

September 2016

Greetings Brethren!

As we are rapidly approaching the time to depart for God's fall Feast days, soon all of our planning to be where God has placed His name again this year will roll into action. Much physical planning has been done, starting at the last fall Feast, to bring us to this point of great anticipation and excitement at being able to partake in these Holy Days. As this time will soon be upon us, it would be a good idea to review some of the things that we should be thinking about in our planning. What kind of Feast are you going to have? A good Feast? A rewarding Feast? A refreshing Feast? Much of our Feast experience has a lot to do with the orientation of our minds in answering the following question: What kind of Feast are you *planning* to have?

If we are looking forward with great anticipation of coming together where God has placed His name—being in full agreement with how He is carrying out His Plan as pictured by these Holy Days—then we will be present with the orientation of feeling abundantly blessed to be called out of this world with other potential children of God to hear His instructions. These orientated individuals will have diligently *planned ahead*, mentally and physically, to be present for every meeting. They have set aside every weight and sin that so easily besets us, to patiently run the race that is set before them. Although obstacles and potential difficulties may arise along the way, they have *planned* to leave early enough to allow some recovery time in their schedules so that they still can be present if something should arise. They step out in confidence, even though there are potential storm clouds of fear and winds of family pressure blustering about, knowing that they can absolutely depend upon the Author and Finisher of our faith to see them through to be where He has commanded them to be. The principle here: *Plan ahead* and be prepared mentally for any obstacles that might arise, with the orientation to not let them detour or frustrate us, but instead to strengthen our resolve to remain calm and carry on. Learn to persevere.

Are you *planning* to serve, or to be served? As with any event, there is much that needs to be done prior to, during, and afterward. There are always many different opportunities and ways to serve and to assist. Do you see the opportunity, or are you blind to it? Mr. Armstrong broke it down to the simplicity of: the way of give vs. the way of get. Many seem to go through life thinking that things magically just happen, while others have trained and honed their awareness skills to know better. Some have the excuse that they cannot do anything because they have a family, and "it's all they can do just to get them corralled" into and out of services. A valuable opportunity to set a powerful example of service is being missed. Just as the very capable wife in Proverbs 31 not only was diligent to

take care of her family, she also was aware of the poor and needy. When all of us do our parts, like cleaning up our areas and straightening up the chairs after services, it makes the whole amount of work light. At larger gatherings, someone needs to sweep, clean up and stock the restrooms, and pick up hymnals every day. What can you do to help? Ask your local deacon—volunteer. Do not wait to see if something needs to be done—you *already know* there are items to be done! If there is nothing that they need assistance with today, follow up again. The principle here: Come with the orientation of service. Raising our awareness is something we all need to do a better job of training and honing. *Plan to look* for opportunities to serve.

What is our orientation for being at the Feast? Do we think that it is just a vacation, or that being at services is optional? Kind of like being at a corporate junket where opening and closing meetings are optional, where excessive eating and drinking and seeing the physical sights take an elevated position in our minds over the purpose of the meeting. In the past, I have paid to take associates to educational opportunities, and they lacked the self-control and sense of proper orientation while there. They stayed up late and would blow off the early meeting the next day because they were hung over, or if they did somehow pull it together to make it, they would show up with sunglasses on and would be physically present, but mentally absent—drifting in and out of attention or snoozing frequently during the meeting. I know how it made me feel, and can only imagine how it makes God feel when we squander this valuable time of training and spiritual recharging. The principle here: Remember the primary reason for being there is to appear before God to receive inspiration and instruction. Do not let yourself become distracted with all of the physical. It is not wrong to enjoy the time, unless it takes away from our primary purpose. *Plan* to exercise self-control before, during and after the Feast. It should be a way of life.

Real Value

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:38).

Most of us have planned ahead to reserve a nice place to stay for the Feast, and many have arranged to have a nice ride to drive around in, and we have purchased all kinds of food and drink—all physical things. Having nice physical things is not a problem, unless they distract us and outweigh the real purpose of the moment. Martha was overly concerned about all the physical elements of the moment, whereas Mary recognized that the real value of the moment was focusing on and listening to the instructions of life that Christ was sharing.

As with every topic (like roads), there is a ditch on either side. Instead of having temperance and being properly balanced, we naturally have the tendency to be in one ditch or the other. Martha was too concerned with the physical—too much "prep." Others can fall into the other ditch—no "prep." But the main reason we are there is not for the physical food. Learning to have a right set of priorities and to be balanced in them is important.

Certain families or individuals come together at the Feast, and they just spend time with their physical family or friends. The Feast is about the spiritual Family of God. While we certainly can enjoy physical family time together, it should not be at the expense of the greater spiritual Family. Part of our planning should be in reaching out to be inclusive of others in the Family as a whole. New members, older members, all members. When we read the story of the Good Samaritan, it shows us that we naturally tend to avoid individuals that require more effort from us, and we often despise having *our* free time taken up with the necessities of others. Sacrificing for the Body was the example that Christ set; how are we doing with joyfully following it?

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live (Luke 10:27–28).

We see that when this lawyer was tempting Christ, he *already knew* what the law was, because he quoted it back to Christ when requested. But that did not quite fit into how this lawyer wanted to spend his time. He wanted to serve those convenient, or those rewarding to him, not the individual that was inconvenient or where it cost him to serve—where it took him off the path of things that he was doing with his time. Many times it can be slightly inconvenient for us to stop and express the required care and encouragement for others. If we are just planning on *blowin' in the door* to get seated moments before services, and heading straight for the door afterward to get to *our* physical stuff, we are missing the opportunity to fellowship. For iron to sharpen iron, one must first come into contact with another. A failure to plan to be present early, to be aware of the needs of others, or to completely avoid fellowship, diminishes the potential benefits we can give and receive. If

the Feast is all about "Me" and what I can get out of it, that is not the right orientation, but actually a very selfish one. *Real value* has a lot to do with what we give others in service, reflecting the depth of what we have received.

Directing Your Steps

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?
(Luke 10:29)

You see, he discounted the need to serve all. He, from a physical viewpoint, did not see the value in serving everyone. He saw the value of serving those who could be reciprocal in serving him and his needs; however, he did not see the need or value of serving those from whom he would get no physical return, but who would cost him physically instead. We that claim to be spiritually motivated should see the opportunity to serve all, and rejoice in knowing that there is great reward in doing so. Will you be one who crosses the street to extend yourself out of your comfort zone, or will you be one that comes up with excuses?: I have my family to think about, I have children, I'm elderly—they should come to me, I don't feel like it, I'm busy, I don't know what to say, It's awkward for me. Excuses, excuses, excuses! Excuses are like being in the fast lane on the road of life and the opportunity to serve arises in our lane of travel, and we intentionally swerve to avoid it. Avoidance, because we do not want to stop or to be inconvenienced, *is what we choose*. Do we do more than profess that we know and love God, or do our works deny us? Is there anyone we are avoiding—that we need to *go* to?

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, *Go, and do thou likewise* (Luke 10:30–37) [emphasis mine].

Second Tithe Planning

Lack of self-control is a common trait in the world we live in today, but it should not be a trait of those in training to be a part of the God Family. Sadly, many lack self-control at the Feast. While many of us have faithfully saved the blessings of our increase over the course of the year to have our second tithe for the observance of the Feast, many forget that the tithe comes with responsibilities. Many of us are physically rich for the moment with an abundance of second tithe—*our* second tithe. First of all, let us clarify: Anything that is a tithe, is not ours in the first place. All tithes are God's. It is through His manifold kindnesses and purpose that He allows us to manage one of these tithes. The second tithe is primarily for us to attend the fall Feast of Tabernacles. If we have ample second tithe, then other Holy Day attendances can be included. (Do not confuse this with the fact that God commands us to appear before Him seven times in His Holy Day plan.) Some, with "x" amount of their second tithe, go about planning to spend all of their tithe. Their orientation is more along the lines that they *had to pay* this tithe, and at least *they* are going to get *all the personal* physical benefits possible out of it! Has that been the orientation of any of us? Now the Bible does state that we are to rejoice, but the principles of moderation and temperance never get put on hold. Drunkenness is never acceptable. Just because God allows for some strong drink does not mean that we have to finish the bottle! It does not mean that we have to drink every day. Is your orientation to drink every day? Do you have the capability to control the liberty God is allowing, or do you abuse the liberty?

And thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place his name there (Deuteronomy 16:11).

Having an abundance at the Feast should not only afford a time to rejoice individually, but an opportunity to apply to a greater extent the daily principle Mr. Armstrong taught us of serving (the way of give versus get) while we are together as a family. Are we truly valuing and living the elements of godliness while there at the Feast, having a "good profession" before the brethren? Or have we, while momentarily rich with second tithe, fallen into a snare and erred from the faith because of our hurtful lusts? God is evaluating how we manage His tithe. Will He be pleased with your use of it?

How are all of the physical requirements paid for at the Feast, like the renting of a facility? These expenses are paid for out of the Second Account that is funded with excess second tithe of the brethren. While an administrative decision could be made to require everyone to send in a portion of God's second tithe to support the Feast requirements (tithe of

the tithe), our group has always left it as a reminder request prior to the Feast to review your blessings and voluntarily send what you can. On the physical level, it is like a large family reunion where multiple families are coming together in a central area and renting a facility to hold the reunion. If each of the families contributes to help cover the cost, it makes the burden relatively light for all.

It is amazing how God has the capability to sustain us when times are tight, so that we can stretch what *seemingly appears to be physically* inadequate. He absolutely delivers on His promises when we fully trust in Him. Many of us have faced challenges like that when we were just starting to be obedient with the paying of our first tithes. How many times have we heard of others being sustained who stepped out in faith and obeyed, or where we personally experienced God sustaining us when we were obedient in paying our first tithe? What is motivating and driving us, fear (*false evidence appearing real*), or faith?

If we are properly managing our second tithe, we should be planning to use it like our paychecks. And how do we do that? Proper budgeting of our paychecks involves living on less than the total amount earned. Therefore, with a proper service orientation of managing God's second tithe, we should be planning to contribute some for the event. Some might actually wait to turn in their excess until after the Feast because they are on a really tight second tithe budget, where they are scrimping and saving all they can just to get there. That is understandable. However much we have been blessed with God's second tithe, He does require that we manage it well, and then at the end of the Feast to "zero-out" that account. Since second tithe is God's, He sets up the rules for its usage. Once the purpose for which it was created has been fulfilled, then any overage of His tithe is turned in. He could have required us to turn it all in and then turn in an "expense report" for reimbursement of acceptable Feast expenses. For any of you in the corporate world, you understand that process. Instead, He gives us the rules of the game and sets up a testing ground that tells Him a lot about our character. What are your choices saying about you?

A Good Profession

Living acceptably in an ungodly world is more and more difficult to do peaceably. As the world moves further and further away from godly principles, it is understandable why people war and fight: because they do not have the blessing of knowing the Awesome Creator God and His Plan of Salvation. While we are to apply ourselves unto good works and then manage the resulting proceeds, our faith is not in the money. Money is a tool, and how we view and use our discretionary amounts also tells God a lot about our character with regard to what we profess is true, or not. Remember the principle: How we handle the little areas of responsibility reflect how we would handle larger areas of responsibility. That could

be an entire topic in its own right, however, for a brief reminder about how God wants us to view it, let us read it in 1 Timothy 6:6–12:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Brethren, it is a great privilege to be able to come into the very presence of the Almighty God of the Universe. Let us not take it lightly nor get distracted from why we are there. If our hearts and plans are in line with His Plan and purpose, truly all our plans will succeed as noted in Psalm 20:4: May He grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans.

I wish you all a most rewarding and inspiring Feast!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David F. Brandenburg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.

David F. Brandenburg