

August 19, 2004

Dear Brethren and Friends;

As we approach the end of the summer months (I say this with the temperature outside at 96 degrees and just fifty miles to the East of here is Palm Springs with a torrid 106 degrees), we are beginning to move into the period of time of the fall festivals: the Feast of Trumpets, Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

We are anxiously looking forward, with anticipation, to our gathering together with the brethren, in one of two beautifully millennial settings where God's name has been placed for us to observe the Feast this year: 1) The Sea Pines Golf resort in Los Osos, California, located on the banks of Morro Bay on the central coast of California or 2) Chatsworth House, this being the wonderful peak district home of the late Duke who died recently and still the home of the Duchess of Devonshire, located in Derbyshire, England.

We will assemble ourselves together as admonished in God's Word in observance of the eight day festival which we all know as The Feast of Tabernacles; which, in fact, is inclusive of the two separate festivals; of the seven day "Feast of Tabernacles" and the separate festival of God which is called the "Last Great Day."

The four fall festivals noted above portray great events prophesied in God's Word to be coming soon to the earth and will culminate into the wonderful Kingdom of God, with Jesus Christ ruling on the earth for 1,000 years. But before all these events, which are prophesied to affect all the people of the earth, God reveals to us through the prophet, Daniel, that at the time of the end, knowledge will increase and people will be going to and fro over the earth.

But, we must ask the question, is this knowledge which will be increasing in the earth, something that is desirable? Is this increased knowledge something which will move the peoples of the earth closer to their Creator and to the Way of life He has chosen for us to be living? In fact, the Scriptures reveal to us that there is a knowledge which has been given to mankind which is to be desired! But is this desired knowledge, the knowledge that is being referred to as being increased at the time of the end?

The Scriptures also reveal to us that there is a knowledge in the world which leads to grief and sorrow (Ecclesiastes 1:18). God, in fact, in the beginning of man's existence on the earth, introduced to the man and to the woman the fact that there were two approaches to life, represented by the two trees in the midst of the garden; and they must make a choice as to which way they would go (Genesis 2:9, 16-17). And so, we find in the book of Hosea, there would come a time during which knowledge is being increased in the land; at the same time, the prophet Hosea quotes the LORD as saying, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

But what knowledge is Hosea referring to? Surely not the knowledge that is increasing in the land! In the first verse of Hosea 4 the LORD explains what knowledge He is referring to. He states, "There is no truth or mercy or *knowledge of God* in the land." No truth of God's Way! No understanding of God's mercy and the fact that we should be showing mercy as He shows mercy! No knowledge of God, of His Law, of His Truth, or of His Way of life! What is the result of this lack? When there is no knowledge of God, He tells us (in Hosea 4:6) that the people are destroyed!

So, there is a body of knowledge which God refers to as true! This knowledge is revealed knowledge, which comes from God and which builds up the people who have received this revelation. But then, God also shows, there is a body of knowledge which is of this world and is destructive to mankind. It is true that included within this body of destructive knowledge are things which are good. But this body of knowledge also includes things which are evil. And these things are not easily discernable without the true knowledge of God. All of this becomes very clear to those whom God has called and who have had these truths revealed to them and who have God's Spirit leading them in their lives.

Paul understood the value of this body of true knowledge and revealed that fact when he made the statement in Romans 7:7 (KJV) which said, "...I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet.'" Of course, we understand that this law Paul is referring to is one of the Ten Commandments, which existed from the beginning, but which was again revealed to the nation of Israel as God was leading them out of the land of Egypt, where they had been in captivity following the death of Joseph.

But much of the understanding of the Way of God has been lost down through the ages, and, today, we find ourselves in a world pretty much devoid of God and His Truth. We find ourselves living in that time prophesied by Daniel and others when knowledge would be increased. Yet this increased knowledge is not of God and His Way but is the knowledge of this world and its ways, which are a reflection of Satan's ways, he being, at present, the god of this world. God proclaims this knowledge is that which is derived from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and tells us we must come out of that way!

Paul tells us that mankind rejected the knowledge of God which had been given to them. The result was that God allowed their minds to go off into error, which is where the majority of mankind find themselves today (Romans 1:16-28). Even Israel, God's chosen people, had a zeal for God, but that zeal was not according to the knowledge of God (Romans 10:1-2). Thus, Paul admonishes us, in the book of Colossians, that his desire for those God calls is that they be "filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and understanding"; and, that we "...increase in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:9-10).

Paul continues in chapter 3 of the book of Colossians, admonishing us to "Set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:2)." He continues to develop this concept in this chapter showing that we must be renewed in the knowledge of God, giving detailed instructions as to how we are to do this.

Interestingly, Paul, on numerous occasions used a key phrase in his letters to the Thessalonians, to Timothy and to the Hebrews whereby he admonished them at that time, and you and me today, to "hold fast" to that which is good, to the confidence, to the confession, to the pattern of sound words he had delivered to them. He realized the importance of the knowledge God had given to them in opening their minds to receive this knowledge. And he understood how it is so easy, if one is not diligent, to allow one's self to be swayed from these truths.

And John, as he was diligent in recording the words of our Lord in the book of Revelation, noted to three of the last four of the seven churches recorded in Revelation 2 and 3, where Christ specifically admonishes them to continue to "hold fast" to the true knowledge God had revealed to them until His return to this earth to establish the Kingdom. To the church of the Laodiceans, He said only, "be zealous and repent." Apparently, Christ saw they were letting these wonderful truths slip away!

Brethren, we have been called to live this Way of God. This festival season we are about to enter is given to us by our Heavenly Father to provide special time for us to be renewed in the knowledge of His Way, and to grow and increase in God's knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). Let us all take full advantage of this blessing God has given us. Let us prepare our hearts and our minds to receive the Spiritual food God has for us and let's prepare to go to this Feast of Tabernacles and rejoice in the sure knowledge of God and of His Way of life!

Continue to "hold fast," dear brethren!

In Christian love,


J. Edwin Pope