

CHURCH OF THE
G O D
E T E R N A L

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." – Matthew 24:14

May 27, 2003

Dear Brethren, Co-workers and Friends,

In just under two weeks time, we will be celebrating the Feast of Pentecost. We have understood for decades that out of all the billions of people alive, only a tiny minority has had the priceless privilege of being called today into God's true Church. We understand, of course, that this is not the only day of salvation. Those who are not called in this day and age will be called at a later time. Those, however, who have been called, or who are now being called, are identified as the "firstfruits" (compare Romans 8:23; James 1:18; Revelation 14:4). That we are called the "firstfruits" indicates that others will be called later.

Being part of the first group to be offered salvation is a priceless privilege—one that we must not take lightly.

Acts 2 gives us a ringside seat at what must have been a truly awe-inspiring sight on that fateful day in 31AD, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were all together "with one accord in one place," as we read in Acts 2:1. The Greek word translated as "one accord" means "likemindedness." It shows the unity of purpose that the early disciples had. God would not have given them His Spirit if they had not been unified in approach and goal. The coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by the sound of a rushing mighty wind and cloven tongues like as of fire. That was one of the great moments in Bible history. If the early disciples had not been faithfully and "with one accord" keeping this Holy Day, they wouldn't have been the recipients of God's Holy Spirit at that time.

Today, upon repentance, belief, baptism and the laying on of hands, we can also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). We then have to use and exercise that precious gift. Galatians 5:22-23 clearly shows the fruit that we have to produce after our conversion:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

God's Holy Spirit gives us the supernatural power to help us live the way that Jesus Christ lived some 2,000 years ago. How much do we exercise the Holy Spirit? The fruit of the Spirit is in very short supply today. The world we live in exercises the works of the flesh in an ever-increasing way. The consequences of such wrong actions are there for all to see. Notice how Paul summarizes those works of the flesh, which are prevalent today:

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

We, who are Christ's, are to "crucify the flesh with its passions and desires" (verse 24). We are to "live in the Spirit." We are to "walk in the Spirit" (verse 25), showing the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

As we look forward to this most important annual Holy Day of Pentecost, let us meditate on the fruit of the Spirit and how well we are doing. These Christian attributes of the Holy Spirit are a reflection of how God's mind works, whereas the works of the flesh reflect how the human mind, without God's Spirit, works.

The first Godly characteristic listed by Paul in Galatians 5:22 is "love." Love has been defined as an outgoing concern for the good and welfare of others. Love is something that should be part and parcel of the way that we live our lives. Failure to live up to this basic Christian admonition is a dereliction of our duty as a follower of Christ.

Joy, the second attribute of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned by Paul, is a deep, abiding, inner confidence in the realization that God exists, that He cares for us and that He has a wonderful future in store for us.

The next Christian character trait, peace, is a unique and unparalleled tranquility. A war has just been fought to preserve the peace in the Middle East—yet the suffering and heartache that many have experienced will live with them for the rest of their lives. True peace comes from the One who is utterly reliable in all things, not from mortal human beings.

Paul lists as the fourth Godly attribute the quality of longsuffering—a patient endurance and steadfastness under provocation and forbearance under ill will with no thought of retaliation. This is a pretty good summary as to what our behavior should be. How truly longsuffering are we? God expects of His children the continued practice of longsuffering. As sure as the rising of tomorrow’s sun, one cannot be a Christian and not develop this vital quality.

The next Christian attribute listed is that of kindness. How kind are we to other people, even if they are not kind to us? Are we only interested in treating those with kindness who treat us kindly? A true Christian will possess the quality of kindness toward others, regardless of what reaction he or she may receive from them. One does not have to be a Christian to be a kind individual. Many who are adherents to other creeds, or who may even be atheists or agnostics, may be kind individuals—up to a certain extent. A true Christian, however, must develop the attitude of kindness toward others, no matter what the circumstances.

Goodness, the sixth character trait of the fruit of the Spirit of God, describes our readiness to do good and to put into action the other fruits of the Spirit. When we have goodness in our hearts, we love others, exhibit joy toward them, live in peace with them, and are longsuffering and kind towards them. We are told to do good to everyone, especially to those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

The seventh Christian attribute listed by Paul is the quality of faithfulness. Faithfulness to God the Father and Jesus Christ must be our top priority. In addition, fidelity to our spouse, our children, brethren and friends is a quality that God is looking for us to exhibit. Remember that only those who are called, chosen and *faithful* are truly Christ’s disciples (Revelation 17:14).

Next, Paul lists the character trait of gentleness or meekness. Meekness is not weakness, but controlled strength. A meek person is someone who is piously humble and submissive—qualities that are all too rare today. The world would have you believe that an aggressive approach pays dividends. In the short term this may appear to be the case. This is why we have so much violence, hatred and so many wars in this world—because people think that wars may bring them peace. The lesson to be learned by man is, however, that wars don’t produce peace. Christ told Peter, “Put your sword in its place, for ALL who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26: 52). We are to develop the quality of gentleness or meekness toward others—and this quality is to last for eternity.

The ninth and last character trait of a Christian, as listed by Paul, is self-control—something that most of us have to look at very carefully. We are encircled by a society where all restraint seems to have been cast off. This can rub off on us, if we allow this to happen. We need to make extra efforts to let God develop His attribute of self-control in our lives.

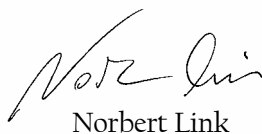
The passage in Galatians 5:23 finishes by stating that “against such there is no law.” The law exists for the purposes of restraint and there is nothing here to restrain. When we let God produce His character attributes in our lives, we are fulfilling His law. For instance, we read in Romans 13:10, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

As we approach Pentecost, we should meditate on our calling. With the gift of the Holy Spirit, God will enable us to develop the fruit of the Spirit, which is so important in a Christian’s life. Those who have been called into God’s Church have been freely given His Spirit and the opportunity for salvation. We are the “firstfruits.” We have a wonderful calling in spite of all the tests, trials and problems that affect so many of us. We are told that we must endure to the end (Matthew 24:13; 10:22; Mark 13:13), and that nothing can separate us from the love of God toward us (Romans 8:38-39). With the help of God’s Holy Spirit, which was made available to the Church on the Day of Pentecost some 2,000 years ago, we can and will persevere.

Our prayer for all of you is that you will have a rewarding, profitable and spiritually uplifting Day of Pentecost.


With brotherly love,


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Dave Harris


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