore be removed from the houses of believers. The symbolism of this feast fixes attention on the need for spiritual soul-searching among members of God’s people.

Christians do not observe a specific New Testament version of this feast as it should be an ongoing commitment among them to prove themselves before God. Paul says: *“Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2Cor. 7:1). This clearly implies that we must be purged from the leaven of sin: *“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, or with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”* (1Cor. 5:6-8).

The crucified Christ is our (fulfilled) Passover, while a process of sanctification should be a lifelong commitment. There are many deviations from the narrow way in the form of spiritual deception, as well as many temptations towards sinning in the moral sphere of our lives, and we should continuously be reminded that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. In the same way in which a small sickness can eventually kill a body, willful sinning in the smallest way will eventually permeate and contaminate our whole life, and even cause us to stumble and fall.

We should resolutely avoid evil: *“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (Gal. 5:16). Persevere on the narrow way: *“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”* (Heb. 12:1-2). He will keep on cleansing us from the leaven of sin: *“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). Do you walk in the light or do you do things through which you grieve the Holy Spirit and contaminate yourself?

Feast of the Firstfruits

In the month of Spring, usually very close to Passover, the Jews celebrate the Feast of Firstfruits, specifically on the first day of the week (a Sunday): *“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the*

priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it" (Lev. 23:10-11). In a spiritual sense, this celebration was aimed at making the people of Israel acceptable to the Lord.

In the year 32, this ceremony was conducted on the Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the grave (Mark 16:9). The seed that had fallen in the ground (the death and burial of Jesus) gave its first fruit on that Sunday morning. It also indicated the beginning of the harvest of souls, for the whole harvest that would be gathered after it would be acceptable to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus signaled the transition from the old covenant to the new. That is why it had to happen on a Sunday, the first day of the week and symbolically the beginning of a new dispensation. This is the reason why the celebration of the Sabbath would not only take on another form without legal injunctions and punishments to offenders, but it was also moved from the seventh day to the first day of the week in the new dispensation of grace. Because of the finished work of the Messiah, we can celebrate resurrection day every Sunday. We have entered into the new covenant with God through Him, and are therefore active partakers in the resurrection life of Jesus our Lord: *"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! ...But now Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1Cor. 15:17, 20).*

The fulfillment of this feast prompted the disciples to celebrate the day of the Lord on Sundays (Acts 20:7; 1Cor. 16:2), and this was a well-established practice since the beginning of the Christian church. The early church fathers all confirm the fact of Sunday worship as a common institution. The bishop of Antioch wrote in 110 AD: "Those among us who obtained the new hope no longer keep the Sabbath but the day of the Lord on which we arose from the dead in Him, so that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ." Justin Martyr (100-165 AD), a disciple of John, wrote: "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read.... Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly because it is the first day on which God made the world and created light out of darkness. Jesus Christ, our Saviour, rose from the dead on the same day." Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, said in about 178 AD that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus could only be celebrated on the Lord's Day, which is the first day of the week.

The great significance of the fulfilled Feast of Firstfruits demands that we celebrate this feast every Sunday as the Savior's Resurrection Day. It is indeed lamentable that there are still people who give

precedence to the prophetic shadows of the old covenant by observing the Sabbath which is prescribed by the Law of Moses. Small wonder that the spiritual discernment of such people is so restricted that many of them do not even realize that Jesus is the Messiah who rose from the dead on the first day of the week, thereby introducing a new dispensation in God's plan of salvation for humanity.

Pentecost

"And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: Seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD" (Lev. 23:15-16). This feast was specifically also determined to be celebrated on a Sunday, which is the 50th day after Resurrection Sunday. According to the inclusive reckoning of the Jews, both the first and last Sundays in this period are counted as full days, thereby expressing these seven weeks as 50 days.

Orthodox Jews celebrate the onset of the dispensation of the law at Pentecost (derived from the Greek word *pentecostos*, meaning *fiftieth*). They believe that the people of Israel arrived at Sinai fifty days after their departure from Egypt. It was there that God gave Moses the law (Ex. 19:1-3). It was for the celebration of this feast that Jews from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem on the day when the Holy Spirit descended (Acts 2). They did not realize that the Passover, the Feast of the Unleavened Bread and the Feast of the Firstfruits had already been fulfilled through the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, they did not realize that the dispensation of the law had been consummated. The new dispensation of grace, ministered by the Holy Spirit, was to come in its place, *"for the code of the law kills, but the Holy Spirit makes alive" (2Cor. 3:6 AB. See also Heb. 8:7-13 and Jer. 31:31).* 3,000 people died at Sinai because they were punished under the law for worshipping an idol (Ex. 32:28). On the day of Pentecost, of which we read in the New Testament, 3,000 people were saved when the new dispensation was introduced by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:41).

The beginning of the dispensation of the church at Pentecost indicates that it replaces the dispensation of the law. It was another example of God's perfect timing, since 40 days passed between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and another ten days while the disciples were praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit to be poured out. This total of 50 days is exactly the same as the time that expired between the two wave offerings of the Feast of the Firstfruits. We still recognize this chronology, as we celebrate the resurrection on the Sunday after Good Friday, the ascension 40 days later on a Thursday, and Pentecost ten days later, again on a Sunday.

It is also interesting that Pentecost is not celebrated in isolation. It forms part of a whole cycle of feasts and is intimately linked to the Passover festival 50 days earlier. For this reason the outpouring of the Holy Spirit must always be seen in its close association with the whole series of events that include the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. To Christians, Pentecost is not an isolated feast celebrated only once a year but refers to a life of sanctification and daily dependence on the Holy Spirit to fill, guide, and inspire us. Only He can equip and motivate us to keep on serving the Lord.

The harvest festivals

During autumn every year the Jews celebrate three harvest festivals—the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. Prophetically, these festivals refer to the second coming of the Messiah when they will all be fulfilled by His end-time revelation:

The Feast of Trumpets will be fulfilled when the harvest of God's kingdom is gathered in heaven: *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words"* (1Thess. 4:16-18). Christians do not only single out one day a year to fix their attention on the end-time harvest of souls but always keep on looking up and expecting the Lord: *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body"* (Phil. 3:20-21).

The Day of Atonement will be fulfilled when the entire remnant of Israel will be saved at the second coming of Christ (Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:25-27). When Christ returns after the seven years of tribulation and sets foot on the Mount of Olives we will be with Him (Zech. 14:4-5). *"When Christ who is our life appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory"* (Col. 3:4)

The Feast of Tabernacles will be fulfilled after Christ has returned, judged His enemies, saved a remnant of Israel and the nations, and restored the throne of David in Jerusalem (Rev. 19:19-21, Matt. 24:29-30; Acts 15:16-17). Promises of the second coming of the Lord Jesus are very important to Christians as they represent the core of our future expectation. We should recognize the fact that the prophetic promises contained in these three feasts will be fulfilled in the Messiah just as literally as the promises of the first four feasts were fulfilled by His first coming and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

It is vitally important that we give due attention to the eschatological perspective afforded us by the last three feasts, as that would ensure that we maintain high spiritual standards amid great deception, tribulation and a worldwide falling away from biblical principles. Confessing Christians who do not believe in the imminence of Christ's coming may become fainthearted and even end up as backsliders. Jesus warned His disciples on this possibility: *"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold"* (Matt. 24:12). Such believers will find themselves among the foolish virgins who lost sight of the Bridegroom's soon return, failed to ensure that they have enough oil in their lamps (the filling of the Holy Spirit), and fell asleep when they should have watched and prayed.

Jesus Christ is our entire life. If we remain true to Him by overcoming the deception, temptations and the prevailing spirit of worldliness, we will share in the glory of His kingdom: *"For if we died with Him [to sin and to the world], we shall also live with Him. If we endure [tribulations], we shall also reign with Him"* (2Tim. 2:11-12). Are you overcoming all the obstacles which the adversary of your soul is heaping up along your way in an effort to discourage you or derail you spiritually? Christ says: *"Hold fast what you have till I come. He who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations"* (Rev. 2:25-26). Persevere to the end, expect the heavenly Bridegroom every day, and prepare to appear before Him holy and without blemish: *"Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure"* (1John 3:3).

No religious traditions or teachings of men can measure up to a life in the likeness of Christ, which can only be obtained through faith in Him, a regenerated heart filled with His Spirit, and conformity to His death as well as His resurrection. Paul was fully prepared to lose his position in the religious establishment of Israel for the sake of Christ. He says: *"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death"* (Phil. 3:7-10).

Paul died to the world with Christ, but by also sharing in His resurrection he found a newness of life with which no religious system or legalistic lifestyle can ever compare.