

Keep This God's Feast!

By Clayton Steep

What do you look forward to most at the Feast?

Careful, now! Some would consider this a trick question. Still, it is one well worth thinking about.

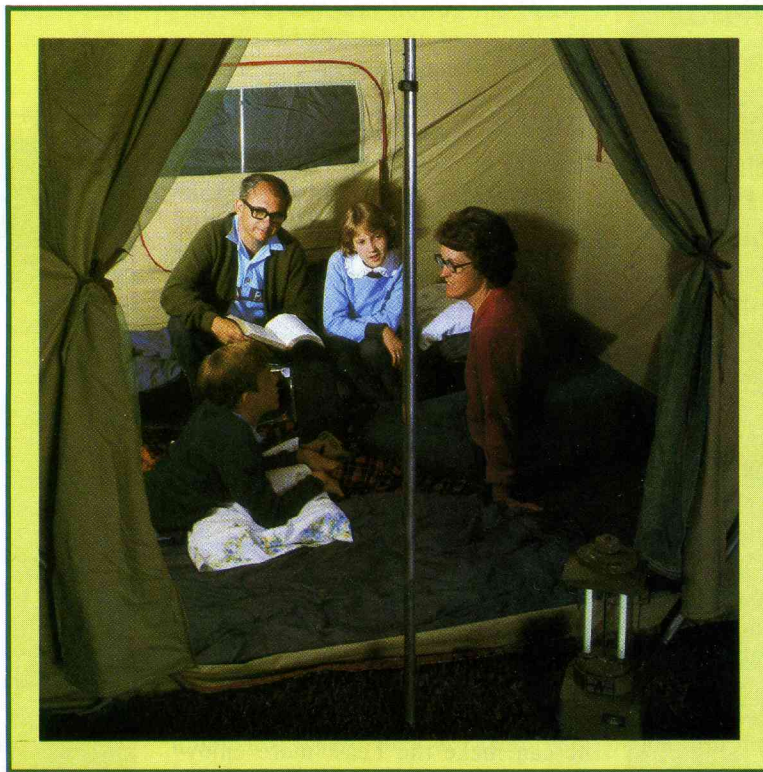
God gave His feasts to us to keep us mindful of the plan of salvation He is working out. The festivals were intended to be periods of spiritual rejuvenation — to bring us nearer to our great Creator, to teach us more perfectly His ways and to give us opportunities to rejoice together in that knowledge.

"Why are we here?" Herbert W. Armstrong continually asks at the Feasts. If the first answer is "to ski," "to sunbathe," "to see relatives or friends," "to travel," "to rest" or to pursue any other physical experience, then something is not right.

Do you know why God was displeased about the way the feasts were observed by His people in the Old Testament?

He was, you know. He declared, "Your [they were no longer God's!] new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them" (Isa. 1:14).

Why was this?



One of the reasons was that while the people *physically* had a great time, *spiritually* their feast keeping was worthless.

Notice how God objected to the way they were celebrating their "feasts":

"Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands" (Isa. 5:11-12).

Yes, they had a ball — a busy, wild whirl of frenetic activities — a constant round of partying and diversion

lasting from early morning to late at night.

But they were too involved in "rejoicing" to have time for God.

We can easily fall into the same trap! When that happens, our "Feast" becomes entirely physical. It becomes a mere vacation like those the world takes. Chances are, after it's over we are tired out, feel like we need a week to "rest up" and may even be sick.

For certain, we are not at the spiritual high point we should be after keeping God's Feast.

How can we avoid having a purely physical Feast?

The answer is simply stated: We've got to put God first during the Feast, just as we must the rest of the year. God wants us to enjoy the Feast physically. But doing so must complement and add to the building of a better relationship with Him.

At Feast time many activities, reunions, things to see and places to go clamor for our time. Obviously we can't do everything. So we must each evaluate our own circumstances and determine which things are most important.

Bible study and prayer should be an important part of the Feast. It's God's Feast. We should talk to Him and let Him talk to us as effectively

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Maybe he felt put down — after all, here was this whole vast universe, and his dominion was only one planet. The Bible does not say how long he dwelt on thoughts like these — it could have been eons — but in the end he decided to abandon God's government and take to himself powers God had not given him.

The result? Read Genesis 1:2: "And the earth [became] without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

"For the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity" (Rom. 8:20).

And that is the exact cause of many divisions between brethren and the Church — vanity. Dwelling on imagined injustices only leads to trouble.

Have you felt wronged by what someone in the Church — a minister, a deacon, a writer in *The Good News*, another member — has said or done to you? Maybe you deserved that responsibility or honor, but someone else got it? You wonder what so-and-so meant when he made that little offhand remark to you? Is it really important?

Will you eventually choose to leave the Church because of it?

Go to your brother (Matt. 18:15). Talk it out. Many times hurt feelings are only the result of poor communication.

God's Church is made up of the begotten members of God's Family — let's all deal with each other in humility, with unselfish, deep love, as befits the future Gods we are.

• *Church leadership.* Many times brethren who leave God's Church do so because they forget about the uniqueness of this spiritual Body and who heads it.

Paul reminded the Ephesians that "There is [only] one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6).

There is only one true Church, and Christ is the Head of it (Eph. 5:23), under God the Father.

Under Christ are those human leaders He has placed in charge: apostles, prophets (of which there are none in the Church today), evange-

lists, pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11).

Through these leaders works the government of God to which we are to respond: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17).

Don't get to feeling that you can "go it alone" without God's Church and the leadership He has placed in it. You can't.

If you are developing a sense of enmity or resentment toward God's leadership, quickly ask God to humble you and help you submit.

It is this organization through which God is working. God will not work with people who forget that.

Hold fast

The pain to the rest of us is great when Satan snatches away one of our brothers or sisters. But God warns that as the end of this age draws nearer, more, unfortunately, will turn aside:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first" (II Thess. 2:3).

This Feast, which pictures the fantastic world just ahead of us, is also a time of self-evaluation. It is a time to examine our spiritual condition, just as we do during the Passover season.

Peter wrote, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things [develop the Christian qualities listed in verses 5-9], ye shall never fall" (II Pet. 1:10).

Remember Paul's words: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

If we are constantly vigilant and growing toward God's Kingdom, which this Feast annually reminds us of, then we can rest assured, because we have a God who "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). What a magnificent promise!

Have a great Feast, and see you next year! □

God's Feast!

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as at any other time of the year — or even more so.

Of course, living in motels, hotels, trailers or tents with others, it may take real resourcefulness to find places and occasions to pray or study. It may not always be possible to spend the same amount of time in undisturbed prayer or study as can be spent at home.

One approach may be to arise early in the morning. This is literally putting God first in the day. Another solution may be to pray short prayers more often during the course of the day, and to keep your Bible constantly handy so you can turn to it often whenever you have a few minutes.

The important point is to keep mindful of God and in contact with Him throughout the whole Feast.

Around December you hear the resolution of the world's religions to "Put Christ back into Christmas." Well, He was never there in the first place! And He never will be in Christmas or in any other of the commercialized pagan holidays. But we are keeping God's feasts. Each of us will do well to resolve to "Keep God in His feasts."

You will find it much easier to accomplish this if you talk about God and His ways in your conversations with other brethren, discussing the sermons, the meaning of the Feast, even including Bible games at some of the parties, rather than talking only about affairs of this life.

God will be looking down upon us as we assemble before Him. Let this be what He sees in all our activities and celebrating and feasting:

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another [about God and His greatness]: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name [as we should do all through the Feast]. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal. 3:16-17).

That is the kind of meaningful Feast that pleases God and that best strengthens us to face the coming year. □