

Fundamentals of Belief #13A: Why God's Holy Days?

Edited Sermon Transcript
Jon W. Brisby; 2-24-2001

As you might expect, this afternoon we are going to continue with the very long series we have been involved in on the Fundamentals of Belief of the Church of God, The Eternal. I decided long ago to go through each of these fundamentals one by one, because over time I have heard a lot of comments and requests from certain brethren as we traveled around the country. When visiting different people, they would ask fundamental questions and express an interest in a rehearsal of some of the basics we believe in the Church.

Growing up in the Church, you just know and accept a certain number of things, but if you go back and spend time with the old articles and literature that was written years ago, there is a lot of very important information. With the new people who have come into the Church and those who are not as familiar or have forgotten a certain number of substantiations for those fundamental doctrines, I decided that it was an excellent time to go back and do a rehearsal. I thought we should get into the meat and potatoes of the foundation of those doctrines we believe.

What better place than to turn to the actual list of the fundamentals of belief? We have called this the Fundamentals of Belief of the Church of God, The Eternal, but the very first twenty of the twenty-six fundamentals on our list are the original fundamentals that were written by Mr. Armstrong. They are exactly identical to the Fundamentals of Belief of the Radio Church of God. Why did we expand them from twenty to twenty-six?

Well, we will get to those. We are only up to fundamental number thirteen right now. Those additional six were added because of circumstances that have existed and events that occurred within the Church since the apostasy of the early 70s. Those things make it more relevant than ever. The newer crises and considerations that have come up needed to be addressed. That is why those things have been added.

A number of those later fundamentals do not include anything new or different. They are simply those things that Mr. Armstrong did not feel the need to list as fundamentals, although they certainly have been fundamentals from the very beginning.

We do have twenty-six fundamentals. We have now come to number thirteen. I would like to read that fundamental for you:

We believe the seven Annual Holy Days as given to ancient Israel by God through Moses, kept by Christ, the Apostle Paul, and the New Testament Church, as evidenced by the books of Acts and Corinthians, are to be kept today. The sacrifices, which were added, are not to be kept on those days nor any other day of the year. During the spring festival of seven days, leavening in any form is not to be eaten, as Paul instructed the Corinthians.

That is fundamental number thirteen. As you realize, we have just completed fundamental number twelve, which included several sermons I did on the weekly Sabbath and the significance of the weekly Sabbath in the overall plan of God. We studied the command to keep it and what it signifies in picturing the coming Millennium—Christ's world-ruling government yet to arrive on the face of this earth. It is followed immediately by fundamental number thirteen concerning the annual Holy Days, all of which are the Feasts of the Eternal.

I want to do something a little bit unusual in approaching the subject of the Holy Days. Rather than immediately launch into the commands that we depend upon to show the significance of those Holy Days (as far as the commands and requirements to keep them), I want to begin in a totally different way. I want to ask first, "What is the significance of those Holy Days?"

Yes, we are going to get to the scriptures on the commands. I am going to give you all the evidence we always had over all of those years to show that the

Holy Days are required for Christians today. They are absolutely commanded by God and have not been done away with, as we already saw with the weekly Sabbath.

Let's begin by asking, what is the significance of the Holy Days at all? Why are they important? Why are they something that we should not only be willing to keep, but that we should also be willing to relish and love? If I can lay out for you the significance of how valuable those Holy Days are to begin with, then I think it will make it a lot more meaningful.

Today, if I can, I want to try to get you to go back and remember the time you first became aware of those Holy Days. Maybe it was from the first time you became convinced of the value of those days and what they meant to you personally. What is the significance of God's annual Holy Days which we have kept for so many years?

We have to first put them in context of all of the other religions extant on the face of the earth today. There is no other religion today that can answer the hard questions that plague mankind. For those of you who were members of other churches of the world and came to the knowledge of the truth after you were an adult, then you have, within your background and history, the understanding of that transition which occurred in your thinking—when you first came to understand the truth and how different it was from what you were taught in the other churches of the world.

As all of you know, I am a Church brat, as I call myself and those who have been raised in the Church. We have known nothing else except that way of life, and we have kept the Holy Days from the time we can first remember. So it is a little bit different for us, as far as our recollection of our calling and how those things became significant in our lives. Certainly, those of you who were converted as adults and have been in the Church for years and years, understand that transition and how important the knowledge of the Holy Days became in your thinking at some point.

No other religion can answer the hard questions that plague mankind today. You have got every concept of men's thinking extant in those other religions. They try to answer the questions of why there is so much violence, hatred, and evil upon the face of this earth. I think so-called Christianity is probably the one religion that answers it least well. The Eastern religions have their concept of yin and yang. At

least they try to come up with a good explanation for why there is evil. They explain it as the complimenting forces of good and evil have to stay in balance. They seem to have the concept that evil is a necessary part of the world. Other religions like Hinduism and Buddhism exercise the concept of stages. The Hindus believe you have to go through different reincarnations to achieve perfection. They explain evil and the problems and difficulties in this life by saying that those are lower incarnations of beings at a lower level. So they expect to have a mixture of good and evil by the way that they describe the world. That is their opportunity to try and explain why they have not been able to achieve utopia. None of these religions has achieved that which they dearly desire.

Then, there is Christianity. Christianity attempts to explain that we are all in a war between Satan and God. They are struggling at this very moment for the souls of men, and who is going to win? It answers very few questions, and certainly not well at all, for those who have a desire to really know God, to understand, and to put into perspective the things being played out upon this earth.

Why the famine? Why the abuse of children? Why the killing? Why the problems, hatred, and wars? Why all of the misery being played out in nation after nation, people around this earth experiencing all of these horrible things? "If there is a God," you will hear people say, "why does He allow these things to happen?"

How have the traditional churches of this country and others—those who claim to be Christians—answered those questions? Well, they really can't. If you believe what they tell you about man's hope of going to heaven and the current struggle between Satan and God, you would have to conclude that Satan must be winning. If anything, the people of this earth are growing further away from the God they claim to believe, not nearer to Him.

If you believe there is an all-powerful God who is working out a plan, what is that plan? He seems to be absent, does He not? When you see the proliferation of the filth and evil, especially that this country seems to be leading the way with, where is God and how is He really being manifested?

The concepts of so-called Christians today do not answer those questions whatsoever. For those of you who came into the Church, who were called and had your minds opened by a revelation through Jesus Christ, you received for the first time the answer that has escaped the rest of the world. You were told and taught

the real explanation of what God is doing upon this earth and how He is really working to save mankind. It is not anything like you were taught in these other churches.

It is the only explanation that fits exactly with what we read in the Bible. It does not contradict anything we find in the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. It paints a beautiful picture—a mosaic—with every piece fitting together perfectly to show exactly what God is doing by His will and determination. It is the confirmation that there is a living God and He is working out an incredible work on this earth. He is not idle; He has not hidden Himself; His will is being done, even in the midst of the chaos, evil, trials, and problems we see and read about in the news. All of those things are being allowed for reason.

If we believed, like the other churches of the world, that God is attempting to save everyone right now, you would have to conclude He is failing miserably. Yet, it is that special knowledge that you and I have—not because of anything that is good within us, but because we have been given it as a priceless gift—that answers those questions and gives us the opportunity to have peace of mind, harmony, and contentment, even in the midst of turmoil and trial.

It is those things, brethren, which are manifested in God's annual Holy Days. It is the Holy Days that lay out the specifics of the plan God is carrying out, even right now, which makes everything fit together harmoniously. It makes sense.

Why keep the Holy Days? Yes, they are a command. They are God's Feasts, and if we are going to obey Him, He commanded us to convoke before Him in the place where He has placed His name. We learned the value of the Holy Days in keeping them; but when we mature as Christians, we come to value and desire them because they do give us that confidence. They do give us the picture that tells us why we are here, what this life is all about, and how everything is being worked out according to His perfect plan and purpose.

The promises of heaven and inheriting heaven are empty in today's churches. The evil present in this world challenges the faith of those who think God is trying to save everyone right now. The truth, manifested in the Holy Days that God really did give to His Church, gives us confidence and contentment, no matter what difficulties or circumstances we may be living in.

To begin, let's turn to Matthew 10:34. This is a scripture that I don't hear too many of these other churches quote. It doesn't seem to fit with their preconceived ideas and assumptions about God's work on this earth.

Matthew 10:34:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." That time of peace is going to come, but it is the final step of the plan, after Jesus Christ returns the second time. It is not the time of peace right now. Those who are going about trying to initiate their own brand of peace, their own utopia, are going to fail miserably. It is simply not going to happen. There will be no peace on this earth outside of the perfect plan God has structured and is actuating in the lives of men.

In Luke 12:49–57, we find an expansion of this very concept through the words of Jesus Christ:

I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division . . .

How contradictory this seems to those who have a concept in their minds about Christ—who He is and what He is. Christ says here that He came to give division. That is not the typical concept you hear about Jesus Christ, is it? Yes, He is perfect in love and in every fruit of the Holy Spirit, but His purpose and plan includes a demonstration of the power of God as opposed to the will of human beings—to prove once and for all that over the six thousand years of our history and dominion on the earth, we cannot create that peace without Him. We cannot have that perfect unity and the fulfillment of good things that men seek separate from the perfect laws of God.

Christ said that now is the time for division—to show the division that occurs between Satan's evil way as he manipulates the minds of human beings who are already very much in tune with him and opposed to and separated from God, Jesus Christ, and His perfect law.

By raising up the Church and doing that work, there is a stark contrast that occurs on the scene. Hatred, enmity, and division occur between those who have

been given a down payment of the Holy Spirit, who are beginning to walk in newness of life according to those laws, statutes, and judgments, and who are opposed to the rest of the world.

It is a time of contrast now, brethren, when God's ways, even through a very small Church of those who have been called, are facing the ridicule and hatred that comes from an adversary who hates everything that is a part of God and His way.

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?

Is that not exactly what is going on in the activities of human beings? They are attempting to justify and explain the circumstances they see happening among men upon this earth, but they have ignored every sign that God has given. They reject every sign that a living God exists and rules whose will is being carried out. They reject every law that governs humanity and say they don't exist at all.

Those laws concerning the Sabbath and Holy Days are part of those immutable laws that God set to govern the activities of men. They were given as a blessing to those whom He would call, who would love that way. However, they are a curse, an absolute abomination, to those who are separated from God and hate that truth. They can only be understood by those who have had their minds opened through a great miracle.

Those of you before me and under the hearing of my voice have that priceless opportunity today to understand, to be called out, and to receive the blessings from obedience to those laws. The Holy Days paint the glorious picture of what God is doing. No matter how much misery, pain, anguish, and suffering you see around us

in the world today, it does not have to cause you to doubt. You do not have to become discouraged. You do not have to wonder if there really is a God in heaven; and if there is, is He a God of love or is He a God of hate and indifference?

Your faith does not have to be shaken as the faith of all those in other religions who wonder, *Can any of the things I believe about God be true?* The God that you have been called to love and obey has given you an opportunity to understand His real purpose. It is revealed through those annual Holy Days that we keep year after year.

Those Holy Days are a blessing, brethren. It is not just a command God has given us in order to see if we will jump through hoops. That is why I don't want to begin by going through those commands. I want, instead, to try and instill within each one of us a remembrance of the value of why those things are to be relished, why those days are Feast Days, and why they can and should be a joy in our lives. They answer the questions that plague mankind today. You have the answers that no one else has. I think it is sometimes easy for us to forget that. It is easy for us to take for granted the knowledge we have. It is time for us to remember and relish again those truths we were given.

Another false assumption which is very prevalent among religions, especially false Christianity, is the idea that human nature is inherently good. They want to believe that human beings inherently have something of worth and value. If you just get them in the right environment, with the right training and the right instruction, human beings will do the right thing. They will desire truth; they will desire to be honest and to help their fellow man; and we ultimately can create a society and environment for our living that can be very glorious, beautiful, and rewarding. If we can just channel the "good part" of our human natures in the right way, we can achieve that utopian society.

So they set about to save the world and to turn people on to Jesus. They think if they can just make a difference, how glorious this world can be. What did Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, say about human nature?

Romans 3:10–18:

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they

have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Yet, human beings still go about attempting to convince themselves and one another that we inherently do have good qualities within us. But we are told, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, absolutely not.

The first step in beginning to understand what God is doing is to understand what we are. That was part of that initial revelation we received when we were first called—to understand that we are not good little boys and girls deep down inside. God created us with a nature that is totally antagonistic against the truth. By nature, we each despise the things that are good; and, therefore, of ourselves, we can never create harmony, peace, unity, oneness, or a happy society. Those things come from God's truth. They come through the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and human beings by nature are separated from that Spirit in every way. We will never achieve it on our own.

Part of that great plan God is working out was for man to have dominion on this earth for six thousand years. The rejection of the truth that God offered at sundry times is proof positive through history that, without God, His intervention, humbling ourselves, and rejecting the natural natures within us, we will never achieve good things. We will only pay the penalties that come from disobedience and following our own minds and thinking.

When Jesus Christ returns and that perfect government is established upon this earth, there is not a single question of those who are then called that will not be able to be answered. I have used this as an example before, but I can just see the questions coming up. "Christ, if you had only called me, if you had only allowed me to understand, I would have loved and embraced it. All you had to do was take this veil off my mind, and I would have done the right things."

Ancient Israel wrote the examples in the Bible, as has the Church of the last days, to prove that it is not true. All of those questions will be able to be answered at that time by looking at the history of those who did have their minds opened. Without the Holy Spirit, without the calling and the power of the mind of Jesus Christ living within us, there is no way, even with the knowledge of the truth, that human beings can succeed.

Israel had it, did they not? They had the very truth that came from Christ Himself as God of the second part. Christ, the God of the Old Testament, gave that law, those commands, statutes, and judgments through a chosen servant—Moses. They had the perfect truth given to them, not on a silver platter, but on two tables of stone. They received, through the writing of Moses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the interpretation and applications of those laws.

They had the truth, but that knowledge in and of itself was not enough to make them happy or to give them success, because Israel miserably failed. So it would be with any human being. It wasn't that Israel was an exception in any way. They were perfectly reflective of the human state. Any human being, even given knowledge, even given truth, but without the power of the Holy Spirit to guide his life in a different direction, is not going to be successful.

When Christ returns, no human being is going to be able to challenge Him by saying, "God, if you only would have allowed me to know the truth, I could have been happy, and I would have obeyed." No, Israel proved that it just doesn't work that way. There has to be a conversion in mind. There has to be an acceptance, a humbling of the self, and a crying out to God to give us the power of the Holy Spirit which provides the missing ingredient. What is that missing ingredient? Faith. Faith is what Israel lacked, as we read from Hebrews 4.

So what does this have to do with the Holy Days? The Holy Days show God's perfect plan, because He made us; and it is through the Holy Days that we see why the six thousand years of suffering. We see why a loving God who is supposedly full of mercy and longsuffering would allow billions of people upon this earth, generation after generation, to continue to go on in a state of sorrow, misery, and evil. Would a loving God really work that way?

It is through the understanding of the picture presented through the Holy Days that we come to understand. We begin by understanding human nature, and what is required in character building for a human being to really separate himself from what he is by nature and to embrace instead a totally different way. Those six thousand years of misery and pain are there for a reason. They are absolutely necessary for men to learn.

Character is going to be built. Billions and billions are going to be added to a glorious eternal family, but it is going to be because of the creation of perfect and holy righteous character. Understanding that we cannot do it on our own creates that character. We are going to have to embrace the very nature of God and Jesus Christ

and admit that it is inherently not within us; otherwise, there would be the great likelihood of more Lucifers turning into Satan the Devils. God is not going to allow that to happen. Lucifer, as a perfectly created being, was created without perfect character, as all the angels were. The angels had to ultimately make their choice whether they would obey, really love God, serve Him, and remember their place, or whether they would assume they had something of value more important within themselves. Lucifer failed because he began to take for granted and to attribute to himself the gifts God gave.

It is the same test for every human being. We are each born with that exact proclivity, and God is not going to have a universe full of immortal beings who turn into Satan the Devils. In His perfect love, mercy, and desire for our success, He has created us flesh and blood. We have the opportunity to prove whether we will love and embrace the truth and develop that righteous character to be God's subjects forever, or if the latent tendencies to justify self and to take credit for God's work within our own lives will cause us to fail.

A six thousand year plan, ending in the seven thousandth year represented by Christ's Kingdom on this earth, is absolutely a perfect and glorious plan. It is the means by which God is going to create a family of billions of spirit beings living in perfect harmony, unity, and peace forever. By keeping the Holy Days, we came to understand how God is specifically working that plan out.

Men try to fool themselves that human nature is good, but every single day, not only the fruits in our own lives, but also those we see around us prove otherwise. The religions of this world try to explain away what we are seeing with our own eyes day after day. It cannot be explained by anything other than God's truth.

That truth and that way of life, brethren, has only been given to a chosen few of us to understand. He has called a chosen few, not because we were worth more—not at all—but because God made choice. I am personally very thankful that He opened my mind. I thank Him daily for the call, and I try not to take it for granted, although it is so easy to do. I do try to remember every day to thank Him for calling me and placing me within the Body of His Church. I am not worthy of it. There is certainly nothing good within me. I know that I would be just like these other people I see on the streets everyday and on the news if it had not been for His will and determination to open my mind, give me the training, and, somehow, the love for that way of life.

I know He has worked in each one of your lives in exactly the same way. If we recognize that it doesn't make us better whatsoever, but it is only by His choice—and who knows why, but yet, He did choose—that we are here together and have an opportunity to live the benefits of that way of life today. Even in the midst of the turmoil and the things going on in this world, we can have that inner peace and contentment that comes from understanding what those laws and statutes are and how valuable they are as a pearl of great price.

The Holy Days are incredibly significant because that is the building block. The Holy Days show those pieces put together of all the work God is doing.

Let's notice Luke 10:21. We are talking about the concepts of this world, especially false Christianity, that attempt to save the world today by thinking all they have to do is get people to embrace the name of Christ and say, "I believe." You are then going to waft up to heaven when you die, sit on a cloud, and play a harp. That is supposed to be the great source of solace, anticipation, and joy for human beings. It holds nothing compared to what God really has in store.

Luke 10:21–24:

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.

No one can know the Father or Son, except by a miracle, an intervention, an act of God to open a mind and reveal. Yet, that is not what the world believes at all. They are all out proselytizing, trying to get you and your neighbors to embrace Jesus through their television programs, magazines, and "ministries." They want you to find and discover God, but they reject the very principles we understand: that a human being cannot embrace God and believe the truth, except for a call, a divine miracle, a revelation on that mind.

. . . no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have

desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

It has nothing to do with being smart. The discovery of truth, the understanding of the secrets of the universe and God's plan for mankind, has nothing to do with being intelligent. It has nothing to do with being wise or elite in any way. Every mind of human beings has been blinded; that truth has been hidden and revealed only to those whom God has chosen.

Notice 1 Peter 1:9–12:

Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you . . .

We are speaking here of the prophets of old, who were the men of God and who were called for a purpose and given the words they wrote. We think of these men as being incredibly great and devout and close to God, and so they were. They penned the very words of God. They were motivated by the Holy Spirit to write them in a book, and we have those words—that which we call the books of the Bible—preserved and carried forward through time.

Yet, we find here that those men did not even understand, by and large, the things they wrote. They did not understand because, in spite of the fact God used them, it was not for their time or understanding. Therefore, it wasn't their prowess, strength of mind, or personal wisdom in any way that gave them the opportunity to understand truth or to decipher the very books of the Bible. Even those who penned them with their own hands did not understand anything about what they really meant.

So many human beings and so-called scholars of today think they are going to pick up the books of the Bible, and with their concordances, lexicons, and commentaries, they are going to figure out truth, when the very men whom God used to record those books didn't even understand them. It is arrogance on the part of human minds to think we do not need a revelation from God to understand those miraculous words.

. . . the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

Don't those books of the Old Testament contain exactly that? The prophets foreshadowed the very sufferings and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Not only that, but the glory of His Second Coming, the establishment of that Kingdom, the time when the laws would be those that govern all nations and all peoples, and when that unity, harmony, and peace would reign absolutely in the dominions of the nations of this earth. Yes, it is all there. It is all written.

". . . when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." What glory? The very glory that is pictured by the Holy Days we keep year after year.

Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy [Spirit] sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Even the angels of heaven, spirit beings serving at the very throne of God, do not understand all of those things that have been preserved and given to you, brethren. How special should that make you feel? Not because you are inherently better than any other human being, but because God did choose you; He called you out and gave you this priceless gift. If we love and value it, how much opportunity is there to be gloriously fulfilled, to have that peace and contentment of mind and heart even in the midst of turmoil, trial, and difficulty? We can have it.

The glorious angels were not given the gift of that understanding. The prophets who wrote them were not given the understanding to be able to see the whole picture laid out of what God was working. Yet, here you are as members of the Church—God's priceless sheep, His people—and you have been given this priceless, glorious opportunity to understand that truth. How valuable is that way to you? How easy is it for us to take it for granted?

For those of us who have been in the Church for years and years, who have been keeping the Holy Days for a number of decades, it can become very mundane. Another Holy Day season, another year of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, followed by Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day.

How easily we can begin to take it for granted and forget how priceless that knowledge is. We are in the midst of a world who would love to understand the

things you know. Do you really relish that truth and how much of a blessing you have received by your understanding of the meaning of the Holy Days and what they represent?

The angels don't understand it. The prophets of old didn't understand what they were writing. They were writing those things for you whom God would call, those who have been placed in the Church—the very Body of Jesus Christ.

Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves [They wrote them, but it was not for them at all.], but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you . . .

Take note of this, brethren. How is it that you have received that understanding and truth? He certainly opened your mind, if you have any affinity at all for this way of life, for the keeping of the Sabbath, the Holy Days, and the other statutes and commandments of God. It is because He opened your mind in an incredible, special miracle. But what happened after that? Did He open your mind and then say, "Sit down with your Bible, and I am going to unfold to you directly everything that is contained here for you to see"? Is that how He worked in your life? How did you receive the truth?

". . . by them that have preached the gospel unto you . . ." There was a preacher, brethren. There was the foolishness of preaching. You heard a human servant somewhere, and it was through that voice, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that those things began to be opened to you.

". . . by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy [Spirit] sent down from heaven . . ." I don't think any one of us heard Jesus Christ come in His eternal state into our own rooms and homes and teach us in the same way He taught Paul in the desert for three years. I don't think any of us heard it that way, did we? Yet, we were called, and yes, we did receive a knowledge of the truth, but it was by the preaching of that gospel through chosen servants whom God elected to use for His purpose.

It is especially sad, brethren, to wonder where the thousands are who once knew, believed, and practiced those things, who were a part of that parent body—that original Church of the last days. Where are they now? They are either scattered amidst over 230 splinter groups, or they are not affiliated with any at all—they disappeared into the woodwork.

In a recent article we got, as that church was featured on the front page of the Wall Street Journal this week, rehearsing the work of Mr. Herbert Armstrong—of course, in the wake of a current legal battle going on between the Worldwide Church and one of the other splinter groups—even the reporter of this article made a comment about the number of people, over 100,000 members, and the number of splits that are extant today from that Church. He even commented on the fact that there are many of them watching this case, not because they are affiliated, but because they have a respect for a certain element of those things that were taught originally by Mr. Armstrong, even if they are not affiliated with the group today. It struck me—and Mr. Cole and I discussed it—how interesting it is that they even recognize an element of what that division has been like.

Where are the thousands who are not even affiliated with any of these 230 groups today? They are ones who once embraced it; loved something that captured their attention; devoted themselves, their lives, and their families to keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days and to the fellowship that came within that body. Where are they now? God is going to bring them back. There is a day that is a part of that hope we have—the explanation of that plan God is working out, told by the very Holy Days. It has a very glorious ending. We know that God's people are going to be restored into that one Body again. It is just a matter of time. We don't have to doubt. We don't have to despair. We don't have to worry. His timing is perfect. It always has been, and it always will be.

Romans 10 tells us how God works. Many of those at this present time have embraced concepts of deception. They want to do it on their own, after having been disappointed by the ministry of that body who should have taken care of the sheep. They should have sacrificed themselves, but instead, as it was prophesied, they took advantage of them for their own benefit. They merchandised and abused them, and I know even a number of you have your own scars from those things.

There was something about you—something you loved in that way that caused you to hold on in spite of the failures of men. Unfortunately, there are many who now reject the concept that God works through a chosen ministry, because too many of the ministers failed. Too many of them abused their responsibilities and set a bad example, and therefore, all authority is being rejected wholesale. Now, they are just going to do it themselves with God. *Just you and me, Lord; I don't need any ministry. I have my Bible, and I am going to depend upon you to directly inspire me through your Holy Spirit.* Is that the way God works?

Romans 10:12–15:

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. [Sounds at first like it is pretty easy to accept Christ, doesn't it? All you have to do is call on Him.] For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

This is the very premise of all of these other Christian groups who are out there trying to save the world with their false concept of God's plan on this earth today. All they have to do is get you to call upon the name of the Lord, and then you are in the bag. Your spot in heaven is all sewn up, and you're ok. Then, they move on to the next, trying to save as many souls as they can and take them out of the hands of the Devil.

". . . whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call . . ." Uh-oh, sounds like we are getting ready to see some conditions and further clarification of what is required in order for any human being to call on the name of God. It is not just as easy as rolling off a log. No, God has designed some rules that go along with it.

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" Oh, so I can't just use the name of Christ. You are saying I have to really believe in Christ. Ok, so all I have to do is say, "I believe." Is that enough? ". . . and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?"

Hasn't everyone heard the name of Christ? Hasn't anyone who wanted to heard the name of Christ preached by all of these ministers and missionaries all around the world? That can't be what we are talking about, otherwise everyone would be saved, wouldn't they? That is not what it means to believe at all.

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

You mean it requires someone to stand up and speak in the name of God before someone can hear, respond, believe, and then truly call on the name of God? So, any of us who wants to can just go out, stand up, and preach Christ. No, one last condition.

And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

It requires someone to be sent, brethren. It requires someone to be sent by God. It means God wills, and He selects specifically. He determines that He is going to select a man or men; they are going to be His representatives and speak through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the voice of those human agents, as weak as they are humanly, God is going to do a work. The truth is going to be proclaimed, and those whose minds God has opened—even the very few on the face of the earth today—will hear and respond to that preaching. Not the words of a man at all, but the very words of the living God through those men, by the power of the Holy Spirit. What is that message, brethren, of the called and chosen ministry, whoever and wherever they are?

". . . preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" That is the gospel message God delivered through His chosen servants, even in the last days. It was glad tidings of good things—the good things to come with the coming Kingdom of God, when Christ will rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords upon this earth.

Glad tidings of good things are all summarized and pictured in the annual Holy Days that we keep year by year. That is what it has to do with. It is those Holy Days that give us the blueprint to explain exactly how God is working, and it was through the preaching of a representative whom God chose that we all came to understand that priceless way.

Brethren, it was specifically the ministry of Mr. Armstrong that gave us the answers to man's darkest questions. Which ones of us, before hearing his voice or reading those writings, understood anything about that perfect plan God is working out, except that we heard it through his ministry? Which ones of us can say we understood the significance of the Sabbath and the Holy Days outside of the fact that it was Mr. Herbert Armstrong's personal ministry that unveiled those things?

Let me tell you what I think is one of the biggest ironies going on right now among the different splinter groups that came out of the Worldwide Church of God. You have got a number of people who totally reject any kind of authority in the Church whatsoever, and I can understand, as I said, because of the mistakes and abuses that occurred within that body. It is a natural, human reaction. How many of

them continue to hold the hope of the coming Kingdom of God, based upon what they heard preached by Mr. Armstrong? Even if they turn around now, chastising and criticizing Mr. Armstrong himself, they hold onto that hope.

I can't tell you the number of people I come in contact with day by day and week by week, who love to criticize Mr. Armstrong and say, "He never could have been the servant of God." They believe a lot of the garbage that has been printed about him over the years, and we are not saying what we know to be true and what is not. But, they say, "I think this is true," or, "If this is true, he never could have been an instrument of God." They take issue with him on so many things he originally taught and wrote that we, as a Church, once accepted to be truth, but that now absolutely have been repudiated in so many different ways. They are using their own wisdom to come up with their own version of the truth. What is ironic is that the number of them who reject Mr. Armstrong, who have terrible feelings toward him, who say all manner of evil things against him, still believe in the picture that the Holy Days represent. They still believe in the times of salvation, as we are going to talk about. They believe in the spring harvest and the fall harvest—that only a few are being called now and given this chance but that the greater number of human beings are not going to be called until after the end of the thousand-year Millennium.

They still believe those things. They believe in the significance of the meaning of Pentecost as the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and Jesus Christ as the wave sheaf. They believe in the significance of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread and accepting Christ and the need to put sin out. They accept the significance of the Feast of Trumpets as the return of Jesus Christ, the Day of Atonement as the reconciliation between man and God, the Feast of Tabernacles as representing that harmonious, glorious thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ, and the significance of the Last Great Day, picturing the time for the opportunity for all of those billions who never understood the truth before.

They still believe the fabric of that picture demonstrated by the Holy Days, but you know what? They will tell you they have no respect for Mr. Armstrong at all, and that they just can't believe he ever could have been God's servant. They will challenge him on everything else. They will criticize in every way and challenge him on the validity of the calendar, the proper keeping of the Holy Days, and on every original doctrine. It just doesn't make sense, because no matter how they want to say it, they never would have understood the picture of what God is working out on this earth. They never would have the hope they do in the salvation that is coming and the reign of Jesus Christ had they not heard and believed the things that came through the ministry of that man.

There are all kinds of things that are written out there saying that Mr. Armstrong never figured out those things on his own—that he stole or borrowed them from other people or churches. If you go to the Worldwide Church of God website in their section on their history, they apologize all over themselves for Mr. Armstrong's original teachings. They do the best job of trying to say that Mr. Armstrong got all of this information from his background, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Seventh Day Church, and from Dugger and Dodd's work. He supposedly got all of the information concerning British Israel from other writers, which I will admit easily that, on those concepts of prophecy, British Israel, and certain last-day interpretations, He was influenced very much by certain other writings. Does that have anything to do with the real truth?

What was the significance of what we learned from Mr. Armstrong? Was it those prophetic interpretations? Was it the concept of seven eras of the Church that applied throughout history from the time of the first Church? Absolutely not. What was the main power and significance of that which we learned? Was it not the gospel, the glad tidings of good things to come, and the coming Kingdom of God—everything pictured in the Holy Days?

Tell me, if you will, one other writer who ever understood the significance of what the Bible teaches about God's plan for salvation. What other church or writer ever understood the times of salvation—that God is not calling all human beings on this earth at the same time and trying to save the world? Who understood that?

These other churches, even the ones that make a pretense for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, never understood it. Most of them didn't have any respect for the Holy Days, let alone keep them. They certainly didn't know what they meant. What about the Jews? Do the Jews understand anything about the plan of salvation just because they keep the Holy Days? Not at all. By and large, the Holy Days to the Jews are memorials of things past. Yes, they recognize the significance of the Feast of Trumpets as pointing to the return of the Messiah, but do they understand who the Messiah is? No. They still think it is going to be, in large part, a human being who is going to be used as an instrument of God to set up a physical kingdom and a rule of the Jews upon this earth. They do not understand whatsoever the significance of the very Holy Days they keep. In most cases, they are memorials of things past.

Who else understood it, brethren? How did you and I come to understand the significance of what those Holy Days picture? For those who want to repudiate Mr. Armstrong as a servant of God and say they have no respect for him, then I challenge

them to dump out of their thinking everything they learned from him. If he were not a servant of God, if there were nothing of value that came through the gift of the Holy Spirit through him, then let's get rid of everything we learned from him, start over, and go look for it somewhere else. Don't hold onto the fabric of the things we learned from him and only from him, and then turn around and tell me he was not used of God. We can't have it both ways. Either he was inspired to give us the very living words of life from Jesus Christ Himself and the knowledge of the picture of what these Holy Days represent, or he was a charlatan. He made them up by himself, and there is no value to it whatsoever. I do challenge any of these who are out there still professing their hope in the plan of God, in the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His Millennial reign, the calling of the uncalled masses, the second resurrection, the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, the opportunity to be born into the God Family (which no one else on this earth understands)—to truly be sons of God in His Family—I challenge any of these others who take exception, criticize, and chastise Mr. Armstrong to give up all of those things and go out and tell me instead what God's plan is and what His purpose is.

If Mr. Armstrong were not the instrument by which God revealed those things, how did he know? Could you have read Leviticus 23 and figured out the significance of the Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day? You won't even see the term "Last Great Day" mentioned there. All it says is an eighth day of the Feast. Could you have figured those things out from your Bible study with your little Bible tools? How did Mr. Armstrong do it? He wasn't even a Bible scholar. How did that man, of all men, come to understand and preach the perfect picture outlined in the Bible from cover to cover about how God is working out the salvation of mankind? It was a miracle. God did use him. He was a chosen servant. Yes, he was weak in the flesh, as we all are. We don't say that Mr. Armstrong was without mistakes whatsoever, especially in his later years, but we can tell you that those things were prophesied as well. The dissolving of that body absolutely was prophesied to occur. In fact, if it had not occurred, if that Church had not broken up, we seriously would have to question whether it was the true Church. The true Church absolutely was prophesied to dissolve. What better way for that Church to go apostate than at the very hand of the man who taught the truth?

Yes, that body did go apostate. It rejected the truth; but we have no doubts about the things we heard, because they changed our lives. The message contained and the gift we received by the knowledge of the Holy Days and what they represent completely changed our lives. What kind of peace of mind do you have by knowing

how to put into place everything you see happening in the world, based upon that overall fabric—that blueprint pictured so perfectly by God's annual Holy Days? That came by the preaching of one, and only one man. I challenge anyone to show me anyone else, prior to the preaching of Mr. Armstrong, who ever understood that perfect plan. He may have gotten certain other concepts, prophetic and otherwise, from other writers, but he certainly couldn't go anywhere to figure out the picture in the Bible of the Holy Days. It was not recorded.

The Holy Days, brethren, do picture God's plan of salvation, the gospel of coming peace, the fulfillment of everything God is working out on this earth for the benefit of mankind.

Turn with me to Colossians 2:16–17:

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come . . .

The new moons signify the beginning of months, which involve the calendar. The calendar is used to determine when those Holy Days fall and when they are to be kept. The weekly Sabbaths and the Holy Days are not memorials of the past; they are shadows of things to come. That is the significance of those days.

Why do we keep the Holy Days? They do picture things that have not yet transpired and those things that are transpiring right now, even in our own lives, as we will see. Even more so, they answer the questions about the future of what is being played out upon this earth and what God's real plan is.

What do these Holy Days actually foreshadow? If they are shadows of things to come, what is it that they are picturing and telling us? What is that great Master Plan revealed through God's Feast Days?

Leviticus 23:1–3:

And the [Eternal] spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the [Eternal] . . .

Whose were they? Were they the Feasts of Moses or the Feasts of the Jews? No. They are God's Feasts—the Feasts of the Eternal.

Concerning the feasts of the [Eternal], which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts. ["These are my Feasts," God says. If they are God's Feasts, if He created them and possesses them, they must be important, don't you think?] Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the [Eternal] in all your dwellings.

We have been through that in the last three sermons, discussing the significance of the weekly Sabbath and what it pictures in the overall plan of God. We saw the command to keep the Sabbath and how to keep the Sabbath to be right in the eyes of God. So that weekly Sabbath is the first of the Feasts listed in Leviticus 23. Then notice, beginning in verse 4, the next Feasts listed are the annual Feasts, as opposed to the weekly Feast. Instead of a Holy Day that falls every seventh day, every week throughout the year, now we have a different, unique classification of Feasts that are going to follow. They are annual Feasts, rather than weekly Feasts.

. . . the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the [Eternal] in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of the [Eternal], even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.

So now, as opposed to a weekly Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week, we are speaking of some unique annual days to be kept in their seasons. Seasons are a function of the year, are they not? They are not days that are observed every week; they come around one time a year in their particular seasons. Notice also, in the possessive form, the seasons were created specifically because of the Holy Days. God's creation was determined around the Holy Days, because again, the Holy Days picture the very plan He is working out. The existence of the earth, human beings, our time of trials, tribulation and difficulty in this six thousand-year period right now—everything—is picturing those things God is working out and which are manifested in the very keeping of His annual Holy Days, those kept season by season.

Notice Genesis 1:14–19:

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years . . .

Those lights in the sky—the sun, moon, and stars—are those bodies that divide day from night. They give us the division of the seasons by the movement of the earth in an orbit around the sun. On its axis, its proximity to that sun creates the difference in the spring, fall, summer, and winter—season by season—as that orbit continues. The moon in its orbit around the earth also denotes the season, because it denotes the beginning of months that are absolutely required in order to know when God's Holy Days fall.

And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

He brought into being these lights—the sun, moon, and stars—and they have a purpose. We have always been taught—and Mr. Cole has given us a number of sermons showing the significance of the relationship of those lights—that the sun represents God and Jesus Christ with their inherent glory and the moon represents the Church, a body that reflects the brightness of Jesus Christ. The moon is a dead body, in that it has no inherent glory. Its glory comes as a reflection of that which comes from God only. There is no value in us—you and me, brethren, or us as a body together in unity. There is no inherent glory physically within us whatsoever. The only value we possess is as we reflect the gift of the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of God. The astrobodies were put in the heavens to speak of the very relationship between man and God. The moon represents the Church, the reflected glory of God—if we are of His Body and if we are being led by the Holy Spirit.

The stars picture and represent the angels, those created beings. Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 15 speaks of the sun, moon, and stars and the differences in their glory. He speaks of the glory of one star versus another, and its relationship to the resurrection. All of these things, brethren, speak of God's plan that He is carrying out for the salvation of mankind, and it is all reflected in those astrobodies you see overhead. They were put there for a reason.

When we read in Leviticus 23 that those Holy Days were ordained, that those annual Feasts were to be kept by God's people in their seasons, it tells you those seasons were created to point to the Holy Days. The Holy Days point out the very plan of God and its significance.

Psalm 104:19:

"He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down." They are there for a reason. They are not just beautiful bodies to look at. It is not just a way of marking time, although they are absolutely the keys to marking time; but why does God have a calendar? What is the significance of the moon to determine seasons and of the calendar, except to allow us to know when the Holy Days are? They are there for us to know exactly when God's appointed times are, when His holy convocations come every year, so that we can be in the place where He has placed His name.

How critical are those Holy Days when you realize that all of the astrobodies in the heavens were put there to point to the Holy Days? I can't tell you the number of, what we call, "calendar dissidents" who are out there now. They once understood the truth and kept the Holy Days with us for years, but now they are out espousing all of their own concepts concerning God's calendar. They reject the Hebrew calendar and say that it was never God's calendar; it was a profane thing that came out of the minds of men. They will tell you, "God's calendar is simple. We believe in the calendar God gave Moses." They reject any authority. They reject that which Mr. Armstrong originally taught. He taught that the one thing God absolutely required of the Jews was that they, without fail, bring the correct calendar down through time so that the Church would have it to know when to keep the Holy Days. Are you going to have to accept that on faith? Yes, you will. Do these who have the dissenting voices that try to convince you of anything else have anything of value or real evidence? No.

Pages and pages and volumes written among the calendar dissenters try to tell you that the Hebrew calendar is profane and that they have the real, simple answer to how to determine the Holy Days. If you accept the fact that Mr. Armstrong was the human servant through whom God revealed the value of the Holy Days (which we have already seen is true because no one else taught it), do you not believe He also would have revealed, at the very same time, the proper calendar required in order for us to keep the Holy Days? Or, do we believe in a God who would reveal to a Church the need to keep Holy Days, but then allow them to have a profane calendar so that they never kept them on the right days?

There are men out there right now who will tell you that they believe Mr. Armstrong was inspired divinely with his knowledge of the Holy Days, but they reject that the Hebrew calendar Mr. Armstrong taught was that which God preserved. You can't have it both ways. If you believe in divine revelation and that Mr.

Armstrong was the servant through whom Christ revealed the truth to the Church, then you have to accept the calendar, because it was integral to that teaching. Make the tree good or make the tree evil. A good tree does not produce evil fruit; neither can an evil tree produce good fruit. It is one way or the other. Christ also said that a spring does not flow both fresh and salt water at the same time.

When Mr. Armstrong laid out for us the value and purpose of the Holy Days, did Jesus Christ, through his ministry, give us the means to keep those days at the right time? Yes, He did. We have absolute faith and confidence in that, whether we can technically substantiate it or not.

We have at least two articles on this subject of the calendar controversy, which go into all the technicalities, but is that really the basis of our faith? No. The basis of our faith is the knowledge that we know what we heard, and it was truth. That calendar was a part of that truth which was revealed, brethren. It was the means by which the Church consistently kept those Holy Days together for almost forty years before the first changes in doctrine began to be made.

Convince me that there is a God who would have revealed the knowledge of the annual Holy Days and His perfect blueprint for the salvation of mankind, but would have allowed us to keep the wrong days for almost forty years. That is what these calendar dissidents would have you believe. It just doesn't add up, brethren.

Our faith can be absolute in the gifts God gave. We don't need to doubt whatsoever, if we know what we heard, by whom we heard it, and the changes it made in our lives.

That should set the stage, brethren, for an evaluation of the specific commands involved with the Holy Days. Next time, we will get into the specific commands and look at some of the technicalities. Hopefully, we can do so, having reaffirmed within our minds the value of those days and of that Master Plan before getting into the technicalities. More, next time.