

Christian Prosperity

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Christian Prosperity

Christian Prosperity, what is it? Under the second covenant, Moses commanded Israel to choose life and prosperity (Deu 30:15)—does one come without the other? What about the *prosperity gospel*? Can it be believed? What about seed, time and harvest? Or receiving more than you have left to be a Christian?

What about tithing? Is it commanded in the new covenant? Must Christians tithe? Or was tithing nailed to the Cross? Will God open the windows of heaven to tithe-payers? What about 2nd-tithes, or 3rd-tithes? Are they required?

Is there a connection between spirituality and material prosperity? Does the possession of "things" reflect a drawn disciple's state of righteousness?

How do Christians go about storing up treasure in heaven? What type of a savings account can they open? And is there any connection between material wealth and treasure in heaven?

The answers to these questions will strain every bit of faith the Christian has, for the easy answers aren't answers at all.

When I was baptized into the Body of Christ three decades ago, I became part of what was then regarded as a fringe cult. Indeed, it had some cult-like characteristics that have since manifested themselves into the implied deification of a man in the same manner as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, George Fox and other men have had their biblical teachings deified. Each of the men was a reformer whose reforms fell short of purifying the Bride of Christ. Additional purification was required as spiritual Israel began escaping from spiritual Babylon, with most of Israel choosing to remain in Babylon, where business can be easily conducted and houses have been built and the customs of the people are familiar. The reformers have always lead a remnant a little farther towards spiritual Jerusalem, with distance between Jerusalem and Babylon being far greater than they anticipated; for to reach spiritual Jerusalem (not New Jerusalem, so there won't be a mistake about my referent), drawn disciples must actually believe and live as Judeans, how both Paul and Peter taught Gentile converts to live (Gal 2:2, 14). The accursed gospel that Paul mentions isn't teaching Gentiles to live like Judeans, but the mixing of the physical covenant with the

spiritual. In other words, Paul's accursed gospel was converted Jews requiring that Gentile converts become physical Israelites before they can become spiritual Israelites. But that is the model we see in Scripture prior to Peter's vision and the conversion of Cornelius and all of his household. So those converted Pharisees who taught converts that they must become physically circumcised actually had Scripture on their side, for most of what we read as the New Testament hadn't yet been written.

Paul's accursed gospel manifests itself today in the mixing of the physical covenant given at Sinai with the second covenant, with those who do the mixing not understanding either. It also occurs when prophecy experts mix physical applications of prophecies with spiritual applications. The spiritual creation that began with the second Adam will actually catch up to the physical creation that began with the first Adam when the demon identified as the king of the North possesses a man, and that man of perdition declares himself God 1290 days before Christ returns as the all powerful Messiah. Both creations will tract together for 30 days, before they separate because the days are shortened—if they were not shortened, no flesh would be saved alive. The spiritual

creation will then separate from the physical, with a place of safety (on Mt. Zion) for physical Israelites who have believed Christ, and with safety for spiritual Israelites in spiritual Jerusalem, a city with theological walls and not a geographical location. All of humanity will be liberated from slavery to sin and Satan 1260 days before Christ returns as the all powerful Messiah. Those people who wish to remain in slavery to Satan will have to accept his slave mark, which is the mark of the beast (*Chi xi stigma*, or the tattoo of the Cross) on their hand or forehead. Because this slavery is physical and spiritual, we can expect the tattoo to be equally physical and spiritual.

Now, what does Paul's accursed gospel have to do with Christian prosperity? When I began attending the services of the Church of God, the prevailing teaching concerning wealth was then very Calvinistic: the amount of physical prosperity a person possessed was a measure of the individual's spirituality. Tithing was putting God to the test to demonstrate how He would prosper the individual (Mal 3:10). If prosperity didn't follow tithing, then the person either wasn't properly paying his or her tithe, or the person had a secret sin which wasn't allowing God to prosper the person. The fact that most disciples were not significantly increased with goods suggested that most disciples had secret sins. Corrective sermons were given, but the correction that needed to occur was of additional spiritual understanding being given to the ministry. The Church of God billed itself as having restored all spiritual truths, whereas it had only reached spiritual Jerusalem. Ahead of it was the task of rebuilding the scaled down temple and the walls of the city. In a physical application of this spiritual commission, it actually built a downsized temple, thinking that such a building was pleasing to God while leaving undone the spiritually weightier matters of the covenant. It never could intellectually separate the physical from the spiritual. It never understood the new covenant. And its work was tested by God, and was found to be of straw. Its work has been burned, with a few burning straws escaping the inferno and setting ablaze small grass tussocks that are consuming themselves. Each calendar year, the average age of these fellowships' members and ministry is just about twelve months, meaning that within a few years, the members and ministry of these fellowships will

rest in their graves, awaiting the revealing of their judgments. These fellowships will cease to be viable if Christ doesn't return in a decade.

Regardless of the actual state of members' finances, the ministry of this remnant of spiritual Israel self-identified as the Church of God needed to show that tithing worked as its endtime apostle flew the Church's plane between Jerusalem and Cairo in what he believed was fulfilling his great commission of warning the world that Christ's return was eminent. Jet fuel costs money. Airports have landing fees. And the bills were being paid by a hundred thousand plus tithe payers, so tithing needed to work as advertised.

Yes, there were nicer cars in church parking lots, and nicer homes were purchased, but disciples acquired more consumer debt and seemed to reflect America's rising debt-based affluence. Overall, disciples were neither ahead, nor behind the nation's economic health. Yet new vehicles and nicer homes became evidence that tithing worked—God was pouring out His blessings on a people and on a nation so that His work of taking the true gospel to the world could be accomplished.

Following baptism, my income went from \$13,000 in 1971, the last full year before I began tithing, to \$3,500 in 1973, the first full year I was tithing. I failed to see how I was physically prospering by tithing. Yes, I learned a lot of Scripture, and I was continuing to learn. Yes, I had supernatural events happen to me that actually saved the life of my youngest daughter on two, and possibly three occasions. In 1975, I would experience a supernatural event that saved my life. But I wasn't prospering by any measure of how that word is normally used. I was strapped for money. My business was barely afloat, and I had become virtually unemployable, judging by the number of jobs for which I wasn't hired. Yet despite being genuinely destitute, I was able to relocate to Alaska, where I purchased an acre of raw land in what would become a prime retail area for \$200. down and \$45. per month. And while Outside (out of the state), I would have my neighbor put in a power pole on my lot (his mistake: he directed the power company to put the pole on the wrong lot), and I would trade seven chainsaws, for which I was a dealer, and a twenty-five horse outboard, for which I was also a dealer, for the Cat work and building materials to construct a 26x36 foot shop. I was

faithfully tithing, and I was getting by financially, but no one would have said that I was prospering in the usual sense of the word.

In the many sermons I heard about money management, the idea of tithing to gain material wealth was implied if not directly taught. I felt a certain degree of low level guilt because I wasn't prospering more than I was. But my lack of monetary wealth wasn't for lack of effort: from Breakup to Freezeup, I was in the shop at six every morning, six days a week, and I didn't leave until ten or eleven at night. Even though I was living a quarter mile from the famed Kenai River, I didn't have time to go fishing. My presence was required in the shop so that others could fish. Likewise, when moose season came, I had no time to go hunting. Moose hunters cut firewood when they weren't successful, and I was inundated with chainsaw repair for all of moose season. Then came the dead season: November through March. For those years I was at Kenai, I busheled during those months, falling timber for whichever contractor had the money to pay wages, and occasionally not receiving those wages because the export log market had collapsed. And the sermons kept coming: test God and see if He won't open the windows of heaven, pouring down an overflowing blessing. Prove God. Send tithes and offerings to headquarters. If I am faithful, then God is faithful to open the windows of heaven. And I didn't have the money to take a chainsaw sales rep job in Boise, Idaho, in December, 1978. I was hired for the job, then didn't have the money necessary to leave Kenai and get down the Highway. Everyone I knew was a broke as I was, so there wasn't anyone to whom I could turn. I was without choice: I stayed in Kenai, but I put my shop on the market March 1st, 1979. It sold nine days later; it sold before I could change my mind.

By this time, I had been faithfully tithing for six and a half years, and I had less material wealth, success, and prosperity than I had before I started. I had begun to understand those sermons I heard about testing God were somehow off target. I didn't know then what was wrong with them. I only knew that I had been faithful, and I had been blessed in many ways, the foremost being physical protection through supernatural intervention, but I hadn't prospered materially.

Coming forward two decades, I began

hearing televangelists preaching a "prosperity gospel," based upon Jesus' teachings. The idea of sowing money into a ministry and reaping material gain is an unassailable tenet of this gospel. If a person puts in enough money, even if the person has to borrow the money or pay only a tithe of the pledged amount, the person is assured of financial success. The anecdotal evidence is overwhelming: people are getting out of debt by giving to a certain ministry. They are receiving new houses, new cars, new clothes, renewed relationships. Whatever their hearts desire, they are receiving by sowing a large enough seed. And if the seed money doesn't produce gain, then that ground is no good, and the person needs to sow seed into a different ministry.

The basis for the prosperity gospel exists in Scripture. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus, after being assured by the young ruler that he had kept the commandments since his youth (Luke 18:21), told the young ruler to sell all he had and give his wealth to the poor, the same advice Jesus had previously given His Disciples (Luke 12:33). The young ruler couldn't do this, for his wealth was proof of his spirituality. His wealth was proof that God had opened the windows of heaven to him. He couldn't see his wealth as standing between him and God, so when Jesus offered him a place in the resurrection of firstfruits, he couldn't claim the position, because he had to divest himself of the proof of his righteousness. He couldn't see that spiritual wealth differed from material wealth, and neither could Jesus' disciples. For the 1st-Century world of Judea and Hellenistic Asia Minor, wealth involved tangible goods; it consisted of things. And the wealth of this world separated the young ruler from God, just as it does with most everyone (1 John 2:15-17). Jesus then made His famous comment about it being easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God. Peter, not understanding Jesus' comment, said, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you" (Luke 18:28). Jesus answered Peter with a statement that validates the prosperity gospel if the evidence of how Christians have lived for the past two millennia is ignored. He said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the

kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life" (v. 29-30). So the unambiguous teaching of Jesus is that between now and a disciple's glorification, the disciple will receive much more than the person has left. A wife, brothers, parents, children, however, aren't things; they are relationships. But a house is a thing. So Jesus told Peter and the others listening that a person would receive much more than a house left behind; plus, the person would receive eternal life in the age to come.

All of those years before I sold the shop in 1979, all of those years when I had nothing that appeared as material prosperity, and all of the years since when I've had even less seem to argue against Jesus' unambiguous statement of receiving more back than I left, if the *more* were material possessions. Of course I spent several years living on Kodiak Island, enjoying its hunting and fishing, and I twice sailed a small boat down the Alaska Peninsula and out to the Aleutians, experiencing some of the most impressive scenery in the world close up. I made a poor living selling hunting and fishing articles for a few years, and I entered graduate school without an undergraduate degree and without any course work in the field. My first degree is my M.F.A. in Creative Writing from University of Alaska Fairbanks. So I have no complaints. Rather, I came to take for granted what others spend large amounts of money to enjoy as I lived on the edge of the world, taking a living from its margins. I have looked into tomorrow in a literal and in a figurative sense; I have also been uncertain about how Jesus' statement about receiving *more* applied to the real-world lives of Christians. I don't know many disciples who have brought forth fruit worthy of repentance who have substantial material prosperity. Those individuals with even limited prosperity are the exception, rather than the norm.

In the early 1990s, the most visible administration of the Church of God realized that as an institution, it hadn't well understood the new covenant. The institution initiated a series of doctrinal changes that placed it left of center within Evangelical Christianity. The resulting fallout caused spinoff organizations to idolize the teachings of the previous Pastor General of the institution. But neither the move left, nor the subsequent spinning magically produced understanding of the new

covenant. Doctrinally, nothing good came from the destruction of this most visible administration's work. Spiritual understanding didn't suddenly materialize. The Church of God's accursed gospel joined the even more accursed gospels of Evangelical Christianity. In every case, the centrally controlled organization mixes the physical covenant with the spiritual covenant. These organizations cannot maintain their centralized authority without such blending of the physical with the spiritual.

I just telegraphed where I am going theologically; so if you are more interested in exercising governance over Christ's disciples than you are in obeying Christ, you should probably stop reading and get your sermon ready about the windows of heaven being opened for the tithe payer, according to the promises made at Horeb (Mal 4:4); that is, according to the promises made in the Sinai covenant.

Within the Churches of God, autocratic government became one of the restored truths. But this "truth" of top-down governance allowed Satan to kill the organization, plus a hundred thousand saints (my own daughters included) with two shots. Of course, God the Father and His Christ had to allow Satan to fire his two shots. But permission was granted because the organization had, in 1962, made the conscious decision not to grow spiritually. They even rejected a third of God's sabbaths, the observance of which they should have restored. The observance of these sabbaths argued against this revealed "truth" of top-down governance. And for the sake of the great endtime work then being done by the organization, it was more important to maintain control of tithe moneys than it was to obey God, a harsh statement, the truth of which I'm willing to debate with anyone.

Again, when change came the work that had been constructed on the centralized collection of tithes was destroyed. Although I do not feel great love towards the men who engineered its destruction and the slaughter of so many saints, I am humbled by their spiritual ignorance, which is beyond appalling, and in any other field, would be criminal.

In *A Philadelphia Apologetic* I tell the story of being drafted into the Body of Christ three decades ago. In January of this year (2002), I received a similar call to begin what I am doing now. And with that call came understanding of

the new covenant, what it is, how it differs from the Sinai covenant, and how rarely it is understood. What I received when I wasn't looking (in a figurative sense) was the training necessary to actually read Scripture. So my qualifications for what I do now come from being a novelist and literary critic who has had the Holy Spirit for thirty years. They do not come from a seminary where I would have been taught to read texts in this particular way, or in that particular way. I was spiritually drafted to reread Scripture, not to reinforce the readings of historical exegesis. And if in rereading biblical passages, I overturn concepts formalized by the Council of Nicea 325 A.D., or taught by the college that educated many of the Church of God ministers who are still unsure about what is a part of the Law of Moses, then overturn those concepts I must.

Before someone says that he or she understands the new covenant, the person needs to look into the mirror of the perfect law and see who is looking back. If Christ isn't, then have the laws of God really been written on the person's heart and mind? Does the person really have the Holy Spirit? Under the new covenant, three linguistic absolutes occur when God the Father draws a person from the world (John 6:44, 65), and no one comes to Christ without being drawn by God the Father. These three things occur simultaneously. The laws of God are written on the person's heart and mind. The person now knows God because the person has internalized God's laws; and the person's sins have been forgiven because the person chooses not to sin, which is the transgression of the internalized laws of God (Jer 31:31-34 & Heb 8:10-12 & Heb 10:16-17; plus, Matt 5:17-19). Actually, the person is reconciled to God the Father by having the person's past sins covered by the shed blood of Christ. The person is now justified by having his or her post-baptism sins being borne by the resurrected Christ. Both goats of Yom Kippurim are the sin offering for Israel, now spiritual Israel. As a shadow of what would/will happen, one goat was sacrificed (Christ at Calvary), and one goat is lead away into a far country (the glorified Christ returning to heaven as the high priest of saints). Christ presently bears the sins of saints, but He will return those sins that rightfully belong to Satan to the devil when Yom Kippurim becomes a reality after Christ returns, which is why animal

sacrifices will be resumed in the Millennium. As King of kings, Christ will no longer bear humanity's sins.

Under the new covenant, the laws of God aren't almost written on the heart and mind of a disciple. Nor are they partly there. They are either on a disciple's heart and mind, or the person hasn't had his or her sins forgiven, and the person doesn't know God, regardless of what the person thinks (1 John 2:4). The person either has the Holy Spirit, or the person doesn't. If the person has the Holy Breath of God in the person, then the person is a disciple. The person has been spiritually modified. The person has the laws of God written on the person heart and mind.

Under the new covenant, righteousness comes from faith, but exactly what does this mean when the laws of God are written on hearts and minds? It's one thing to mouth these words, but quite another to read the writing on one's conscience that came with the forgiveness of sins, then to actually apply that writing and those laws. Even the demons believe in God (Jas 2:19), and shudder, but they are also in rebellion against Him. Disciples, however, once enlightened, will go into the lake of fire if they rebel against God, and against what is written on their consciences. So to erase what God the Father has written through clever arguments leaves the person without additional sacrifice for the person's sin, which by definition (1 John 3:4) is lawlessness.

Distinguishing the Sinai covenant from the new covenant, Paul said that the righteousness that comes from faith says, and he goes on to quote the second covenant mediated by Moses (Rom 10:6-8 — compare to Deuteronomy 30:12-14). This is Paul's law of faith (Rom 3:27). And this law of faith is the single law of God that Jeremiah says is written on hearts and minds by the new covenant (Jer 31:31, 33). When summarized by its two principles of love—love God will all one's heart and mind, and love one's neighbor as oneself (Deu 6:5; Lev 19:18; Luke 10:28 *et al*)—it becomes the plural laws of God: the writer of Hebrews changes Jeremiah's single law of God, or Moses' single commandment of God (Deu 30:11) that brings forth circumcision of the heart and mind [*naphesh*] (Deu 30:6) into the plural laws of God (Heb 8:10 & 10:16). About this second covenant, or single law or commandment of God, Moses said, "Surely,

this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away . . . it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe" (Deu 30:11, 14). Thus, the provisions or terms of this single law that constitutes the second covenant has drawn disciple observing all of the laws, commandments and decrees written in Deuteronomy; hence, this single law becomes plural when the mediator changes from Moses to Christ, and better promises are added. Love is now emphasized, but the fault of this covenant wasn't with its terms. Salvation was possible under this second covenant, because the Holy Spirit was offered to those Israelites who believed the Lord, and obeyed by faith. Circumcision of the heart and mind is receiving the Holy Spirit. Malachi writes,

Then those who revered the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the Lord and thought on his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. (3:16-18).

The fault of the first covenant lie in the nation of Israel (Heb 8:8); so it is Israel that is changed. Actually, what is changed is when an Israelite receives the Holy Spirit. Under the second covenant, obedience preceded receipt of a circumcised heart and mind. Under the new covenant, receipt of spiritual circumcision precedes obedience, and actually allows for obedience to occur. Obedience very seldom occurred prior to receipt of the Holy Spirit, even in a nation that had the laws of God and had knowledge that its citizens were a holy people.

Paul declares that the second covenant mediated by Moses is the righteousness that comes from faith. This law or commandment says, "For the Lord will again take delight in

prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob], when you obey the Lord your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your [mind — *naphesh*]" (v. 9-10). Moses then adds, "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess" (v. 15-16).

(For a lengthier discussion of "what does Paul mean by *the law*," request the booklet by that title.)

All of the above relates to spiritual prosperity through understanding the terms of the eternal or new covenant. Because belief in *YHWH* unto obedience preceded spiritual circumcision, *YHWH* attached a series of carrots to the law in order to get physical Israel to obey. It is always wrong to say that salvation wasn't offered to physical Israel—understanding the key of David, which Peter preached on that day of Pentecost when three thousand were added to spiritual Israel, shows that salvation was available through obedience by faith.

But the carrots *YHWH* attached to the law didn't produce much righteousness. All those carrots produced was an appetite for carrots. Therefore, a new covenant was promised. And the new covenant differs from the second covenant only in when hearts and minds will be circumcised.

I have, in three books, built upon what I was taught, but my teachers knew less than I did when I wrote, and a lot less than I do now. When I wrote those books, I didn't fully understand the key of David. Apparently, until now, no one has understood the specifics of why David will be in the resurrection of firstfruits since those first generation Apostles preached what Jesus personally taught them. Yes, everyone has known that David would be there, but without the key of understanding why he qualifies to be there, disciples seem unable to comprehend exactly how binding the terms of the new covenant are. Disciples will

not realize the seriousness of their callings. Disciples will mouth words about God not being a respecter of persons, then they expect Christ to change the terms of the eternal covenant so that they can practice lawlessness. Come on, spiritual Israel, grow up! Judgment is upon you right now—and you want to tell the One who didn't spare but eight that you do not have to abide by His rules? How smart is that? Oh, you say, Christ is love. Yes, He is. And He loves you enough to put you into the lake of fire if you practice lawlessness; i.e., sin.

Once drawn by God the Father, a disciple is spiritually modified. The disciple is no longer under the law, because the commandment of God—the essence of all that is contained in the Book of Deuteronomy—is written on the person's heart and mind; the person has received the Breath of God. The laws of God are now inside the person, who is under grace, which is a gift of God (which is inviting Jesus to live inside the person). But receiving grace isn't receiving permission to ignore what has been written on hearts and minds. Literally, this commandment or law of God that requires of those who have a circumcised heart and mind to keep all of Deuteronomy isn't too far away to observe, nor too hard to do. And to not keep the laws of God is to grieve the Holy Spirit. Actually, to not keep the laws of God is to sin against the Holy Spirit, for lawlessness is sin (1 John 3:4). A person commits the unpardonable sin when the person refuses to keep the laws of God.

Satan rebelled against the laws of God. Why would you, spiritual Israel, expect God the Father or His Son to glorify you if you are going to be another Satan? Does that make sense to you? Think about what you teach. Many of you teach that Christians don't have to keep the laws of God because Jesus did. But what did Jesus say not to teach (Matt 5:19)? How good are your excuses now that you have closely aligned yourselves with Satan's position that the laws of God aren't binding? Seriously, do you really expect to be glorified when teaching a doctrine of lawlessness? If you do, you belong in the lake of fire. Nothing I write can help you.

Again, the new covenant is, simply, the second covenant of Moses (Deu chapters 29-31) with spiritual instead of physical promises, or carrots, attached to obedience. When the mediator changed, the promises

changed, but the contractual terms of the law remained the same, which is why the fault of the first covenant wasn't with the law but with Israel (Heb 8:8-9). Jesus specifically links keeping the law of God to receiving eternal life (Luke 10:25-28 & 18:18-20; plus add Matt 5:17-19 to 1 John 2:3-6).

The promise of prosperity under the Moab covenant was the accumulation of "things" and children—money, property, houses, livestock, vineyards, servants—which are the things that televangelists promise today if a person will sow seed (money) in good ground, that good ground always being the televangelist's ministry. As such, these televangelists are keeping alive the promises made under the Moab covenant, either when the law was given or when prophets, speaking for God, tried to coax Israel into returning to the covenant relationship. These televangelists are such poor readers that they do not realize they have blended the promises of the old and the new covenant without accepting any of the contractual terms for achieving those promises. They are, frankly, intellectually dishonest with the Word of God, either through their own ignorance, or through spiritual malice by being Satan's ministers of righteousness (2 Corth 11:14-15).

When the rich young ruler asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 18:18), Christ didn't tell the ruler that he already had eternal life. He didn't tell the young ruler that achieving eternal life wasn't possible if the ruler were a legalist. Rather, Jesus said, "You know the commandments" (v. 20) and listed enough of the single royal law (i.e., the Ten Commandments) so the young ruler would know the law to which Christ was referring. Keeping the Ten Commandments as part of the law of God was the reasonable expectation of a person who desired eternal life. It was commanded under the Moab, or second covenant. Yet Jesus told the Pharisees that none of them were keeping the law Moses gave them (John 7:19).

The young ruler thought he had been keeping the commandments as required (Luke 18:21), but if the Pharisees weren't, then it wasn't likely that the young ruler was. Because we have the story before us, we know he wasn't. His wealth was his god, as shown by his attitude about selling all he had. His wealth came before even his desire to receive eternal

life. Thus, he wasn't keeping the first commandment. In addition, he was a little short on love toward the poor, which is directly addressed in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Earlier in Luke's gospel, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life (10:25), the same question the rich young ruler asked. Jesus' answer was almost the same as in the later incident: "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" (v. 26). The lawyer recited the two summary commandments that incorporates all Ten Commandments, with the necessary requisite of love both toward God and toward neighbor—these two commandments sum up not merely the Ten Commandments, but all of the Book of Deuteronomy. It is a mistake to state that these commandments summarize only the Decalogue, when, in actuality, the Ten Commandments are the codification of the larger law of God that has been bound in a book and placed with the holy ones as a witness against them (Deu 31:26). And Jesus tells the lawyer, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live" (Luke 18:28).

Again, what the lawyer asked about was eternal life. Jesus didn't tell the lawyer that achieving eternal life wasn't possible unless the lawyer invited Jesus into the lawyer's heart. Rather, Jesus said to do the summary commandments, which encapsulate love that only comes from faith.

Eternal life is a gift from God (Rom 6:23). Jesus told the lawyer that if he were to do what he knows the law says—that single law being the second covenant, made at Moab and by which hearts and minds are circumcised—the lawyer would live. The lawyer would receive the gift of eternal life, which negates the value of however many houses the lawyer might possess, or of however many sons and daughters he might father, or of how far his land stretched. Because most of spiritual Israel believes the lie Eve swallowed, the gift of eternal life doesn't mean much. These spiritual Israelites already believe they have eternal life, that they received it at birth in the form of an immortal soul, or in the form of a little angel that no longer remembers coming down from heaven, or in some other form of theological silliness. This lawyer who sought to test Jesus (as well as the rich young ruler) were light years ahead of the televangelists promising old

covenant blessings for just believing that the person has been born again.

God is not a respecter of persons. This is universally accepted. So why are the airways filled by televangelists teaching that He is? If Jesus said to keep and to teach others to keep the least of the commandments, why do so many teach a different gospel, one based upon historical exegesis, one based upon doctrines received after spiritual Israel was taken captive by the spiritual king of Babylon? Why do so many teach an accursed gospel in which they mix the physical and the spiritual covenants and promises? Don't they believe that they can sin against the Holy Spirit? Or are they so intellectually dead that they will embrace Satan himself as their messiah? That is what they, what you have set yourself up to do.

Just so everyone understands, conversion occurs when God the Father decides He wants an out-of-season relationship with a person; when the Father decides He wants to hire a person for a certain job. He modifies the person spiritually by giving the person a little bit of His spirit, enough to cause His laws to be written on the person's heart and mind so that the person can know Him and accept Christ's sacrifice. Until such modification is made, a person is part of the world. The person's mind is hostile to God. The person cannot understand the things of God, nor even understand that the person needs salvation. Under the better promises of the new covenant, receipt of the Holy Spirit comes prior to obedience, but comes with the expectation of obedience to all of God's laws and decrees written in the Book of Deuteronomy.

The Father wouldn't bother to write His laws on your heart and mind unless He expected you to keep them. He is a legalist. Sin—any sin, even the smallest sin—separates either angel or human from Him. Therefore, to have a relationship with the Father, you must be sin free, which no human has been except for Christ Jesus. But as God the Logos prior to His human birth, Jesus' physical life was worth more than all of the Creation. Thus, His shed blood is of sufficient worth to cover your sins, thereby reconciling you to the Father. As your high priest, the glorified Christ Jesus bears your sins as long as you stay in the covenant relationship which has you believing God unto obedience by observing all of the laws and

decrees written in Deuteronomy.

You don't have to do anything except believe God unto obedience by observing His commandments. Everything has been done for you, including giving you enough of the Holy Spirit that you can escape sin and spiritual lawlessness. So why do you mock God by saying that you don't need to observe the laws He has written on your heart and mind, that to observe what He was written inside you is legalism?

Under the new covenant, God sets before you life and prosperity, death and adversity. You weren't asked if you wanted to be made a party to the new covenant, the proper understanding of predestination. You were, without your consent, made a party. You were, again, without your consent, offered eternal life and spiritual prosperity. And if you accepted the terms of this covenant by being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, judgment is now upon you. And you aren't being judged by whether you have invited Jesus into your heart. You are being judged by whether you **do** what you know is right, based upon what has been written on your heart and mind. If you know to do (doing is works) good, you must do good. If you know you are not to covet, you must not covet. If you know you are to keep the Sabbath, you must keep the Sabbath. If you know you are to honor your parents, you must honor your parents. If you know you must put God first in your life, you must put God first. And you know how well you **do** what you know is right. What your judgment will be is in your thoughts right now if you are honest with yourself.

So for the purposes of this booklet, the new covenant is the writing of the twin laws of loving God with all one's heart and mind, and loving one's neighbor as oneself, these two laws summarizing the Book of Deuteronomy, which exists as a witness for or against a Christian. The new covenant is not some touchy-feely feel good invitation to Jesus to come live in the person's heart. Until the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the Most High God and His Messiah (Rev 11:15 & Dan 7:11-12), only those individuals who have been drawn by the Father and spiritually modified by Him can come to Christ or the Father (John 6:44, 65). Circumcision stands as the symbol of separation. Only under the new covenant, circumcision isn't of foreskins, the point Paul

makes, but of hearts and minds. As such, disciples are drawn from the world but must still live in the world. They are not of the world, and they should not love the things of the world. Their desires should not be for the tender things of the world, but should be for the things of God.

The new covenant elevates the obligations of covenantees to match the better promises of the Covenantor. The expressions of the obligations remain the same as do the expressions of the promises, but what is meant by those expressions has changed. Life and prosperity (Deu 30:15) are eternal life and spiritual prosperity. Death and adversity become the second death (John 5:28-29) and the type of delusion that doesn't allow those who are perishing to repent (2 Thess 2:11-12). And finally, we are ready to take a new covenant look at prosperity.

What Jesus said about leaving houses and receiving more in this age must be understood in the context of a person receiving eternal life in the age to come, which is the first and greatest blessing for those who endure in covenant with God. Except for Jesus, no human being has yet received eternal life even though many have qualified, part of what Peter preached about King David. The separation of this present age from the world tomorrow is unambiguous. It is in this present age when disciples will acquire more than they left.

Jesus told two parables that relate to spiritual prosperity—the parable of the pounds, and the parable of the talents—with both parables told within ten days or so of His death, so the subject was on His mind at the end of His ministry here on earth. The subject should be on our minds, for the juxtaposition in Deuteronomy is with life comes prosperity, and with death comes adversity. Jesus' parables show this relationship between life and death at work.

In the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27), a certain nobleman who can be read as Christ—Jesus told the parable because His disciples "supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately" (v.11)—goes to a far country to get royal power for himself. He would return sometime in the future. But before he leaves, he gives a pound each to ten of his slaves, or servants, and he tells his slaves to do business with them until he returns. And here the parable addresses all of those

Christians who teach a dispensation of grace, and who teach that legalism is the great apostasy: the citizens of the nobleman's country send a delegation after the nobleman. Along with, apparently, seven of the ten slaves who received a pound each, the citizens say that they will not have the nobleman rule over them. They will not have Christ rule over them.

Let's pause to determine what each pound represents, for when I read this parable, I almost unconsciously perceive the pound to be a pound Sterling, or a unit of money, since we put money with moneylenders in order to gain interest. But when Jesus was asked by His disciples why He spoke in parables, "He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the crowds] it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away'" (Matt 13:11-12). The language is virtually identical to what is said to the slave who buries his pound and to the slave who buries his talent. What, then, is given is knowledge of the mysteries of God. The pound and the talent both represent this knowledge. More knowledge is given to some disciples than to other disciples, depending upon the job for which the disciple has been called. And having less than nothing is losing what the disciple had received by promise—and what has been received by promise is eternal life.

The nobleman returns. The first slave comes forward and says, "'Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds'" (Luke 19:16). And it needs to be here noted that this slave is offering to the nobleman all eleven pounds, the original one pound and then the ten additional pounds that have been earned in this present age. Those ten additional pounds were always the nobleman's, and were not the slave's to spend however the slave wished even though the slave had earned them through his efforts. And when substituting knowledge of the mysteries of God for the pounds earned, what we encounter is what the Apostle Peter wrote about being made a holy people to proclaim the mighty acts of Christ (1 Peter 2:9). Multiplying the pound or knowledge left with a person is evangelizing the world, beginning at home (Luke 24:46-47). The increase is the making of additional disciples, which always

belong to Christ and the Father, and never to us. But in a way, we will always have a relationship with those whom we have disciplined. And now we can peek back at what Jesus told Peter after the rich young ruler left: we will get more relationships back in this age than we will leave because of Christ. Each of these relationships will have an aura of permanency, since both student and teacher should receive eternal life in the age to come.

Even though the first slave offers the nobleman all eleven pounds, the nobleman apparently takes only the one which had been initially given since when the one pound of the third slave is later given to this first slave, those witnessing this accounting protest, saying "'Lord, he has ten pounds!"' (v. 25). He would have had eleven pounds if he kept them all, and he would have no pounds if he had returned them all to the nobleman. So what this first slave was allowed to keep was his increase, or the gain he had made trading. He could keep the relationships he had made while discipling converts, while remaining in his relationship with Christ. Plus, in addition to this gain of relationships, he will be rewarded by being given authority over ten cities, thereby establishing a one-to-one correspondence between his earnings and his reward. And cities are much more than houses: instead of getting a couple of houses back for the one he left, he will receive authority over entire cities.

So what Jesus told Peter about receiving, in this age, more relationships and houses than left behind seems to be that our future spiritual prosperity—the treasure that we store up in heaven—is directly related to the work that we do in this age in spreading the gospel, taking it from here (wherever "here" is) to the farthest corners of the world. But not much treasure is acquired taking the false gospel of lawlessness to the world. A person teaching lawlessness makes him or herself an enemy of Christ.

The second slave has made five pounds with the one pound that had been left with him. Continuing the one-to-one correspondence between gain and reward, this slave is given rulership over five cities (Luke 19:19).

The third slave came forward, and returned the pound he had been given to the nobleman. He had not done what he had been commanded: "'Do business with these until I come back'" (Luke 19:13). Rather, he had

buried the knowledge of God with which he was to have done business, and the nobleman isn't pleased. He says that the slave should have at least put the pound with the money lenders so that it would have accrued interest. If this slave didn't want to manipulate his capital, thereby making a greater return in his investment, then the least the slave should have done is put the pound with someone who would work with it.

Within the Church of God, I was taught that the pound represented the Holy Spirit. But would a person put his or her portion of the Holy Spirit out to money lenders? No, a person wouldn't. The Holy Spirit isn't a tangible thing on which interest can be accrued. So what about a person's knowledge of the mysteries of God, since knowledge also isn't tangible? And a little linguistic leap is necessary, but a leap that can be well supported from Scripture.

Tithing is commanded by the second covenant (Deu 14:22 as part of Paul's law of faith); it isn't a voluntary option that a person can do if the person wants covenant blessings. It isn't limited to the Sinai covenant, or the law of Moses. It is, rather, part of what has been written on the hearts and minds of spiritually drawn disciples. And to not tithe is to grieve the Holy Spirit.

If you have been drawn, you know you should tithe. Excuses are merely reasons why you will not have Christ rule over you, thereby making you one of the seven slaves or servants who will be slaughtered by Christ when He returns, this slaughtering being the resurrection to condemnation (John 5:29).

Because of a disciple's knowledge of the mysteries of God, the disciple knows to tithe, returning to God the portion of this disciple's increase that doesn't belong to the disciple. Now, the tithe has acquired the characteristics of the received pound. So, since this drawn disciple will tithe willingly, what is this disciple really doing if not investing in a work or ministry that proclaims the mighty deeds of Christ to the world, while beginning locally? This disciple can proclaim the mighty deeds of Christ through public evangelism, and/or this disciple will proclaim Christ through paying his or her tithe to a ministry that takes Christ to the world. Therefore, tithing becomes a salvational issue as we will see when we look at the parable of the talents, which the slave who buries his talent is bound and cast into

darkness.

Make no mistake: tithing is a salvational issue. If your treasure is here on earth, if your focus is on acquiring the tender things of this earth, if your prosperity consists only of "things"—then why should Christ bother glorifying you? You won't appreciate receiving eternal life?

If eternal life doesn't mean enough to you in this age that you will not strive for it, you won't miss not having it in the age to come. What you do with your money reflects where your heart is. What you do with God's money (i.e., your tithe, to which you have no claim) reveals whether you are a thief. And how many unrepentant thieves are there going to be in the kingdom of heaven? You have one guess, if you don't know the answer.

In this parable, a pound is received in this present age. The work done is performed in this present age. The increase is made in this present age, but isn't spent or consumed in this age. Rather the earnings don't belong to the slaves until the nobleman returns. And the reward isn't received until the age to come arrives—that reward is spiritual authority over cities.

Under the new covenant, prosperity is spiritual, which apparently has some physical-like qualities, in that we make relationships now with those individuals we disciple. We multiply our voices through acquiring broadcast or printing facilities, but it is through personal evangelism and spiritual fellowship that relationships are made. The work of ministry, however large or small, produces spiritual gain for both Christ and for the disciple doing the work.

Parables are analogies, and as such, they don't work exactly like allegories, but they are close enough that what can be said about allegories can be said about parables. What the nobleman left with each of the ten slaves was identical. All ten slaves had knowledge of the mysteries of God, but what Paul writes about spiritual gifts (1 Corth 12:4-11) suggests that what is allotted to each individual by the Holy Spirit differs (v. 11). Thus, what is allotted equally might be better read as the opportunity to work at proclaiming the mighty deeds of Christ. The widow putting in her two mites gave more than the many coins of a rich man. Both had the equal opportunity to give. The gifts differed, with the gift of the widow being

of greater worth spiritually even though it was worth less physically.

Paul's discussion of sowing sparingly and sowing bountifully (2 Corth 9:6-15) works with the idea of receiving interest on what Christ has left with each person. The spiritual interest received is somewhat dependent upon what has been sown, with the minimum sowing being the tithe that actually belongs to God. The more that is sown, the more interest a person receives. Making now another linguistic leap, the pound in the parable has become a person's wealth, with everyone's wealth being perceived as a single unit of one pound. The widow's wealth is her one pound, and she gives it all to the temple. Likewise, the rich man's wealth is also his one pound, of which he only gives, maybe, a thousandth of it to the temple. Therefore, the rich man has sown much more sparingly than has the widow even though he has given more coins of greater worth. And here, we can again link this parable to what Jesus told Peter about receiving more in this age than what the disciples left (Luke 18:29-30).

Unfortunately, the evidence of two millennia of Christianity isn't that drawn disciples receive many more houses in this life than they left. Rather, the evidence is that most disciples struggle financially as they reflect the overall prosperity of the social area in which they live. Their sowing of seed hasn't statistically improved their material prosperity beyond what their prosperity would have increased or decreased within the rise or decline of the social-economic strata in which the disciples reside. Certainly benefits come. For disciples, things have a way of just working out when there doesn't seem to be any way possible for that to happen. But getting back physically much more than what was sown hasn't been the case in the Church of God. King David was appalled that the wicked seemed to prosper more than the godly, and not much has changed since his reign when it comes to the righteous and material prosperity.

Under the prosperity gospel, disciples sow seed in this ministry or in that ministry, hoping that their seed sown in the particular ministry will return blessings to them in this age. They have sown physically, and they will reap physically if they have sown into good ground. But if they reap physically, they have no crop stored in heavenly warehouses. They remain spiritually bankrupt. They are spiritual paupers

since they have received their reward for their giving.

Was that blunt enough? If you sow physically to receive physically, you have no treasure in heaven. Your sowing has become like the Pharisees' giving. Instead of a trumpet blast causing all to look to see you give, your name becomes part of a telethon's pledge roll. You have occupied a phone line, while helping to take an accursed gospel to the world. You might as well smile: you have been conned by the greatest con man of all time, Satan himself, as the spiritual king of Babylon.

The spiritual interest on the seed sown in a ministry doesn't become the disciple's prior to judgment. Until then that interest might well be accruing, but it doesn't necessarily translate into things. Rather, Jesus commanded disciples to, "Sell your possession, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:33-34). And this is what He told the rich young ruler, and this is what He would tell those televangelists who preach the prosperity gospel. God the Father knows that as humans, disciples have need for things, for income, for food. About these things, disciples should not worry. Instead, they should strive for the kingdom of God, and the physical things that are needed will be given (v. 29-31).

The slave who has his one pound taken from him did nothing with it. The nobleman says that the least that the slave should have done would have been to put it with the moneylenders so that it might earn interest. The least a disciple is to do with his or her knowledge of the mysteries of God is to tithe, which is merely returning to God what is already His. While it has been argued by some scholars that tithing ended with the abolishment of the old covenant, the second covenant addresses three tithes, or rather, one tithe divvied into three funds: one fund for the operation of the temple, or now, the work of evangelism; a fund for feast expenses; and a fund for supporting all who have no inheritance in Israel (Deu 14:22-29). The Church of God has traditionally labeled these the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd tithes.

Under the formerly most visible administration of the Church of God, considerable faith was necessary to trust God

to supply needs when a disciple's outgo versus income didn't balance after a 1st tithe was paid. Now add a 2nd ten percent every year, and a 3rd ten percent every third year—more faith was needed than many disciples had. Nevertheless, most members of this administration faithfully paid what was asked of them. A lot of seed was sown, and the ground went to weeds.

The disciple who fails to tithe has been tested, and has been found wanting. That disciple can be assured more testing will come, so God the Father can be absolutely certain about where the disciple's treasure is stored. But tithing was never intended to become the burden that it became when a person gave thirty percent of his or her income to the Church, plus additional offerings.

Tithing is returning a tenth of a disciple's increase back to God, who retains His claim on this first tenth. Under the old covenant, tithing was a national responsibility that preceded receiving the promises of physical prosperity (Mal 3:8-12). The entire nation of Israel was to be a holy people (Exod 19:5-8). The Sinai covenant wasn't made with individuals, but with a nation. Therefore, both the responsibilities and the promises of the Sinai covenant were national, with national punishment (enslavement or captivity) coming for disobedience. The *watchmen* today who prophesy national captivity for the modern descendants of the ancient house of Israel fail to understand that the new covenant is made with individuals, and that the old covenant has been abolished. They, like the televangelists preaching the prosperity gospel, are exceedingly poor readers of Scripture.

Under the new covenant, all promises have become spiritual. God the Father knows what the needs are of disciples He has drawn from the world. He would fail in His responsibility for these disciples if He didn't provide their needs now that they are no longer of the world. Of course, if they return to the world, if they leave the covenant relationship into which they have been drawn, they can expect to have to provide for themselves. And God's promise to provide doesn't relieve the disciple of his or her responsibility to work. Rather, the promise is that regardless of what work is diligently done, enough material prosperity will come the disciple's way that his or her needs are met—and not only needs, but *wants* that don't harm

the disciple's spiritual development. Therefore, tithing is directly addressed by Jesus (Matt 23:23), commanded by the second covenant (as Deu 30:10 addresses Deu 14:22), and indirectly commanded in both the parable of the pounds and in the parable of the talents. Where it is indirectly commanded, it can only pertain to the new covenant. But under the new covenant, a person shouldn't expect to receive material prosperity because of the person's faithfulness in tithing. That prosperity might occur, but the promise is that the person is storing up treasure in heaven, even if that treasure is merely the interest gained on the person's pound through tithing.

The other parable Jesus gave concerning spiritual prosperity is of talents (Matt 25:14-30). A man going on a journey summoned his slaves, and gave to one five talents, to another two talents, and to the third one talent. After a long time, the master returns and demands an accounting from each slave. The one who received five talents had made five more, and his master said, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (v. 21). That last phrase now makes spiritual prosperity a salvational issue, thereby linking life to prosperity in the same way they are linked in the second or Moab covenant (Deu 30:15).

The exact nature of what the *many things* are over which the slave will be put isn't mentioned, nor needs be. The purpose of this parable, which is given less than a week after the parable of the pounds, appears to be for the purpose of adding flesh to the first parable; for the same thing is said to the second slave who returns two additional talents made from the two talents he received as was said to the first slave. To whom more is given, more will be expected to receive the same reward. Thus, the disciple who has been given five talents and has a fivefold increase will return to Christ thirty talents, of which he can keep twenty-five when the two parables are put together. This servant, who will become a son when glorified, now receives both the treasure or prosperity he or she has accrued in heaven, as well as the reward of being put over five cities.

But the disciple who received two talents and who has a tenfold increase will return twenty-two talents to Christ at judgment. This

glorified saint will keep twenty talents and will actually have less treasure than the servant to whom more was given, but this saint will be rewarded by being put in charge of ten cities. So this saint's reward will be greater than the first's.

Parables or allegories establish one-to-one correspondences that are literary, not literal. The reward of a glorified saint might be rulership over cities, if the saint doesn't become a pillar in the temple of God (Rev 3:12). What the parables actually establish is that a relationship exists between doing work here on earth for God the Father and His Son, and the saint's prosperity in the world to come. The minimum that a saint is to do is pray and pay (i.e., pay tithes and give offerings). If a saint buries what the saint has received, the saint is worthless and will be cast into the lake of fire. Thus, what a saint does with his or her wealth, opportunities, and abilities becomes a salvational issue, which wasn't the case under the old covenant. But under the old covenant, national captivity was the club God used to chastise an adulterous nation. Malachi concludes his instructions to bring the tithes of the nation into the storehouse with, "Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I [God] commanded him at Horeb for all Israel" (4:4). That covenant made at Horeb has been abolished (Eph 2:15). Therefore, the promises to open the windows of heaven for a tithing nation have also been abolished. But the principle of tithing hasn't been. Rather, the windows of heaven have become purses that are holding the prosperity of saints until their judgment.

The work of saints is to proclaim the mighty deeds of Christ to the world (1 Peter 2:9). Through trading upon a saint's natural gifts and received spiritual knowledge, the saint accumulates spiritual prosperity, to which will be added rewards when glorified. There is no possible way for one person to determine another person's level of spirituality from the second person's material wealth. No correspondence is promised under the new covenant, where what had been physical has become spiritual. Thus, the prosperity gospel of televangelists that sounds too good to be true is, but Satan as the King of Babylon, or "the world" as Satan's serf can make the physical promises of seed, time, and harvest

come true. However, no spiritual prosperity has accrued when a person sows into the soil of this world.

Now, we can proceed beyond the basics and chew some spiritual meat: a tithe of the firstfruits is commanded to be kept for attending the feasts of the Lord (Deu 14:23-26). The language is somewhat ambiguous. Traditionally, the Church of God, based upon Herbert Armstrong's understanding of this passage, has taught that a full tithe was to be kept for attending religious services on the annual holy days. That teaching has allowed many people to attend services in exotic locations, and to generally treat attendance at the holy day services as expensive vacations. The fruit of spending ten percent on one's increase in a week or so hasn't been spiritual enrichment as much as it has been physical enjoyment according to the physical blessings promised under the Sinai covenant.

A little logic needs applied to this 2nd tithe command: firstfruits are the tithe, are they not? A person doesn't give to God secondfruits or thirdfruits? A person would have taken his or her tithe to the temple. The person wouldn't have lugged his or her entire crop up to the temple, then have taken eighty or seventy percent of it home. Rather, the person would have only taken his or her tithe to the temple—and of this tithe, a tithe is returned to the person by the priests so the person can eat while attending High Day services.

When the command to spend a festival tithe is closely examined, the traditional practice of setting aside ten percent of one's yearly increase cannot be well supported. Rather, the command appears to be that a tithe of a tithe is to be retained to cover festival expenses. This would be one percent of a person's yearly increase, and would certainly be enough to address the expense of a housetop booth constructed of boughs and food for an eight day festival. The practice of traveling to exotic locations for services, staying in the best hotels, and feasting lavishly seems to be contrary to the spirit of High Sabbath observance. Yes, the passage commanding retention of a festival tithe says that the money can be spent for whatever the person desires (Deu 14:26), but the purpose of observing the High Days is "to learn to fear the Lord your God always" (v. 23). The purpose isn't to vacation far from home, which is what has

happened with the location of feast sites near Disney World, or in the South of France. The spiritual intent seems to be that services should be held locally, not just at Jerusalem, or at Orlando, Florida. Under the new covenant, with its spiritual promises and obligations, learning to fear the Lord isn't dining in the restaurants of five star hotels, but listening to the Word of the Lord expounded wherever the person is at.

Now, spiritually adding to the festival tithe being one percent of one's annual increase is the observance of new moons, the sabbaths which the Church of God studied and started to keep in the late 1920s, but abandoned a decade later. When new moons are observed, every spiritual Israelite ends up taking charge of his or her own salvation though setting holy day calendars locally. Paul's accursed gospel had converted Pharisees mingling the physical and spiritual covenants. The Church of God has likewise mingled the physical with the spiritual by using physical Jerusalem to set the sacred calendar for spiritual Israelites returning to spiritual Jerusalem. Observance of new moons shows that centralized governance of the Body of Christ is contrary to Scripture. In addition, since the setting of the seasonal calendar requires that harvest feasts are kept at harvest time, with the Feast of Ingathering to occur when the harvest moon does, feasts starting dates will vary. Therefore, the Feast of Ingathering will occur in Perth approximately six months before or after it does here in southern Illinois. It will be kept locally there by spiritual Israelites, using one percent of their annual increase to cover their expenses for attending services. This is not to say that additional moneys cannot be spent to observe the feast. It is to say that those additional moneys are not a person's tithe.

(For more about the significant doctrinal changes caused by new moon observance, request the booklet about *New Moons*.)

Has, then, the teaching about saving a 2nd tithe been changed? Yes, it has. The fruit that has matured over the past forty years of spending ten percent of a person's income on the person in a week has caused the passage commanding the saving of a 2nd tithe to be reexamined. When reread critically, only a portion of a person's tithe is to be spent as a form of worshiping God for bringing Israel into the promised land (Deu 26:1-11). Debate

will occur over how much of the tithe can be eaten by the person and over how much is given to the Levite. This debate will give rise to counting a person's mint leaves, a figurative expression addressing the retained carnality of a person which, if not checked, will cause the person to sow as little seed as possible with God, thereby garnering little interest on the person's spiritual investment. Thus, within the ambiguity that exists in the passages commanding disciples to save a festival tithe, the determination that a tithe of a tithe should be retained for the exclusive purpose of learning to fear God on His high sabbaths seems reasonable, and not overly burdensome. If a person wishes to go on a vacation to learn to fear God, then that person needs to set non-tithe moneys aside for that purpose; these moneys would be in addition to the commanded festival tithe (1% of a person's income).

There isn't really enough ambiguity in the text to support an argument for a full tithe to be retained as a festival tithe, not when the evidence of that reading/practice is that it has not produced the spiritual fruit promised. Rather, it has promoted a Christmas-type holiday atmosphere, in which actual competition has existed in how to spend moneys. That ought not to have happened.

When Feast of Booths (or Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering) observance was commanded, there were no five star hotels, nor jet travel to distant lands. Vacation as a concept was underdeveloped: a pilgrimage to the promised land might be as close to our concept of a vacation as the ancient world could experience. The principle, though, of learning to fear the Lord remains unchanged. The annual sabbaths are shadows of the significant events in the plan God has for humanity, so an ancient Israelite journeying to Jerusalem to observe the Passover was certainly escaping his or her day to day routine, but the person wasn't on holiday, using the British expression. Rather, the person was worshiping God in the most sacred setting then extant. And the same thing cannot be said of the person making a pilgrimage to Orlando, Florida, to attend Feast of Tabernacles services. That geographical location is no more sacred to God than is Stonefort, Illinois.

The question must be asked, does a person need to travel away from his or her home

church to learn to fear the Lord? The answer is, No! And it is NO every time the question is asked. Spiritual Jerusalem has no geographical location. Rather, its walls are of living stones in whom are the doctrines of Christ. God sets His name wherever two or more are gathered. It is a mistake to use physical Jerusalem as the lens through which spiritual Israelites worship God.

Likewise, it is a mistake to create multinational, autocratic, top-down governing institutions within the Body of Christ. Associations of fellowships are commendable. But the Bride of Christ needs to keep Her eyes on Christ, not on other men. She needs to keep a spiritual focus, what the 2nd tithe actually shows.

While Paul certainly traveled at feast time, and tried to return to Jerusalem, we don't find Paul commanding entire congregations to travel to Jerusalem. But in the Millennium, the families of the earth shall up to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Booths (Zech 14:16-19). When this passage is coupled to, "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose" (Deu 16:16), what becomes evident is that representatives of all of the families of the earth shall appear before God three times a year, with Jerusalem being the only named place at this time where God has chosen for Millennium observance. So making a pilgrimage to a location where God has placed His name fits Scripture. However, under the spiritual application of passages that are undeniably physical, God the Father has placed His name wherever two or more disciples are gathered in His name. Therefore, under the new covenant, where local congregations assemble on the weekly Sabbath is also where God has placed His name for annual Sabbath observance. No one has to travel halfway around the world to arrive at an exotic feast site to learn to fear the Lord.

The Church of God's traditional teaching that saints should save a full ten percent of the saints' yearly income for the purpose of attending the holy days cannot be well supported from Scripture although retention of a festival tithe is commanded. The context indicates that this festival tithe is a tithe of a tithe, or "some of the first of all the fruit of the ground" (Deu 26:2). Therefore, as an administrative decision, disciples should save a tithe of the tithe (1%) of the disciple's increase

for the purpose of learning to fear the Lord where He places His name. This tithe of the tithe was returned to the tithe payer by the Levitical priesthood after the full tithe was paid. It is, therefore, unacceptable for the individual tithe payer to determine what percentage of the tithe will be 2nd tithe. The tithe payer is to bring the full tithe to the ministry, who then becomes responsible for returning the 2nd tithe to the tithe payer.

Other fellowships will need to make the administrative decision of how to handle this festival tithe; i.e., whether to collect only nine percent, or to collect ten percent then return one percent, as is the Scriptural example.

The 3rd tithe is the tithe paid on the third and sixth years of a seven year cycle. It is not an additional tithe, but a different destination for the single tithe. While nine tenths of the tithe for years one, two, four, and five were to go to the temple, the tithe of years three and six supported the Levite, and all who resided in Israel without an inheritance. While an argument can be sustained that under the new covenant, the support of the ministry and the work of evangelism are the same, thereby making no distinction between the years of the tithe, as a matter of faith—since tithing is a salvational issue—these moneys should be kept separate. The ministry needs to be supported as God provides the increase to disciples, but the work of evangelism has the higher priority to available tithe moneys.

The linguistic icon "tithe" is used in context with firstfruits, first born, and other offerings. In its old covenant usage, the person producing the tithe also partakes in consuming the tithe, while remembering the resident Levite. Thus, the icon acquires sufficient vagueness that administrative decisions regarding tithing are necessary; yet, all of the tithe is holy to God (Lev 27:30). Therefore, under the new covenant, the tithe remains holy. But only one tithe is paid, not two or three. A feast tithe can be consumed by the saint at where God has placed His name—and that isn't on every hill and in every grove, nor is it at every national vacation destination. It is, rather, where genuine saints assemble together for Sabbath services. And it is there where the ministry should return to the tithe payer his or her feast tithe, or 2nd tithe. This would have been in the form of feeding tithe payers during High Day observances. This would still be an appropriate

means of returning the feast tithe. To use the feast tithe for any other purpose is problematic, regardless of what the past practices have been of the formerly most visible administration of the Church of God.

Not understanding the spiritual nature of the new covenant, the formerly most visible administration of the Church taught that the feast tithe should be used by disciples to live as that administration imagined saints would live in the Millennium. The emphasis was on physical prosperity. Protests to the contrary have the locations of feast sites, with very few exceptions, arguing against disciples primarily coming to the Feast of Tabernacles to learn to fear the Lord. Festival brochures were published that emphasized the vacation potential of each location. And the practices of the splinter organizations that have derived from this formerly most visible administration have these organizations choosing the most exotic vacation spots possible for their Feast of Tabernacles sites. It is hardly a coincidence that most of them choose at least one location near Disney World.

Question: if God places His name at Disney World as He had at Jerusalem for the purpose of disciples learning to fear Him, why does He need so many competing sites within a few miles of each other? Wouldn't one site be enough? And if it were enough, which site, or whose site would it be? Or is it possible that God hasn't placed His name at any of the temporary sites?

Concerning the poverty tithe which has been called the 3rd tithe (Deu 14:28-29), paying this tithe is a form of worshiping God that expresses love to those individuals who are without resources. A minister fully employed in the work of proclaiming Christ doesn't have time to earn an additional income. It is also used to support the dependent, regardless of the reason for their dependency. It is the full tithe, suggesting that on the third and sixth years, the feast is handled differently. When it has been fully paid, the tithe payer can ask God for a special blessing. Under the new covenant, the blessing will be spiritual, but my observation is that a terrific number of couples have a child after their third tithe year.

It is easy to spiritualize away the promises of God that have material benefits coming from paying tithes and giving offerings into a ministry. None of us can see what treasure we

have stored in heaven; so a charlatan can beg offerings while assuring a disciple that he or she is storing up treasure in heaven. A televangelist will promise a material blessing for the sowing of a large enough seed, knowing that the law of coincidence will cause some of his or her audience to continue sending in donations. The audience that these televangelists milk doesn't seem to be expanding. Rather, moneys that once would have gone to a local church now are being sown in "better ground," as if giving offerings to God equates to buying lottery tickets.

The parables of the pounds and of the talents suggest that as long as the person has put his or her pound or talent out to the bankers, the person has resolved the salvational issue, but if the person has sown into the soil of this world, the person won't receive much interest. The person faces spiritual poverty when judged. So it behooves a person to determine as best as the person can where God works—and it becomes self-serving to say more about who is doing the work of God at this time.

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