

# A Holiday from the Truth

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung 12/23/2017

Satan has temporarily achieved a great deception in this world, but his primary concern is the Church of God where there exists a stronghold of true believers. We are not to become smug and self assured because we know better than this world about pagan holidays.

Jesus seeks unity among the brethren – a unity that is only achievable and maintainable with the help of God’s Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed that we would be “one.” But now we have coalesced into **separated** groups of brethren who no longer seek to become one people. In fact, we have become quite content to enjoy our little congregations to the exclusion of almost all the fragmented brethren. This is not pleasing to God—we are failing His test.

We all know what a great outpouring of God’s Spirit was poured out on so many brethren last century. We became a people with a great deal of God’s truth. Have many of God’s people taken **a holiday from the Truth** of God? That is my title – because it seems to me that a very large part of the church is taking a vacation from - **a holiday from the Truth** that God gave to His people to preserve.

As a people – we have let down – we are not enduring to the end. We are in a critical situation because God says:

Matthew 24:13 ...he who endures to the end, the same **will be saved**.

Let’s take a moment and read this in context – because we are fast running out of time!

Matthew 24:9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

Matthew 24:10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

Matthew 24:11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

Matthew 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Matthew 24:13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Matthew 24:14 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.

## The Test

We are getting really close to the end! It does not look like we have enough time to do what we have yet to accomplish. Yes, God’s **Gospel message** was heard by a **great many people** – in fact it was heard **by all that God intended**. Now God is waiting to see who took it to heart – and who just heard it without it really sinking in.

Matthew 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

Who today is truly living their Christianity **as God intends**? We are in the Christmas season – a really dangerous time for the People of God. It is not a dangerous season because we **do not know** that it is a counterfeit pagan day. Quite the contrary: Christmas is dangerous to us for the very reason that we do know so well that it is a counterfeit pagan day holiday.

I'll explain what that unique knowledge can do to our attitudes. In every store that we've been in since before Thanksgiving, we've been greeted by a large decorative tree glistening with shiny decorations. Among the holidays of this world there is not a vestige of the **truth of God**. Those pagan holidays do not have a shred of redeeming truth in them.

The **day before yesterday** was Saturnalia the first day of winter - the shortest day of the year - the longest and darkest day of the year - Saturnalia was an ancient Roman festival held in honor of the god Saturn, on the Winter solstice, December 21. God has no Holy Day anywhere near this cold dark time of the year! Certainly, you will find religious sounding words, symbols, and even a few Biblical quotes associated with these pagan holidays, but they have been so corrupted and counterfeited that they bear no resemblance to the truth of God whatsoever.

Many of us grew up with some of these 'Christian' holidays. God has taught us when and how He is to be worshipped. Every last one of this world's holidays is a diversion away from God's truth:

His **Sabbath** has been changed to Sunday.

**Passover** has been changed to Easter.

Jesus was conceived this time of the year [late December] **when** God's messenger said to Mary:

Luke 1:35 The angel answered and said unto Mary, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Jesus was born 9 months later at the time of the Feast of **Trumpets** - not on a December 25 Christmas Day.

Christmas has nothing whatsoever to do with the birth of Jesus Christ. In fact, Christmas had been celebrated for thousands of years when Jesus was born. Satan counterfeited Christ's birth to be on December 25th and it has become - by far - the world's most celebrated pagan holiday. How many people tell you "Happy Passover" compared to those who wish you, "Merry Christmas?"

All of the heathen countries like **China** celebrate Christmas with revelry because it has nothing to do with Christ or Christianity! It is the same with all the worldly holidays - true Christians would never find an ounce of Biblical truth about the Plan of God and salvation.

Christians need to understand the purpose of **God's Holy Days** and His Law that point to His eternal order and Plan of redemption. Every nation that has profaned the Sabbath and Holy Days has lost contact with the knowledge of the True God and gone into idolatry.

Upon honest investigation, the earnest seeker of Truth learns that these Catholic holidays are all of heathen origin and pagan significance - and he learns that he can have no part in them. For those who grow up in '**Christian**' communities which celebrate Easter and Christmas, there would have been be **no hope** of ever finding the Truth of God - if it were not for a direct calling by God (John 6:44, 65). This entire world has been more deceived than any of us can comprehend.

Revelation 12:9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, who **deceives the whole world**: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

It is Satan who makes it **very appealing** for the entire world to accept his counterfeit holidays rather than to learn the truth of God. He began his vicious attacks on Adam and Eve. God said:

Genesis 2:17 Of the **tree** of the knowledge of **good and evil**, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eat thereof **you shall surely die**.

That is the tree of **good and evil** that Satan wanted mankind to choose – not **Life**.

“He's making a list and checking it twice. He's going to find out who's **naughty or nice**. Santa Claus is comin' to town.”

The **tree** of the knowledge of **good and evil**... going to find out who's **naughty or nice** – did you pick up on that parallel in the language?

God said... for in the day that thou eat thereof **you shall surely die**. Satan said, “That is not so,

Genesis 3:4 **“Ye shall not surely die,”** he said.

That is “the **lie**” of the beautiful **Christmas tree**, and “the lie” of the **immortality of the soul**. And so, even today after so long a time, everywhere we look we find this **deceptively** beautiful **tree** decorated with shinny ornaments.

Jeremiah 10:2 Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.

Jeremiah 10:3 For the customs of the people are vain: for one **cuts a tree** out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe.

Jeremiah 10:4 **They decorate it with silver and with gold**; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.

Jeremiah 10:5 They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.

Israel was decorating Christmas trees some 600 years **before** Jesus was born! Satan does not care so much about the world now – he already has them in his clutches – they are interminably deceived.

But Satan **cares greatly about the True Church of God**. He wishes – more than anything – to destroy God’s people – the saints of God’s Church.

Brethren, we can witness all the pagan festivities going on in the world and get to thinking – “because we are not a part of those rituals” – we are doing pretty good. We can easily assume that we have nothing to worry about.

## **That is where the danger comes in.**

We are not examining ourselves close enough. We are not considering the subtleties of Satan. We can get to thinking that we've got it all together. Please understand this: Since Jesus came, Satan has focused his attacks mainly on the true Church of God.

Jesus established His Church brethren so that they might worship God in sincerity and truth. But for most people, that **truth** has been terribly perverted by Satan. By the end of the third century AD **the true servants** of God had become a very **small** minority in the population among those many pagans who were being drawn into Catholicism. **Counterfeit** 'Christianity' had become a huge majority. Way too many Christians went directly **back into the world** from which they had been drawn out of.

They left the Truth and the Faith. They took a **vacation** from their Christianity. What we sometimes forget is that this **process** of taking **a holiday from the Faith** is a grave misstep in the ongoing battle that true servants of Jesus Christ must continuously fight.

Hebrews 6:4 For **it is impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

Hebrews 6:5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

Hebrews 6:6 If **they shall fall away**, [if they take a Holiday from the Faith and Truth] to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Those who truly remain faithful are a very **small flock**.

Luke 12:32 Fear not, **little flock**; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

As a result, those who **do not practice** their Christianity correctly always become the **more visible** 'Christian' church. You can easily see the Protestants and the Catholics – but it is harder to find God's true Church. Peter describes this **re-entanglement** – **a holiday from the Truth** – with the corrupt world.

2Peter 2:20 If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

2Peter 2:21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

2Peter 2:22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

It is Satan who makes the false gospel so appealing and popular. And the Church brethren are oftentimes too easily affected. Satan retains just enough Biblical truth in his deceptions to convince people they are indeed following Christ. Satan is every bit as subtle and conniving **today** as he ever was.

God's Church is not capable of being deceived by Christmas Trees or Easter Eggs – **but we are just as susceptible to being deceived as man ever was**. It is God's people who are under attack by Satan today. We see the result of Satan's ever present tactics:

Until a person is called by God, had his mind opened, and empowered by God's Spirit - he yields to his carnal human nature and is totally unable submit to God's way (Romans 8:7)

Romans 8:7 The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

With conversion, man begins to move toward God. However, if after conversion has begun God's people begin to take **advantage** of other brethren, or even believe that they are **better** than others who are being lead of God's Holy Spirit, God will not hold them guiltless:

One reason subtle false Christianity is so hazardous to true Christians is because they often go uncorrected and begin to believe that their harsh Christianity is pleasing to God. They bring the way of this ruthless world to church with them. They are insensitive to the gentle and the meek Christians at Church. They go to all the services and attend the Feasts of God - all the while running roughshod over the little ones. As their improper conduct **becomes the norm** in their congregations, their high and mighty peers take over completely - pushing God's true people out.

We find an example of this hateful and devious behavior in 3John with the expulsion - the putting out - of the faithful servants of Jesus Christ. Diotrophes had taken over the Church surreptitiously, sneakily and unlawfully.

3John 1:10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember Diotrophes' deeds which he does, prating against us [the true brethren] with malicious words: and not content therewith, **neither does he himself receive the brethren, and forbids them that would, and casts them out of the church.**

Condescendingly thinking themselves to be mature Christians, they speak ill of the babes in Christ..., They conspire against them behind their backs..., They heartlessly hold them in derision, looking down upon them..., They think themselves to be spiritually superior. This is a perfect example of **a lack of Faith.**

Luke 18:11-12 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, **God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are**, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

The problem in the Corinthian's congregation was that they were making distinctions about people among the church brethren, and thus some people were **highly esteemed**, and others were **despised** and looked down upon. That is absolutely wrong and improper. God did not value them differently - they were all very important to God.

### **Here is the problem.**

Some were looking around the congregation to see who were most worthy of their attention, and they were dismissive and rude to those who did not measure up to their own high evaluation of themselves. They were thinking just like the Pharisee of Luke 18 that we just saw:

"I don't want to have anything to do with them, they are not worthy of my attention, I don't want to sit by them, I don't want to eat with them, and I don't want them washing my feet - let alone me washing their feet."

This is a problem because God does not evaluate people as carnal men do. Have too many taken **a holiday from the Faith and a holiday from the Truth?** Is that why Jesus asks,

Luke 18:8 Will I find **Faith** when I return?

After Jesus asked this rhetorical question – He immediately gives the example of the **faithless** Pharisee in Luke 18:11-12. Too many who are comfortable and content in their local congregations give no thought or care to other scattered brethren. They are insensitive to what their fragmented brethren are having to endure. Their hearts do not go out to the scattered brethren who are sick and dying – they are simply of no concern to those who are comfortable in their own little factions. They just rock along in their happy little cliques. Do they think that God is with them – and that He also has no concern for His shattered, scattered, fragmented people?

Ezekiel 34:6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

When their pastors act like Diotrephes did toward the brethren – they **give him a pass** because he is in good stead with headquarters – and they don't want to rock the boat or **take a stand** for the purity of the faith.

Among God's people there are **tares** and **false teachers** among the brethren. Jesus said so. The Scriptures tell us to make a distinction. It is important that we do so.

Romans 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, **mark them**[point them out as misbehaving] which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and **avoid them**.

Romans 16:18 For they that are such **serve not** our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

It is the members who are being hurt. In addressing division within the Church, Paul shows that our very salvation depends on our truly caring for one another. Scripture does not allow for Christians to co-exist without properly relating to one another. It is clear that for us to have a right relationship with God, it is first necessary to "get right" with others.

Jesus tells us that, as Christians, our priority must be to reconcile, not only with God, but also with one another. Christ taught that reconciliation has a higher priority than even church attendance.

Matthew 5:24 Be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

How much more clearly could it be written? Brethren become unified spiritually – one in Spirit, and one in the Body of Christ. By definition, it is absolutely impossible to have Christian love **for only a part** of the Body of Christ. We cannot serve some brethren while neglecting other brethren.

Ephesians 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Ephesians 4:3 Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.

It is very clear what God's intent is – that people learn to live, to love, to work, to associate, etc., together. God wants us to learn how to live with one another now, so that we will know how to live with Him eternally. We are obligated to extend our realm of fellowship to include all who have the earnest of God's Holy Spirit.

Jesus teaches us to lay our lives down for one another. Through Jesus it became possible **for the entire world** to be reconciled to the Father. We follow His example in keeping every avenue of reconciliation open with our brethren.

But, what do we find? Congregations are **self-satisfied**. Today, Church of God groups are operating independently from one another. They have no policy to recognize the other groups, or the scattered brethren. The Scriptures **do not allow** for groups of Christians to co-exist side-by-side without recognizing one another. **Godly Unity** is required, and unity comes only when we have a right relationship with God and man. It is Jesus' desire that we work toward unity and oneness.

When we stop laboring for unity among God's people, we have fallen into one of Satan's traps. Church groups are not exempt from the reconciliation that Christ says is necessary. We need to understand from Scripture that God does not allow us to have an attitude of independence from other brethren.

True Christians enter the Body of Christ at their baptism. Since our unity with the Father and the Son begins at baptism, then so does **our unity** with one another – all the other brethren. It is not at the resurrection of the saints, but at our personal baptism that we are baptized into the Body of Christ – becoming one with all other members of the Body. At baptism, a convert is also baptized into the Spirit of God – the spiritual life of God.

1Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body ... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

How much more clearly could it be written? That most certainly means that those who will become the Bride of Christ should not be divided. In the Kingdom of God there will be no one who insists on being isolated from other spirit-beings. We need to ask ourselves, "Do we identify and encourage those who hold fast to the Truth?" God says that we must.

Would we recognize Jesus Christ by His actions if He were on the earth today? He would not snub another Christian – would He? We need to find others who also represent the Truth. There must be no competition among the groups. Let us warmly receive and embrace all who have God's Holy Spirit.

God's Church People have been shattered and scattered over the face of the earth for some time now. We are a fragmented people – Our power is waning... brethren are dying on the **vine** for lack of spiritual nourishment.

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, **except it abide in the vine**; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

Daniel 12:6 And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, **How long shall it be to the end** of these wonders?

Daniel 12:7 And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and **when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished.**

We, as a Church People, have been segregated by doctrine, distance and division.

## **Division has no place in God's Church**

Jesus prayed five times the night before He died for Unity among the brethren.

John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, **that they may be one**, as we are.

Throughout the Scriptures a universal theme is, "A Unity of the Spirit." There are those of a different spirit with whom no unity is possible; tares, false preachers, false teachers, false ministers. Yes, Jesus told us to be very wary of false teachers – especially in these latter days – men who would pretend to be shepherds of the flock – seeking a following after themselves.

False ministers desire the power and control, and they separate brethren from the greater flock which is the entire Spirit lead brethren of the Church of God. If we are close to God, the false shepherds will reveal themselves by their false doctrine of separation and division of God's people.

There was a lady in God's Church who always wanted to go to the Feast in Hawaii. But when she was there – the ministers did not mix with the brethren at all. God says that the purpose of the ministry is to serve the brethren – but those ministers were on vacation in Hawaii and they didn't have any time for the "lowly members." She told me when she got home "I got to know the "cabbies" – the cab drivers – better than the ministers in Hawaii. Is God pleased with that ministerial behavior – I think not.

Sadly, not a one of those ministers has examined himself on that subject. Any minister who tells you to have no fellowship with the other brethren of God's Church is teaching the false doctrine of separation.

We are looking at how Satan has turned his attacks onto the brethren. That danger to the brethren comes from among us. There is a division within God's Church that has continued down through the centuries – and that is the division that comes when some brethren think they are better or more privileged than other brethren.

How many ministers are calling for the unity of the brethren – not of their group alone – but of all those members of the Body of Christ in the entire Church of God? Not many! This problem of "Us and Them" is widespread among the people of God. There is an "Us versus Them" problem in the church. Ancient Israel relied on their numbers and strength and military. Do we rely on men, organizations, special knowledge and wisdom? Or do we rely, totally and completely on Jesus Christ.

He is coming soon! Every week, brethren are dying right and left. Big named ministers are dying by the hands full. Do we realize how short time is?

Ezekiel 33:28 For I will lay the land most desolate, and the pomp of her strength shall cease; and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, that none shall pass through.

That means that the governments of Israelitish nations are coming to nothing – weak and useless. These nations no longer believe that God is God! Think of the USA. Picture the World Trade Center Towers on the morning after 9/11 – just a heap of useless rubble – not one person left alive in either building. Consider Jericho on the morning after the Days of Unleavened Bread – nothing but ash and ruin – not one left alive. None of the accursed thing will be carried over into the World Tomorrow.

Ezekiel 33:29 **Then shall they know that I am the LORD**, when I have laid the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed.

Ezekiel was not taken seriously, like God's true ministers are largely ignored.

Ezekiel 33: 31 And they come unto thee as the people comes, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness.

They are all too comfortable. Are we also too comfortable?

Ezekiel 33:32 And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.

Don't you know that before they perished they were telling themselves all the usual things: **We can't all be wrong?** Can we? We are God's people – and we are much better people than the Pagans.

Starting in the 1970s, many members of the Worldwide Church of God stopped studying, and the church began to resemble a social club. When Herbert Armstrong died, the spiritual malnourishment of many brethren became obvious. Because so many had stopped being fed with His truth, God gave them over to the hypocrisy of Protestantism.

Very few – by comparison – are being called by God today. We, however, have been blessed with understanding—with the ability to hear God's words and rightly respond. If we value the truth, we will continually search it out, and we will hear it. Because we value it, we will recognize what is false and contrary, and not want to have anything to do with it. With the help of God, we will not succumb to Satan's tactics. We will seek the unity of the brethren with our dying breath.

End: A Holiday from the Truth