

Original Faith

(Sermon Notes)

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I will be referring to the title—**Original Faith**—a number of times in today's sermon. Brethren, can you imagine what it would be like to be able to travel to one of the congregations of the first-century Church of God? You would encounter first-generation Christians taught possibly by the apostle Paul, or one of the other original apostles. They had the **Original Faith**.

Those who were of Israelitish stock would have grown up with the Old Testament scrolls. They would have been Sabbath keepers all their lives. They would be very familiar with the annual Holy Days. They would know the Prophets names – and their stories. You might encounter a member or two who even saw and heard Jesus as He preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

However, if you dropped in on the Corinthian brethren, or the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippian, Galatian or any of the Gentile brethren – it would be quite different. They would not know the Prophets, or the expectation of the Messiah. All **12 apostles** had been sent to the Diaspora – the scattered tribes of **Israel** – and, Paul to the **Gentiles**.

Their message was the same – wherever they went. "**Christ crucified**, unto the Jews a **stumbling** block, and unto the Greeks **foolishness** (1Corinthians 1:23)."

"But, unto them who are **called** [by God], both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God**, and the wisdom of God (1Corinthians 1:24)."

All the first-century congregations would have heard the same message about the return of Jesus Christ to establish His Father's **Kingdom of God** over all the earth – and **their part** in it. The first-century congregations sustained and aided the apostles.

What would Sabbath services be like for the first-century brethren? What would the congregations of that time be like? More importantly, what would **their faith** and belief system be like? Would you encounter a people holding the same core belief-set of doctrines **we hold** to today?

Though they lived in what we would call "bible times," they would be just as different from the world around them as our Church of God congregations today are unlike every other form of religion on earth. That is because the true Christian faith traverses the **breach** that divides God's realm from that of mankind. Paul taught them all, "Come **out** of the world and be **separate** from their ways." (2Corinthians 6:17)

In today's sermon we will explore what Jude, the half-brother of Jesus meant when he instructed the Church brethren to earnestly contend for The **original faith** which was once delivered unto the saints. In the Book of Jude we read of a sense of **urgency** – there's an appeal for **zeal**:

Jude 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the **common salvation**, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for **the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints.

“Common salvation” That means that the Gospel message is the **same**. The same for the Jews as for the Greeks. The **same** for the first-century Church, and the **same** for us today. Jude instructed the Church brethren to earnestly **strive** for The **original faith** which was once delivered unto the saints. Earnestly contend and strive for the Original Faith!

Earnestly contend in this verse is the Greek word *epagoñizomai* ep-ag-o-nid'-zom-ahee It means to **struggle** for: to strive like the dickens to obtain the **Original Faith!**

We, the Church of God brethren, are living **near** the very end-time (Matthew 24:14). It behooves each and every generation of Church brethren, not only to obtain the **Original Faith**, but to preach the Gospel to the world until Christ returns. It is most important that the Biblical knowledge that has been learned, be **preserved** and protected for those who follow us.

As we saw in Jude 3, the knowledge of the principles and values of the true faith must be **sought, conserved** and **safeguarded**. Jude was paraphrasing the Prophet Jeremiah who had written that we must take a Stand for the way of God.

Jeremiah 6:16 Thus says the Lord, **Stand** ye in the ways, and see, and **ask for the old paths**, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your lives.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Hebrews, urging them not to **relinquish** the beliefs and practices they had been taught, but to cling to, and defend the **original faith** once received. Paul said it this way:

Hebrews 10:23 Let us **hold fast** the profession of our faith without wavering.

Brethren, the same thing is happening to our people today – that happened in the first-century churches of God. They let down, and the first-century churches all but died out. You old-timers in the Church – you know this:

This profession of our faith which was **widely** known halfway through the twentieth century has been rapidly eroded to the point that it has become woefully diminished in this last era of God’s Church. It does not have to be that way – but sadly it is. Jesus rhetorically asked the question:

Luke 18:8 “Will the Son of man *even* find faith on the earth when He returns?”

It should come as no surprise to us that **many** would depart the true faith as we saw happened in Paul’s day when many left off believing the true Gospel of Christ. Paul wrote:

Galatians 1:6-7 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ.

How bad was that letting down? Paul confided to Timothy;

2Timothy 1:15 This you know, that **all** they which are in Asia are **turned** away from me;

That’s everyone from Thessalonica, Corinth, Smyrna, Ephesus, Sardis, Colossae, Pergamum, Philippi, Thyatira, Galatia and **all** they which are in Asia.

Brethren, do we have **any idea** how **our Original Faith** has become watered down today? We are not much different from the world.

Americans, British, and other so called "Christian peoples," do not have the Gospel of Christ – though they say, "In God we trust," and "God save the Queen."

The time has come when the knowledge of the **true faith** and the wonderful sequence of God's master Plan of events up to the return of Jesus Christ and beyond are **sorely needed** – even by the Church brethren.

Except for the very elect saints, the entire world will soon be caught hopelessly off guard by end-time events – the Tribulation – and that includes many Church brethren:

1Thessalonians 5:2 For yourselves know perfectly that the **Day of the Lord** so comes as a thief in the night.

The **Day of the Lord's Wrath** comes on the back side of the Tribulation – and **the world** will not see it coming!

Yes, the all-consuming day of the Lord's wrath will come suddenly and unexpectedly on all those who **are not** a part of God's true people:

Matthew 24:22 Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved *alive*: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

But brethren, there is a way to come out of the spiritual darkness that encompasses the world—and only God's people have been shown that glorious light. Those who strive for the **Original Faith**, which was once delivered unto the saints, can know. We, brethren, will know—if our relationship with God is as it should be. Notice how Paul tells us that we do not have to be among those who are letting down:

1Thessalonians 5:4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day [*the Tribulation*] should overtake you as a thief.

The entire cosmic universe exists for the sole purpose of bringing many men and women to the glorious state of God Himself:

Hebrews 2:10 For it became [Jesus Christ], for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons [and daughters] **unto glory**.

That is the **glory** of immortal spirit beings. Jesus spoke of this **glory** the night before He died — the **glory** that the Children of God will be given:

John 17:1 These words spoke Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; **glorify** thy Son, that thy Son also may **glorify** you...

John 17:5 Now, O Father, you **glorify** me with thine own self with the **glory** which I had with you before the world existed.

The stars would not exist at all in the night sky except for the fact that God decided in His great expansive love to create man in His image. Man was created in God's image.

Originally, physical man was able to comprehend the mysteries of the universe. Man's mind was brilliant, and meant to be so.

It was **sin** that corrupted, not only man's mental ability, but the face of the earth was severely impacted as a result of man's godless activities (2Peter 3:5-13).

God's Plan is to bring man back, not only to his **former** mental brilliance, but to be entirely in the **Image of God** with its spiritual complement – bringing man to completion and perfection. The phrase, "in our image," describing man's ultimate destiny to be in the image of God, must **not** be taken lightly, or underestimated.

Genesis 1:26-27 God said, Let us make man **in our image**, after our likeness: So God created man in **His own image**, in the image of God created He him.

And yet, man in the flesh comes **far short** of resembling anything like the supreme, all powerful spiritual God.

It would be utmost arrogance to assume that God looks **anything** like man. That is not what these verses are telling us. This is speaking of man's **incredible human potential**. Paul explains it this way:

Romans 4:17 God calls those things which are not yet, as though they were already.

When the Scripture reads, "God created man in His own image," we are to realize that God speaks of **future** events with certainty as though they were already accomplished.

God's true and obedient Saints will be in His **image**, and likeness. That is because man was created to be **like** God, but the process is ongoing. Where the verse reads, "Let us," it refers to both God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. They are, in fact, two separate beings sharing **one** Spirit. They are a duality of beings because "God" is a family name—not limited to two.

The God Family is not limited to **three** – as the false **Trinity** doctrine teaches. But, as we just saw in Hebrews 2:10 — God is bringing **many** sons and daughters **unto glory**. Believe God—believe God's word the Bible!

Here is the incredible truth revealed in the Bible: God has destined to replicate man into a **multitude** of Divine Family beings. The world is bogged down with the myth of man possessing an *immortal soul* which is destined to go to heaven or hell for the rest of eternity.

That is an utter **falsehood** not to be found in the Bible. What is revealed in the Bible is that man was created to be a member of the **Family of God**.

Ephesians 3:15 Of whom the whole Family in heaven and earth is named.

The Plan of God calls for a divine Family of beings to be just like God is—in His very image. And do not listen to the cynical **critics** of our **Original Faith** who will carry that thought to the ridiculous point of saying that we will equally possess every Godly characteristic of God the Father.

God the Father is the **only** all powerful and eternal sovereign God, and we will always be His children.

1John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, **we shall be like Him**; for we shall see Him as He is.

"We shall be like Him" It is so plain and clear in the holy Scriptures.

Indeed, those who think that these words simply mean that God looks like us, grossly underestimate and fail to appreciate the things God has in store for the faithful. Christians not only believe in Jesus, they practice and live His moral and ethical code of conduct – especially in regard toward God and fellow man. If we **believe** in Jesus Christ, and in His words, we will take on **His glorious image** at the resurrection. Would you like to see that incredible statement in **another** verse?

Philippians 3:20-21 The Lord Jesus Christ... shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned **like unto His glorious body**, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.

The ultimate goal of God's Plan is a veritable **host** of spiritually created beings in His exact **glorious image** with flawless Godly character. This is the touchstone belief—our **Original Faith**—the standard by which the True Church of God is recognized.

Mankind's ultimate future is to become eternal glorious God beings as only God the Father and Jesus Christ possess spiritual glory. This hallmark conviction of our **Original Faith** sets the true Church of God apart from all other belief systems. Jesus was a glorious being before He came to this earth, and He is glorious once again after setting aside His glory to die an ignominious death on the cross.

Philippians 2:6 [Jesus] Who, being in the **form of God**, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

Philippians 2:7 But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was **made in the likeness of men**:

That's **incredible!** Jesus became **the likeness of men**, so that we can become **the likeness of God!** God the Father and Jesus Christ are steadfast in conducting their Plan – they do not deviate from their ultimate objective. God says;

Malachi 3:6 I am the Eternal, I change not.

That is an undeniable trait of God. God's *constancy* is the quality of being enduring and *unchanging* – never capricious, volatile or temperamental. This consistency in God allows us to view His words, not only with uniformity, but possessing a firmness of resolve. This constancy includes the knowledge that **not only** does God not change;

He has also revealed His sure Plan to His prophets of old and the apostles – as a witness (Amos 3:7).

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

Jesus Christ believed every word of the Old Testament Scriptures. He quoted them often and lived by them. After all, as the God of the Old Testament, Jesus was the author of every word – having inspired the writers of old to not only speak His words, but to **write them down** as well.

2Peter 1:20-21 ...No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation, for the inspired writings came not in old time by the **will of man**: but holy men of God uttered them as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to us that God rested on the Sabbath? Was God too tired to go on? Or, did the Sabbath foretell of some **greater rest** in the Plan of God? Why did God create the Sabbath, and make it one of His Ten Commandments?

Genesis 2:2 On the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and **He rested** on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

Exodus 16:23 ...This is that which the Lord has said, Tomorrow is **the rest** of the Holy Sabbath unto the Lord.

Protestants are fond of saying, [Quote], "You can't find **THAT** in the New Testament!" Quite the contrary!

The notion must be categorically **rejected** that unless an issue or law of God is **restated** in the New Testament it is not to be accepted as doctrine.

The first-century Church of God brethren possessed the **Original Faith**, and for the longest time, all they had was the Old Testament Scrolls to guide them.

The **Original Faith** is found in the words of the Old Testament—as well! Jesus often quoted the Old Testament—demonstrating its **veracity**. The Old Testament and the New Testament writings are never in conflict with one another (John 10:35). For example, when we find that God has made the observance of the Sabbath **one of His Ten Commandments**, and He tells us that it is a **sign** between Him and His people (Exodus 31:13), and we find Jesus Christ **keeping** the Sabbath holy as a regular practice – we readily accept Him at His word – and follow in His steps. Many years after Jesus died and was raised to life again, Paul explained to the Christians:

Hebrews 4:9 There remains therefore a rest [Greek *Sabbatismos* - **keeping of the Sabbath**] for the people of God.

Luke 4:16 And [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, [**as He customarily did**], He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

So, we take for granted, even if a particular Sabbath or Holy Day is not mentioned in the Gospel accounts of His life (**most are**), that Jesus obediently lived His life in accordance with the Law of God. When we obey God's Law, He begins to reveal His secret Plan to us.

Believing this **concept and rule** of constancy, [God does not change], in the study of the Bible opens a plethora of revelation to those converted saints who believe and act upon what God says in His word.

"Constancy" allows us to confidently "read between the lines." We see an example of this in:

Luke 24:45 Then Jesus **opened their understanding**, that they might understand the Scriptures.

Notice brethren, The truth of the **Original Faith** was there all along – but their **understanding** of it—needed to be opened by Christ! The **Plan of God** is much too vast for the entirety of it to be covered in a sermon, or even written of in a book. The apostle John set out to fill in all the gaps left by Matthew, Mark and Luke. But John soon realized the impossibility of covering every aspect of the things Jesus said and taught! Notice how John closes out his Gospel account:

John 21:24 This is the disciple [that is the beloved apostle John] which testifies of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that His [Jesus'] testimony is true.

John 21:25 And there are also **many other things** which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.

So, even if everything Jesus said – was written down – **who** would be able to understand what it meant? We saw a moment ago that Jesus had to open their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures. Notice how it works:

1Corinthians 2:9-10 ...Neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has **revealed** them unto **us by His Spirit**.

The Bible is the living Word of God containing timeless spiritual lessons for all who believe and act on what is written there. That is the **Original Faith** to which we must diligently pursue.

Psalms 111:10 Reverence for the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and a good understanding have all those who obey His Commandments.

On the other hand, those who reject God's Law and His word need not even try to **understand** the mystery of God:

Daniel 12:10 ...The wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall **understand**; but the **wise** shall understand.

Only a very few people recognize that the apostle John's Gospel account follows an outline of the Feast Days of the Lord during the years of Christ's public ministry. The fact that John wrote very late – nearly 100 AD – well after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, attests to the fact that the Sabbath and Holy Days had not been eliminated by Jesus Christ. Jesus observed **every one** of the Feasts of the Lord and He taught His disciples (and us) to do likewise. Jesus said:

Matthew 28:19-20 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... to **observe all things** whatsoever I have commanded you.

The beloved apostle John kept a precise record of the activities and teachings of Jesus Christ during His public ministry. Writing very late, John was moved by God's Holy Spirit to fill in the blanks. John recorded every important detail of Christ's pursuits not specifically mentioned by the other Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Please notice a small portion of John's Gospel outline of Jesus' public ministry and His observance of annual Holy Days, the Feasts of the Lord, and ask yourself this question... "Why would God include this intricate record, and more, in the New Testament, if it were not for the fact of its essential significance to the members of the Church in maintaining the Original Faith?"

In keeping with Daniel's 70-week prophecy, – Jesus being cut-off in the **middle of the week** – Jesus was baptized first, and then began His **3½**-year public ministry on the Day of Atonement in the fall of 26 AD at the beginning of a Jubilee Year (Luke 4:17-21).

Daniel 9:27 He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the **midst of the week** He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations He shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

The Day of Atonement that year was on Sept 11, 26 AD – the 10th of Tishri. Jesus' 40 days of fasting would have begun on the afternoon/evening before the 29th of August, 26 AD, and ended at the conclusion of the Day of Atonement. Jesus was baptized on the 28th of August, 26 AD – the 25th of Elul, shortly before His fast began in the evening (Mark 1:12-13).

The first Passover of Jesus' public ministry is written about in John 2:13, 23. Luke had already written of the second Passover and Unleavened Bread (Luke 6:1).

In Chapter 4 John writes of Pentecost which is another name for the Old Testament Holy Day called the Feast of Weeks.

John refers to Jesus' activities during a fall Feast of the Jews (actually the Lord's Feast) in John 5:1.

Then there was Jesus' third Passover in John 6:4. A most important lesson about the "Bread of Life" was taught by Jesus during the Feast of Unleavened Bread in John 6:33, 35.

At that point John moves quickly to the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2) and the Last Great Day of the Feast (John 7:37 to 10:21).

Then John writes extensively of Jesus' last Passover and the death of Jesus Christ on that final Passover (John 11:55 – John 19:30).

And, not coincidentally, our Savior's work of salvation was not complete until Christ's resurrection—fully three days and three nights after He lay dead in the grave beginning on the High Day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31).

The world reads right over all of these important markers in the life of Jesus Christ. More than anything else, the meaning of these Holy Days that Jesus so staunchly proclaimed, reveals the Plan of God coming to fruition – step by step. Isaiah often wrote about the Plan of God saying, "You have done **wonderful things**, Your Plan was formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness."

Isaiah 25:1 O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done **wonderful things**; thy **counsels of old** are faithfulness and truth.

Make no mistake about it, God's Plan is being worked out here and now as He said it would:

Isaiah 14:24, 26 The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand... This is the Plan that is purposed upon the whole earth.

God declares that His Plan was written – set in stone – so to speak, before He ever began to initiate step number one:

Isaiah 46:9-10 ...I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the **end from the beginning**, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

Brethren, at this point in time, God's Plan is well along in its path to fruition...

In my next sermon we will begin to examine the Biblical concept of **Darkness to Light**.

The very second verse of the Bible tells us that the earth was **without form**, and **void**; Shapeless and in ruin – we've seen that many times... Before creation there was nothing. We might think of it as outer space with no stars or anything at all in that vast emptiness. But the truth of the matter is that there was not even any outer space – there was absolutely nothing. God called it **Darkness**.

Genesis 1:2 ...**Darkness** was upon the face of the deep.

We will delve into the meaning of **darkness**... It seems to be a very simple concept to understand. It is as easy as flipping on a light switch in a dark room. The idea is easy to grasp.

What takes a little digging to comprehend is what God means when He begins to expand on this clear-cut notion of darkness to light to arrive the **deeper spiritual terms** that He uses, like '**marvelous** light' and '**unapproachable** light.'

The entirety of the Scripture is sprinkled and salted with so many phrases that build on this stunning Biblical theme of **Darkness** to Light.

Ultimately all Scripture points to God the Father and Jesus Christ. We know that. It is wise to establish – without a doubt in our minds – that Jesus, and His way of life, is the **true ... enlightenment**.

It behooves each and every one of us, not only to obtain the **Original Faith**, but to preach the Gospel to the world until Christ returns. It is most important that the Biblical knowledge that we have been given, be **preserved** and protected for those who follow us. That is our part in the **Original Faith**.

End: Original Faith