

HOW TO KEEP



THE SABBATH

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Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 Work and Pleasure on the Sabbath	3
A Day of Joy	3
Right and Wrong Kind of Work.....	3
Business Partnerships	4
Renting Out Houses and Apartments.....	5
Parties and Weddings.....	5
Sporting Events	6
Flying on the Sabbath	6
TV and Watching Beautiful Scenery	7
Music.....	7
Chapter 2 Eating Out on the Sabbath.....	9
Not Wrong to Eat in a Restaurant on the Sabbath.....	9
Stopping at a Coffee Shop.....	10
Night to Be Much Observed.....	11
Feast of Tabernacles.....	11
Kindling a Fire	12
Farmer's Markets.....	12
Working as Doctors, Nurses or Caretakers.....	12
Sabbath a FEAST Day.....	13
Church to Decide.....	13
Chapter 3 Church Attendance.....	15
Church Attendance Commanded.....	15
Old Testament Instructions	15
Children Included	16
New Testament Instructions.....	16
Keeping the Sabbath and Passover	17
Early Church Kept Pentecost	17
Paul Kept the Sabbath and Annual Holy Days.....	17
Why Young Children?	18
Don't Forsake the Assembly	18
Staying Home?	19
Internet Sabbath Services	19
Not for the Purpose of Replacement.....	20
Legitimate Reasons for Not Attending.....	20
Going on Vacation.....	21
Parties and Weddings Not Legitimate Excuses	21
Chapter 4 Proper Appearance in Sabbath Services..	23
Wearing of Rings and Fine Apparel	23
What James Meant.....	23
Wearing Jewelry	24
Holy Garments	24

Appearing Before God With the Best Apparel.....	25
Don't Neglect Culture	25
Don't Violate God's Standards	25
Apparel of Children.....	26
Dress Code for Worship Services at Home	26
A Balanced Approach.....	27
True Sabbath Observance Lost?	28
Chapter 5 Proper Conduct During Church Services ..	29
Drinking and Smoking	29
Living in Sin	29
Unresolved Problems	30
Entirety of Worship Service Is Holy	30
Paying Close Attention	30
Participating in Song Service	31
Same for Internet Services	31
Angels Are Witnessing	31
Children Should Listen and Be Supervised.....	32
The Church Decides How We Are to Conduct Ourselves	33
Chapter 6 Guidelines for Opening and	
Closing Prayers.....	35
Public Prayers.....	35
Don't Read from Notes	38
No Prayers by Women	39
Chapter 7 Guidelines for Preparing and	
Giving a Sermonette	41
Conclusion	47

Introduction

Many believe and teach that Christians are no longer obligated to observe the weekly Sabbath—the period from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. This conclusion is incorrect. True Christians know and have proven for themselves from the pages of the Bible that they are still duty-bound today to keep the weekly Sabbath, as it is holy time. We offer biblical proof in our free booklet, *God's Commanded Holy Days*.

Questions often arise, however, as to HOW to keep the Sabbath. Are there any principles or passages in the Bible that tell us what kinds of activities are permitted and which are prohibited? Are we told how to apply those passages and concepts practically in specific situations?

In this booklet, we will address many of these questions that have perplexed Christians for decades. We will concentrate on God's command *not to do work* on the Sabbath; *not to pursue our own pleasure*; and *not to engage in business*; and we will discuss *whether or not we should eat out in a restaurant* on the Sabbath. We will also speak on *Church attendance* on the Sabbath, as well as *proper appearance and conduct* during Church services. Finally, we will provide some guidelines for *opening and closing prayers*, and the *delivery of sermonettes* in Sabbath services.

Chapter 1

Work and Pleasure on the Sabbath

The Fourth Commandment says very clearly that we are not to do servile or customary work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15). As God rested on the seventh day from His ordinary work of creating plants, animals and men, so we are to rest from our ordinary labor and to be spiritually refreshed on the Sabbath.

A Day of Joy

Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man. It was God’s gift to man. It was not supposed to be a burden, but a blessing. As God blessed and sanctified the seventh day for holy use (Genesis 2:3), so man will be blessed when he properly keeps and enjoys the seventh day.

At the time of Jesus Christ, the Pharisees had made a burden of the Sabbath. For example, the disciples of Christ were criticized for plucking the heads of grain on the Sabbath, yet they were only doing so in order to satisfy their hunger (Mark 2:23–24; Matthew 12:1–2). It was the position of the Pharisees that the disciples should rather go hungry than to pluck a few heads of grain, falsely interpreting such conduct as prohibited “harvesting.”

Right and Wrong Kind of Work

Christ placed mercy over strict pharisaical restrictions, pointing out that David ate from the showbread of the tabernacle when he was hungry, although it was not “lawful” for him to eat it (Matthew 12:3–4). But Christ did not condemn David for this. He also taught that the priests in the temple had to fulfill their responsibilities on the Sabbath, which—according to pharisaical consequential reasoning—would have been tantamount to “breaking” or “profaning” the Sabbath, but Christ said they were “blameless” in doing so (Matthew 12:5). When God’s ministers today “work” on the Sabbath

in preparing and delivering sermons, they are equally blameless and guiltless.

On the other hand, Christ did not teach that we can violate God's Sabbath by just trampling it under foot—by working on our jobs to earn a living and by pursuing our own pleasures and hobbies. Isaiah 58:13 states (according to the *New International Version*) that you are to “keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day” and to “call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable” and to “honor it by not doing as you please or speaking idle words.” The *Living Bible* clarifies that “doing as you please” refers to “your own fun and business.”

We also stated the following in our free booklet, *God's Commanded Holy Days*:

“When we keep the Sabbath, it will be noticeable to those with whom we have close relationships—our family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Our lack of participation in sports, school or college events that are scheduled on the Sabbath, as well as not going to theaters or *working on the Sabbath*, will become very obvious, and so these people will come to realize our commitment to God...”

To elaborate at this point, it is obvious that we must not work on the Sabbath to earn money, and if we operate our own business, we need to close it during the Sabbath. This would mean that we could not keep it open for our employees to run the business and keep the money for themselves. The same principle would apply for a business “partnership.”

Business Partnerships

First of all, we would strongly recommend against a business partnership between a Church member and an “unbeliever” who does not believe in the Sabbath. In any event, a Church member could not agree that his partner operates the business on the Sabbath, even if he was to forgo any share of proceeds received on the Sabbath. As a partner, he would still be responsible for the operation of his business on the Sabbath. The situation would be different if a Church member was an employee and would not work on the Sabbath for the business, even if the business were to stay open on that day.

Renting Out Houses and Apartments

A related question may arise when Christians rent out their houses or apartments. It is obvious that they cannot demand from their renters to leave the house on Fridays and return on Sundays. Once houses or apartments are rented out, the owners are no longer responsible for the conduct of their renters (as long as it is not illegal). It would be advisable, however, to carefully scrutinize prospective renters to guarantee that they are not engaging in conduct, which would have to be rejected by a Church member. One might say that since no profit may be earned on the Sabbath, a property owner could not rent out a house or apartment since the rent would always include the time for the weekly and annual Sabbaths. Therefore, some have suggested that a Church member could or should never rent out a house or apartment, or should never begin to run a motel or a hotel, or if he had done so, to sell such an establishment.

This seems to be too restrictive. We read in the parable about the merciful Samaritan that he took care of the man fallen under the robbers; that he brought him to an inn; and that he paid the innkeeper for weeks (including the Sabbaths), until he returned. We also read that during the time of taxation (which fell apparently during the fall festivals), no room was found in the inn for Mary and Joseph, showing that inns were rented out in Judea, and they would have been rented out for profit. It is up to the individual Church member to determine how to calculate the rent, keeping the Sabbath question in mind, but it would be too restrictive to demand that he could not rent out his house or apartment.

Parties and Weddings

In addressing activities of “pleasure” and “sports,” it would generally be ill-advised to attend a birthday party or parties in general on the Sabbath, especially if the parties involve unconverted family members or unbelieving friends. Even driving to such parties on the Sabbath (although one may attend after the Sabbath) might create a problem, depending on how long one may be on the road. It would always be better to ask for accommodation, explaining to the relatives and friends that the Sabbath is not really the day when one would want to attend, and whether the event could be held on another day, such

as Sunday. But as in so many cases, this would have to be a personal decision, based on the circumstances, the persons involved, and one's own conscience. We must not neglect the fact, however, that the Sabbath is holy time which is to be dedicated to God.

This means that we may even have to look much more carefully at weddings and wedding receptions on the Sabbath, for both Church members and non-members (given the enormous work involved for Church members if they need to prepare for those occasions). The same general considerations would apply as discussed above regarding birthday parties and other parties. One would need to ask why one would want to conduct a wedding on the Sabbath in the first place, and whether arrangements could be made to conduct it on a different day. Again, whether one would want to conduct or attend a wedding on the Sabbath would have to be a personal decision, based on the circumstances, the persons involved, and one's own conscience.

To be clear, we do not say that it would be prohibited to spend time together with unconverted parents or family members on the Sabbath, for instance, for coffee or a meal.

Sporting Events

Regarding sporting events, it should be obvious that we would not watch a football game, a basketball game or a soccer game on the Sabbath. Neither would we participate in such games; which is not to say that we could not "kick the ball around" for a short while with our children or grandchildren. We would also not go to an amusement park or a sporting event or a theater on the Sabbath, but how about a Church member dropping off or picking up their unbelieving relatives at an amusement park, a sporting event or a theater on his or her way to or from Church services? First of all, it is not our task to condemn anyone, but in case of a request for counseling, we would need to carefully evaluate the individual circumstances, taking into consideration the family situation and other aspects.

Flying on the Sabbath

The same is true when a Church member is asked by his parents who are returning from vacation to pick them up at the airport on the Sabbath. Again, it would be advisable to explain to the parents ahead

of time that the scheduling of the trip should be made in such a way that the flight does not fall on the Sabbath, but circumstances might have existed when such scheduling was not possible.

It would also be inadvisable for a Church member to fly on the Sabbath, for any reason, if it can be avoided. Experience has shown that flights on the Sabbath are simply not the best way of keeping the Sabbath (especially considering the time at the airport, including security procedures, before entering or after leaving the plane).

TV and Watching Beautiful Scenery

It would not be wrong to view certain TV programs or internet postings on the Sabbath, which would inform us about world news or which would show us God's beauty of creation; nor would it be wrong to go to a park for a picnic after Church services, or drive to a beautiful scenery (watching the ocean, a waterfall, a forest etc.).

Music

When it comes to the type of music we might be listening to on the Sabbath, we need to focus on the godly principles when deciding what is appropriate. Ultimately, it is up to the individual to decide what kind of music helps him or her to keep the Sabbath in the right frame of mind, focusing on God, His beautiful creation and the restful nature of His holy Sabbath day. Some might disagree about what type of music is appropriate for the Sabbath, but it is important that we don't become too liberal nor too strict. We must not judge and condemn someone for the type of music which he or she may be listening to on the Sabbath, even though we would prefer listening to something else.

Paul says, "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way" (Romans 14:10, 12–13).

Chapter 2

Eating Out on the Sabbath

The *Church of the Eternal God* in the USA and its corporate affiliates in Canada and Great Britain have consistently taught that it is not wrong to eat out on the weekly Sabbath or annual Holy Days (which are also called “Sabbaths” in the Bible), depending on the circumstances. At the same time, we must always keep firmly in mind that whatever we do or say or think on the Sabbath should be in realization of the fact that we are spending time that God has set aside for a holy purpose (Isaiah 58:13–14). This is not to say, however, that a Christian should engage in shopping on the Sabbath [but see our comments below], except in a real emergency. Nor should this be used as justification or an excuse for a refusal to prepare for the Sabbath on the previous day.

Not Wrong to Eat in a Restaurant on the Sabbath

If Church members today eat occasionally in a nice, quiet restaurant on the Sabbath or a Holy Day after Church services, for instance, while at the same time fellowshiping with other brethren and speaking about the things that pertain to God, then we must not condemn them for that. For instance, Church members might be traveling for quite a distance to attend Church services, looking forward to spending additional time with their brethren after services.

This teaching is in accordance with the long-held understanding of the Church of God. In a letter from the Letter Answering Department of the *Worldwide Church of God*, dated October 1988, this understanding was correctly explained, as follows:

“The Church has long taught that it is not wrong to eat out on the weekly Sabbath occasionally or on the annual Holy Days, depending upon one’s circumstances and preferences. Those waiters, waitresses, chefs, and the like, who may serve in a restaurant, are *not our ‘servants’* in the way described in the Fourth Commandment. They are the employees

of the owner of the restaurant. They would be working regardless of whether or not we ate there. God does not hold us responsible for their working on the Sabbath just because we use their services — unless we are the only ones who ever ate in that restaurant on the Sabbath.

“Obviously, we make up a very small portion of the customers served in restaurants on the Sabbath or Holy Days. Further, eating out occasionally on the Sabbath can *enhance spiritual fellowship* with brethren and allow family members more time to be with one another.”

Mr. Armstrong, the late human leader of the [now defunct] *Worldwide Church of God*, who died in 1986, explained once during a Bible study that he did not feel that it was inappropriate to go to a restaurant on a Sabbath, since eating or not eating did not stop the cooks and servers at a restaurant from working on the Sabbath. He would go out on a Friday night if he had guests, and if he had served his guests in his house, it would have meant a lot of work for Mr. Armstrong’s housekeeper and cook.

The Church of God in Germany published a booklet in the early 70’s, titled *Gottes Sabbat—ein Tag der Freude* (“God’s Sabbath — A Day of Joy”). It reflected the Church’s understanding on the issue in stating: “In Matthew 12:1–5, Christ shows clearly that it is not prohibited to acquire food on the Sabbath, when one is hungry and has nothing to eat. If one is not at home, it is not wrong to go to a restaurant on the Sabbath. There are people who do not have the means of cooking at home. In such cases it is permissible to buy food on the Sabbath.”

Stopping at a Coffee Shop

Some have no problem with going to a restaurant on the Sabbath to be with Church members, but reject the concept that when they get together *for a picnic* after Church services, some participating members, who have been traveling from a distance, go to a shop to buy some beer or some sandwiches for the picnic. Some may object to others stopping at a *coffee shop* on their way to Church services to drink coffee there or eat a sandwich, but they have no problem with buying coffee at the hotel where they are meeting, or at a restaurant where they might meet after services.

We must not have double standards. If one set of actions is accepted, why not the other set? In addition, we do not know why the member

would stop at a coffee shop on his way to services. Maybe, his family situation is such that he would rather enjoy peace at the coffee shop than having coffee at home, where he might be facing antagonism and rejection because of the Sabbath. As mentioned before, these are questions, which must be answered pursuant to personal choices and convictions. Again, it is not for us to condemn or criticize the actions of others.

Night to Be Much Observed

In years when the Passover evening falls on the Sabbath, work will have to be done during the ceremony. In addition, the Night to Be Much Observed falls [in such a] year on an annual Holy Day, following a weekly Sabbath. Some members of the *Church of the Eternal God* keep the Night to Be Much Observed in a nice, quiet restaurant, so as to reduce the workload on the women for that night. Otherwise, the ladies would have to work during the weekly Sabbath to prepare meals for the evening. To prepare meals on Friday might pose several problems, as Friday, being the preparation day for the Sabbath, should be spent more properly to spiritually prepare for the Passover evening (in addition to finishing removing all leavening from the house, which must be completed [in such a] year by Friday evening).

In the early 70s, it was the practice of the Church of God in Germany to meet together in a restaurant during the Night to Be Much Observed. This was always a most inspiring experience, and rightly observed, did not at all take away from the spirit of that occasion.

Feast of Tabernacles

The *Church of the Eternal God* in Germany has followed this example for several years, with great success. In addition, Church members meet for at least eight days in rented facilities during the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Some might object to this, claiming they cannot rent rooms at a hotel, as this would include renting on the weekly Sabbath and two annual Holy Days. They would rather stay home and just attend services. However, in doing so, they would violate God's command to stay in temporary dwellings during the entire Feast of Tabernacles (excluding some extraordinary personal circumstances).

Kindling a Fire

Is it allowed to “kindle” a fire on the Sabbath? We should take note of the following comments from our free booklet, *God’s Commanded Holy Days*:

“God instructs us [in Exodus 35:3] not to kindle a fire for the purpose of working. He is not talking about kindling a fire to warm ourselves, or to cook a meal, or, as some interpret this today, to turn on a light switch. In the original Hebrew, the thought is conveyed of ‘kindling a consuming fire.’ The context in which this command was given was the work of building the tabernacle (compare Exodus 35:10–19)... heavy baking or boiling should be done on Friday, but... it is not prohibited to ‘kindle a fire’ to cook or heat a meal on the Sabbath day... ‘Customary work,’ by Biblical definition, does not include kindling a fire to warm oneself or cooking or heating a meal, and it does not include the bringing of sacrifices by the priests...”

Farmer’s Markets

“[In Nehemiah 13:15–22], we see a description of a very common practice in our Western world today—a farmer’s market being conducted on the Sabbath. People were carrying burdens into the city to sell them there. But God did not—and does not—approve of such practices. If we want to be God’s people, we are not to participate in such activities... Further, the command against carrying burdens applies foremost, as we have seen, to carrying merchandise to be sold. This does not mean, however, [that we should move or continue to move to a new home] on the Sabbath, except, of course, in a real emergency...”

“Christ did not do His customary work as a carpenter—but He did do the work of God, that is, He did do good things on the Sabbath, including healing people...”

Working as Doctors, Nurses or Caretakers

We may want to clarify that this does not justify the work of a Church member as a doctor or a nurse on the Sabbath, since this is their customary work. This would also include an employed caretaker in a hospital or convalescent home for the elderly. In those cases, they need to find a replacement for their work on the Sabbath, as everyone needs to do, who does customary work.

Continuing with quoting from our above-mentioned booklet:

Sabbath a FEAST Day

“Since both the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days are Feast days, the Christians in Colossae kept them of course as FEAST days. They would eat and drink on those days (except, of course, during the ‘Fast’—on the Day of Atonement). Some, though, apparently criticized them for that, teaching that no eating and drinking should take place on any of those days.

“Colossians 2:16, correctly translated from the Greek, states: ‘Let no one judge you regarding eating and drinking.’ Paul is addressing here the ACT of eating and drinking, not the KIND of food and drink being partaken of. Some critics felt, however, that Christians should fast on those days, rather than eating or drinking anything... Rather than agreeing with these human ideas, Paul states that this kind of philosophy is useless and is a doctrine of man that is derived from the ‘principles of this world.’ He specifically condemns such teaching in Colossians 2:8: ‘Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.’

Church to Decide

“Some were apparently trying to introduce those philosophies into the Church, especially pertaining to how to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days. Paul, in addressing these attempts, essentially told the Colossians: ‘Let no one judge you for keeping the Sabbath or the Holy Days with eating and drinking, rather than fasting, but let the Church determine or resolve this.’”

The Church has *resolved* that the Sabbath should be kept as a Feast day, with eating and drinking. Occasional fasting on the Sabbath may be in order, but it should not become a habit. In addition, the Church has also *resolved* that it is not wrong, in certain circumstances, to eat out in a restaurant on the Sabbath.

Chapter 3

Church Attendance

In this chapter we will focus specifically on God's command to attend Church services. In the next two chapters, we will address guidelines for proper appearance and conduct in our worship services.

Church Attendance Commanded

Barring extraordinary circumstances, such as health issues or very long distance, which would prevent us from attending Church services, to not attend Church services because of lack of convenience or interest is clearly sinful in the eyes of God. And if in doubt, it is always better to attend than to use "excuses" for not attending.

Old Testament Instructions

Turning first to the Old Testament, we will see God's explicit commands to the people of Israel to assemble on each Sabbath and on each annual Holy Day, as well as for the entire eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day.

Leviticus 23:3 refers to a "holy convocation" on the *weekly Sabbath*. A holy convocation is a *meeting or gathering for a holy or sacred purpose*. Leviticus 23:4 speaks of all of the annual Holy Days or feasts as "holy convocations."

Leviticus 23:7 states that the *first day of the Days of Unleavened Bread* includes a holy convocation [compare Numbers 28:18]. Leviticus 23:8 says that the *seventh or last day of the Days of Unleavened Bread* "shall be a holy convocation." [Compare Numbers 28:25. Deuteronomy 16:8 describes it as a "sacred assembly."]

Leviticus 23:21 commands that on the *Day of Pentecost* or the Feast of Weeks or the "day of the firstfruits," a "holy convocation" is to be held [compare Numbers 28:26].

Leviticus 23:24 addresses the *Feast of Trumpets* and states that

“you shall have a sabbath-rest” and “a holy convocation.” [Compare Numbers 29:1.]

Leviticus 23:27 states that the *Day of Atonement* “shall be a holy convocation for you.” [Compare Numbers 29:7.]

Leviticus 23:35 says that on the *first day of the Feast of Tabernacles*, there shall be a “holy convocation” [compare Numbers 29:12]. Leviticus 23:36 states that on the *eighth day* “you shall have a holy convocation.” Numbers 29:35 describes it as a “sacred assembly.

The *seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles* are described as a “feast to the LORD,” which is to be kept for the entire time (Leviticus 23:41). We read in Nehemiah 8:18 that “day by day, from the first day until the last day, he [Ezra] read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.”

Summarizing the annual Holy Days, Leviticus 23:37–38 concludes: “These are the feasts of the LORD which you shall proclaim to be *holy convocations* besides the [weekly] Sabbaths of the LORD.”

Children Included

The command to assemble before God in holy convocations included men, women and little children. Nehemiah 8:1–12 reports that on the Feast of Trumpets, Ezra read the words of God to “all the people gathered as one man,” and that he brought God’s words “before the congregation, of men and women and all who could hear with understanding.”

This included little children, as we read in Joshua 8:35: “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.” 2 Chronicles 20:13 adds: “Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the LORD.”

New Testament Instructions

Turning now to the New Testament, we find that the command to attend Church services on the *weekly Sabbath* and the *annual Holy Days* is still binding for us today.

Keeping the Sabbath and Passover

We read in Luke 2:41 that Jesus' parents—together with Jesus—"went to Jerusalem EVERY YEAR at the Feast of the Passover..." Christ and His parents went up year by year to keep the Feasts in Jerusalem, and when Christ was grown, He would never deviate from this practice. Notice these supporting examples in John 4:45; 5:1; 7:8, 10, 14, 37; and 12:12, 20. In addition, as His custom was, Christ went each Sabbath day to the synagogue (Luke 4:16, 31; 13:10; Mark 1:21; 6:2).

Paul and the other early apostles and disciples did the same by assembling together on the Sabbath day and the annual Holy Days.

Early Church Kept Pentecost

We read that the disciples (including the apostles, the "women," the brothers of Christ, and Mary, the mother of Christ, Acts 1:14), were together "in one place" on the *Day of Pentecost* (Acts 2:1), and that they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread (having meals together) and in prayers (Acts 2:42). Members of early New Testament church congregations would assemble and meet together in the private houses of some of their brethren (Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19).

Paul Kept the Sabbath and Annual Holy Days

As his custom was, Paul also kept the weekly Sabbath in fellowship with others. He and his party went into the synagogue at Antioch on the Sabbath day to teach (Acts 13:13–15). While the Jews did not like his teaching, "the Gentiles begged that these words be preached to them the next Sabbath" (verse 42). And "the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God" (verse 44). Paul did so on other occasions as well (Acts 17:2; 18:4). In addition, we read that Paul was very anxious to go to Jerusalem to keep certain annual Holy Days there (Acts 18:20–21; Acts 20:16).

Today we need to worship God together, in a sacred assembly and a holy convocation, which is authorized by God, and where God has placed His name. Christ is the Head of His Church, and we are to follow Him wherever He goes and wherever He leads His Church (Revelation 14:4).

Why Young Children?

As Christians, we are to assemble, as much as is possible, in person on the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days in holy convocations or sacred assemblies. God's Church has consistently taught that parents are to attend weekly and annual Church services with their small children.

Why does God require that our babies and young children attend Church services? The Bible instructs parents to train and teach their children in God's Way of Life from early on (Deuteronomy 6:6–7; 32:46; Genesis 18:19; 1 Timothy 2:15; 2 Timothy 3:15). We are told that when certain habits are instilled in a child—including the right observance of the Sabbath with regular Church attendance (Exodus 20:8–11)—then he or she will not depart from it at an older age (Proverbs 22:6; 20:11). There is no guarantee, of course, as teens will make their own decisions (and sometimes very bad ones), but parents ought to do what *they* can do to help their children grow up in the right way.

Don't Forsake the Assembly

We are warned to NOT neglect attending Church services.

Hebrews 10:24–26 reads, in context: "...And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. For if we sin willfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins..."

The Berkeley Version of the New Testament says: "... not neglecting our own church meeting."

J.B. Phillips writes in *The New Testament in Modern English*: "And let us not hold aloof from our church meetings."

The *Living Bible* states: "Let us not neglect our church meetings..."

The *Jewish New Testament*, by David H. Stern, renders it in this way: "... not neglecting our own congregational meetings, as some have made a practice of doing so, but, rather, encouraging each other..."

These renditions state correctly that we are not to forsake assembling for CHURCH SERVICES.

John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible explains that "assembling" describes "their act of meeting together in some one place to attend

his [God's] worship, word, and ordinances. Now to 'forsake' such assembling, signifies a great infrequency in attending with the saints, a rambling from place to place... It is the duty of saints to assemble together..."

Staying Home?

One important "human justification" for forsaking Church services is the wrong idea that we don't need the Church; that we can stay at home on our own, doing our own Bible studies and gaining thereby the same kind of knowledge which we might have received by attending Church services. This wrong concept is dangerous! It ignores the fact that we are not only to assemble to be instructed, but also to fellowship with and encourage and help other members at Church services, thus demonstrating our love to God and to our neighbor—to God, as we DO what He instructs us to do, and to our neighbor, as we show him or her that we care enough for them to assemble and fellowship with them.

The *Life Application Bible* gives the following and most helpful analysis: "... Difficulties should never be excuses for missing church services. Rather, as difficulties arise, we should make an even greater effort to be faithful in attendance."

Upon the founding of the Church, Jesus Christ established the ministry and holds them strictly responsible to continue guiding His people in obedience to God's commands—including, "...the assembling of ourselves together" (compare Ephesians 4:11-16).

Internet Sabbath Services

We realize that for some brethren, it is impossible or very difficult to attend our Church services in person. They might be scattered; they might be too sick or handicapped; or there might be other valid reasons preventing them from attending in person. To just attend with a Church group which does not teach the Truth, or which teaches only part of the Truth, would of course not be an option. Since they cannot physically join with other members on the Sabbath, they listen to sermon CDs, or they sit in and listen to our live Internet worship services.

There may always be [so-called] "legitimate" reasons to the

human mind for not attending worship services regularly and in person—reasons such as inconvenience, just not feeling like it, feeling too tired, staying with visiting relatives or friends, persecution, high costs of transportation or distance, as well as the idea that we don't really "need" to attend. Rather, as the reasoning may go, we might as well stay home today and listen to sermon tapes or live services that are broadcast over the Internet.

Not for the Purpose of Replacement

However, based on the PURPOSE of PERSONAL CHURCH ATTENDANCE with other members, the means of broadcasting services of the *Church of the Eternal God* (CEG) over the Internet was developed for those brethren who are scattered, or who might be sick, and who therefore cannot attend regular CEG Church services. It was never meant to be a replacement for personal attendance.

Listening to live Internet Church services or listening to sermon tapes [or CDs] does NOT constitute an equally valuable alternative to personal CEG Church attendance. Those who can physically attend CEG Church services are commanded by God to do so, for their own good and for the benefit of other Church members. Listening to Internet services and participating in the chat rooms before and after services may only be the second-best option. Personal attendance is always the preferable course of action.

Legitimate Reasons for Not Attending

Of course, we realize that there are legitimate reasons for not attending Sabbath services, on occasion. Temporary contagious sickness would be such a reason. We state in our flyers, which we publish for our annual Feast of Tabernacles services (but the principle applies for every Sabbath service):

"Although no one wishes to miss any part of the Feast due to illness, please be considerate of your brethren. If you have a fever or other easily transmitted illness, please refrain from joining the group until the illness has passed."

Going on Vacation

It is certainly permissible to occasionally go on vacation even if this prevents us from attending Church services in person. In such cases, we might want to make sure that we can have access to live Internet services, or to take with us sermon tapes or CDs to listen to them on the Sabbath. But we would recommend keeping those occasions to a minimum (it would certainly not be appropriate to go on camping trips or on vacation every other month, thereby preventing personal Church attendance.)

Parties and Weddings Not Legitimate Excuses

We must realize that there is a grave danger in not attending, and we must be honest to evaluate our personal circumstances to determine whether they allow or justify our non-attendance.

It would generally not be permissible to forego Church services in order to be able to attend a birthday party of a friend or relative; and we do not feel that it is normally a legitimate excuse to attend a wedding of a friend or relative on the Sabbath, preventing us from attending Church services. (Please review again previous chapters on attendance of birthdays or weddings on the Sabbath.) Since we understand that unforeseen and unexpected circumstances might arise, it would be advisable, if in doubt, to consult with a minister of God on those issues.

Chapter 4

Proper Appearance in Sabbath Services

In this chapter we will address guidelines for proper *appearance* in our worship services. The next chapter will address proper *conduct* during our Church services.

Wearing of Rings and Fine Apparel

Some have raised the issue that the wearing of rings, especially by women, allegedly violates biblical injunctions. This assumption is wrong. James 2:2–4 speaks about a “man with gold rings, in fine apparel,” coming into our assembly or Church services. James is not saying that the man should stop wearing gold rings or fine clothes; rather, his point is that the brethren should not show favoritism toward him and look down on those in the Church who do not possess such fine things.

What James Meant

If we apply James’ statements to worship services on the weekly or annual Sabbaths, two factors have to be kept in mind. First, James is drawing a comparison. He compares the appearance of a rich and prosperous man—one who is aware of his riches and manifests them without any sense of recognition or compassion for others—with the appearance of a poor man. The translation of the words “with filthy clothes” in James 2:2 (“vile raiment” in the *Authorized Version*) is somewhat misleading in this context. The Greek word for “filthy” or “vile” is “*rhuparos*” and can ALSO have the meaning of “relatively cheap” (compare *Strong’s* under No. 4508).

Second, if applied in that sense, it is important to note that the context speaks of a person “coming into your assembly.” James does not seem to be talking about regular Church members (who know how they ought to dress when they appear before God), but a newcomer or a guest.

James' point was that others are not to condemn a "poor" person who is visiting for the first time or who has just begun attending simply because he is not dressed in an appropriate way. In addition, the way in which he is dressed might be the best the person can do. Rather than condemning a person or looking down on him for not dressing up, we should be lending a helping hand and give the needy what is necessary to meet the proper standard.

Wearing Jewelry

The passages in 1 Peter 3:3–6 and 1 Timothy 2:9–10 do not prohibit women from wearing jewelry or fine clothes or rings per se; but, as we also read in Isaiah 3:16–23, the warning is against the overemphasis and misuse of the same in order to draw undue attention to themselves and their riches. The *Living Bible* renders 1 Peter 3:3 accurately in conveying the intended meaning: "Don't be concerned about the outward beauty that depends on jewelry, or beautiful clothes, or hair arrangement. Be beautiful inside, in your hearts, with the lasting charm of a gentle and quiet spirit which is so precious to God."

At the same time, these passages do not say that women should dress inappropriately or sloppy, *without* adorning themselves in some way when attending Sabbath services. The Sabbath is a *holy feast day*, and we are appearing in front of God—our King—on that day. We would not appear before a worldly king with dirty clothes or in a sloppy manner with casual attire.

Also note the analogy in Ezekiel 16:1–14, describing figuratively how God loved and adorned his "wife," Jerusalem.

Holy Garments

When God gave instructions for the creation of "holy garments" for the priests of Israel, He specifically wanted them made "for GLORY and for BEAUTY" (Exodus 28:2). Relative to how both men and women are to dress when attending Church services, we find a meaningful example when the children of Israel were commanded to wash their clothes in advance of appearing before God (compare Exodus 19:10,14).

Likewise, the priests were to wash themselves when appearing before God (compare Exodus 30:19–20); and, they were to wear special clothing. Note that we today are a "holy" and a "royal priesthood," as

1 Peter 2:5, 9 points out, also showing our duty to appear before God during Sabbath services with washed and special clothing.

Appearing Before God With the Best Apparel

It has been the practice of the Church of God to recognize that we are appearing before God when we assemble for Sabbath services, as well as during other special commanded assemblies given by God [such as commanded worship services throughout the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, even though only the first day is a Holy Day]. As such, we do recommend that each person present himself or herself in the best apparel they have available. The foremost idea is to specially prepare to appear before God to honor HIM!

That we ought to appear properly dressed for worship services, has been the long-standing teaching of the Church of God, and for good reason: We must understand that we are appearing before GOD. God is a great King. God is the Creator of everything that is good and costly and priceless. He is the Creator of beauty. He most certainly is the Creator of quality. He owns all the gold and silver, and it is He who made it all. If we were to be invited by an earthly king, how would we appear in front of him? Would you want to appear in unwashed, dirty clothing, wearing washed-out jeans, a T-shirt, and sneakers?

How much more should we appear before GOD, the KING over His creation, in proper clothes! The famous parable in Matthew 22:10–13 about the king's wedding feast for his son contains a spiritual lesson, but it also describes a physical principle—that we dress appropriately for the occasion. It DID matter to the king—God the Father—how the guests were dressed for the wedding of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Don't Neglect Culture

In this context, we must not neglect culture. In the Western World, it is normally appropriate for men to wear a suit, or a nice combination, with a shirt and a tie. In the U.S.A., Canada or in the UK [and we might include continental Europe as well], men are not dressed up when they appear in worship services with an open shirt, a T-shirt or jeans.

Don't Violate God's Standards

Ladies should also wear appropriate clothing, of course. In addition,

their dresses or skirts should not be too short or too tight or too revealing.

God gives us the freedom to determine what is appropriate clothing, within the acceptability of proper dress in our cultures; but to clarify, God does not give us the freedom to violate His specific instructions so that we can follow our culture. For example, God has told us how to wear our hair. We are told that it is a shame for a man—young or old—to wear long hair.

God takes great exception to the self-absorbed and self-willed practices of people who lose all restraint. This applies to inappropriate sloppy appearance, as well as to the over-emphasis on wealth and riches. Our responsibility is to dress modestly and yet to dress with quality garments that reflect honor to God.

Apparel of Children

As we pointed out in the last chapter, young children should attend Church services with their parents. The rules of proper dress code apply to our children as well. We are not saying, of course, that our young boys need to appear in a suit (even though some might wish to dress them up in such a “cute” way), nor, that our young girls need to wear a “wedding dress,” but our children should not appear sloppy and uncombed, wearing “every-day” street clothes, washed-out or torn jeans, T-shirts or sneakers. Their appearance should reflect the sanctity and holiness of Sabbath services.

Dress Code for Worship Services at Home

If scattered brethren have Sabbath worship services “in their home,” while listening to CDs, to our sermonettes and sermons which are posted online, or to live Internet Church services, they are still appearing before God, during that time, in a SACRED assembly, and should not appear before God uncombed, unshaved and unwashed, or by just wearing pajamas.

However, the requirement for proper attire does not apply to somebody who is sick and in bed. It also does not apply to those who might be listening to CDs or tapes during the week or after the Sabbath is over. Nor does it apply to those who might be listening in to live

services from overseas, *after the Sabbath has already passed for them*. We are strictly addressing live Internet services for those participating in Sabbath services in lieu of attending in person, simply because they are scattered or are suffering, for example, from a sickness like a flu, which would not prevent them from being dressed appropriately.

To emphasize the fact that at-home participants in our live Internet services appear before God in a sacred assembly, we have published the following statement on our “Live Services” page regarding “Attending Live Internet Church Services”:

“The Church of the Eternal God broadcasts weekly and annual live services over the Internet for those who are unable to attend our local services in person. We emphasize that the live broadcasts of our Church services are holy and sacred convocations. Participants over the Internet should conduct themselves appropriately during services, in accordance with our doctrines and practices, and this includes proper dress when we are appearing before God. We encourage any person interested in participating over the Internet to contact the ministry to receive guidance and answers to any questions.”

These same principles apply to those who use CDs or tapes for their Sabbath services at home, in lieu of participating in Church services in person.

A Balanced Approach

Before ending this chapter, we would like to make the following observations:

We are presenting these comments on proper Sabbath observance in order to provide a balanced approach, based on God’s Word. We also need to emphasize that God’s true ministers are the custodians or “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1); and that God’s Church is the “pillar and ground of [God’s] truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), speaking with godly authority on administrative matters (Matthew 18:18), such as how to keep the Sabbath properly.

The question arises whether God will accept worship from members or prospective members when they devise their own practices, and whether He will inspire and lead people who reject His ministry.

The biblical record has strong warnings for those who refuse the clear instructions and principles established by God in His Word and faithfully taught by His ministers (Ephesians 4:11–16; Hebrews 13:17).

The Jews of Jesus' time had warped the keeping of the Sabbath by replacing the godly approach with their own customs and traditions. Those actions led them to seek to kill Jesus because of the way He properly taught and kept the Sabbath. The keeping of the Sabbath in our generation is still the subject of false teachings, and the Church of God, under God's inspiration, upholds the truth of correct Sabbath observance.

True Sabbath Observance Lost?

In addition, we need to ask whether knowledge of TRUE Sabbath observance has been lost and is being rejected by some. All kinds of people in their own groups and all kinds of people in their own minds talk about keeping the Sabbath. As Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong used to say about the differing "Christian" denominations—"they can't all be right!"

After Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986, the new administration of the *Worldwide Church of God* [now defunct] began to disembowel the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days—to water them down—to provide alternate observances, until it completely rejected the weekly and annual Sabbaths in their entirety. This was not unlike the way King Jeroboam set up more "convenient places" than Jerusalem and the Temple of God for worship.

The residue of people who once attended the *Worldwide Church of God* have mostly thrown away Sabbath-keeping. Various Church of God groups are hanging on, but the question must be asked whether the grip of some has been slipping with the passage of time. Right Sabbath keeping is so much more than just knowing ABOUT the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days. God expects obedience concerning the sacred times He has established!

When God looks across this earth during His weekly Sabbaths and His annual Holy Days, how many faithful Sabbath keepers does He see? Our comments on the right way of Sabbath-keeping should be viewed as a clarion call for the people of God to WAKE UP!

Chapter 5

Proper Conduct During Church Services

In the first four chapters of this booklet we addressed questions related to God's command not to "work" on the Sabbath; not to pursue our own "pleasure"; not to engage in "business"; whether it is permissible to eat out in a restaurant on the Sabbath; and attendance of and proper appearance in our Church worship services. In this chapter, we will address *proper conduct* during our Church services.

We need to understand that God has given His Church the responsibility to teach His Law, including proper conduct during Sabbath services. In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul tells Timothy: "I write so that you may know how you ought to *conduct* yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground (or foundation) of the truth." We are not to "despise the church of God" through *improper conduct* (compare 1 Corinthians 11:22).

God expects members and attendees to KNOW how to conduct themselves in Church services, which are sacred convocations or assemblies, and to realize that God is to be "greatly feared," respected, hallowed and "to be held in reverence" "in the assembly of the saints" (Psalm 89:7).

Drinking and Smoking

It should go without saying that we are not to come to services "drunk" (compare 1 Corinthians 11:21); nor should we even think of taking a break during services "for a cigarette." Although we may not get drunk or smoke just before or during Sabbath services, if we have done so the night before, this will become obvious to the entire congregation (the smell of smoky garments cannot be hidden, nor the face of a person recovering from drunkenness).

Living in Sin

Even apart from Church services, getting drunk or smoking is sinful

behavior and must be overcome. This means that we must work on getting rid of sin in our lives. Even if we appear properly dressed in Sabbath services, God will still not accept us if we show Him throughout the week that we are not serious about overcoming our sins and living His Way of Life (compare Isaiah 1:12, 16).

Unresolved Problems

Paul had to deal with a terrible situation in the Corinthian Church, when he chided the members as follows: "I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you..." (1 Corinthians 11:17-18). It is critical for Church members, who assemble on the Sabbath, to not have any unresolved problems between them.

Entirety of Worship Service Is Holy

It is of utmost importance to understand that we appear in front of God during the entirety of our worship service; and this means that every aspect of the service is to reflect our worship of God. This is true whether we are attending together with our brethren in a Church hall, or whether we are, due to necessity, listening in to live Church services from our homes. This means we stand up respectfully and humbly when participating in the opening or closing prayer, and we stand up and participate joyfully in the singing of the congregational hymns [in the Church hall AND at home].

We must concentrate on and listen carefully to the messages (including the announcements, as well as the sermonette and sermon). It is understood, of course, that parents will have to take care of their babies and young children, which might even require at times to take them out of the Church hall when they get too loud and disturb others.

Paying Close Attention

Apart from these sometimes inevitable distractions, there is no excuse for not paying close and undivided attention to services. It would be highly inappropriate to engage in jokes or unnecessary conversation during services (except for unavoidable situations, such as when our technical staff may at times have to communicate with each other to

make sure that the services are being properly broadcast, etc.).

It would also be offensive to God if someone were to get up during services (whether in a Church hall or at home) to engage in unnecessary conduct.

Participating in Song Service

In services, most of us do not have many opportunities to audibly participate, except for saying “Amen” to the opening and closing prayers, after having listened carefully and attentively to every word of the prayers, and for singing joyfully during the song service.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of participation in the song service with all of our heart, concentrating on each word which we are singing, and agreeing with it completely, knowing that we are not doing so to impress others, but because we are worshipping God when we sing out loud (compare Psalm 26:12; 149:1).

Church services ARE FORMAL WORSHIP SERVICES, in dedication to God and in fellowship with His holy people, and all of us must always keep this in mind throughout the entirety of the service.

Same for Internet Services

As mentioned, these statements also apply when we are participating in live services over the Internet. Even though we might be in the privacy of our homes, we should not think that we can therefore dishonor the sacred nature of services by “doing our own thing.” While no other human being might see us, God does, and He evaluates us as to how sincere and committed we are to Him and the holiness of His Sabbath days.

Angels Are Witnessing

The fact is, when we attend Sabbath services, either in person or via the Internet, we are appearing before God and His heavenly throne and majestic surroundings, as we read in Hebrews 12:18–24. The *New International Version* renders verse 23: “You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.” The *Living Bible* speaks of “the gathering of countless happy angels;” the *New American Bible* refers to the angels “in festal gathering;” and the *New Jerusalem Bible* states that angels “have gathered for the festival.”

As we read in 1 Peter 1:10–12, angels “desire to look into” the things which are revealed to the Church of God. Ephesians 3:8–10 adds that God reveals the Truth to His Church, which proclaims it, including in Sabbath services, to angels and humans. God and His angels observe whether we eagerly and regularly attend Church services; whether we listen diligently and attentively to the messages and the prayers; and whether we participate whole-heartedly in the song service (perhaps even conducting at times special music).

Children Should Listen and Be Supervised

These principles apply to our children and teens as well. When they are old enough, they should *listen* to the messages, and their parents should also teach them at home about God’s Way of Life (Deuteronomy 6:6–7; 32:46). Jesus was 12 years old when He was in the Temple, “listening to [the teachers] and asking them questions,” so that all “were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Luke 2:46–47).

Our children and teens should be willing to listen and to learn (Proverbs 4:1–4; 5:7–14). They should rise up for (and, if possible, participate in) the song service and they should stand and listen to the opening and closing prayers (except little children who might be sleeping during services).

Our children and teens should not be doing schoolwork or reading books or comics during Sabbath services, nor should they entertain themselves with video games during services. If they are old enough to read books, then they are also old enough to listen to the messages. They might even be old enough to read the Scriptures in their own Bibles along with the ministers who read them from the pulpit.

Parents ought to *supervise* their children before, during and after services. Generally, our children should be sitting together with their parents. On occasion, they may want to sit together with another child, but then at least *one parent should be sitting with them*; children should not be sitting together by themselves. They should also be responsible enough, if they have to go to the restroom during services, to immediately return to services; otherwise, a parent should accompany the child to and from the restroom.

When the Church meets in a hotel, it is very important that children are not left to themselves before and after services (compare Proverbs

29:15), as disturbing or loud conduct and running in the hallways of the hotel could even cause the Church to lose the opportunity of renting at the facility. In any event, it would not give a good impression to others when our children behave improperly.

At the same time, we must not forget that the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days are FEAST Days, as we explain in our free booklet, *God's Commanded Holy Days*. We point out that Paul essentially told the members in Colossians 2:16–17: “Let no one judge you for keeping the Sabbath or the Holy Days with eating and drinking, rather than fasting, but let the Church determine or resolve this.”

The Church Decides How We Are to Conduct Ourselves

Paul made it clear that the Church is to resolve, settle or decide in what way we are to observe the Sabbath, which would also include our conduct during Sabbath services. Church members should not listen to those outside the Church or to attendees with different and strange ideas; nor should they devise their own concepts as to how to keep the Sabbath and how to observe Church services.

Rather, they should listen to the Church leadership for the explanation and resolution of these questions, including administrative decisions in “gray” areas, which may need clarification.

In conclusion, it is very important to God THAT and HOW we appear before Him in Sabbath services (that is, with clean garments AND clean hearts), as well as HOW we behave in God’s sacred assemblies, thereby showing Him that we understand how to conduct ourselves *in the house of God*.

Chapter 6

Guidelines for Opening and Closing Prayers

The *Church of the Eternal God* in the USA, the *Global Church of God* in the UK, and the *Church of God, a Christian Fellowship* in Canada, conduct their weekly and annual Sabbath services by opening with prayer (usually after singing three congregational hymns), and by closing with prayer (after singing a final congregational hymn). These prayers are given by baptized men who have been selected by the song leader—sometimes after consultation with or direction from the presiding minister. On occasion, and subject to the discretion of the presiding minister, baptized visitors and guests from other Church of God organizations, who might not regularly attend our fellowship, might be asked to give the opening or closing prayer.

Public Prayers

It is not against biblical commands to have baptized men conduct opening or closing prayers in services. We explained the following in our free booklet, *Teach Us to Pray*, on page 5:

“The Bible shows us the proper way to pray, both publicly and privately. For instance, when we pray in public by giving an opening or a closing prayer in Church services, we must not pray to be ‘seen by men’ (Matthew 6:5). Our motivation must not be to please men, but rather to please God. On the other hand, heart-rending, intimate prayers should be communicated to God the Father privately (Matthew 6:6).”

The *Church of the Eternal God* and its corporate affiliates trace their roots to the *Worldwide Church of God* under the late Herbert W. Armstrong (who died in 1986). During his lifetime, Mr. Armstrong established the way in which Church of God services should be conducted, and we have substantially adopted these procedures.

As a consequence, we hereby reproduce and quote, with approval,

excerpts from an article of the *Worldwide Church of God's* monthly magazine, *The Good News*, dated August 1971, entitled, "How to Open and Close Services With Prayer." Of course, the following is not a rigid outline or formula that must and should be adhered to EVERY time, but it is meant to give valuable guidelines.

Beginning with the discussion of *opening prayers*, the article stated the following:

"What, after all, is the object of having opening prayers?... We are instructed in God's Word not to be given to 'vain repetitions' (Matt. 6:7). An opening prayer should not be vain and worthless, nor should it be repetitious... Nor should an opening prayer be overly long. Simply because a prayer is short does not mean it is ineffective. The Bible contains examples of very brief prayers that resulted in powerful miracles being performed.

"An opening prayer to one of God's Sabbath services should also be prayed in earnest, believing FAITH! You should expect that prayer to MAKE A DIFFERENCE in the service that follows...

"The primary purpose of this type of prayer is to ask for God's guidance and inspiration on the entire service. This includes both the hearing and the speaking. It takes in... even the announcement period. It would be appropriate to begin by THANKING God for the opportunity to meet in peace and harmony. Gratitude could be expressed for the hall or the fine weather or various other favorable conditions the Church has been blessed with...

"The most important thing is to ask and expect God's inspiration on the sermonette and the sermon. You could request that Jesus Christ actually be present in spirit to guide and direct the proceedings. Ask God to speak through his human instruments and lead them to say what is most needful and profitable for the whole congregation. As the world becomes more and more violent and Satan's wrath is increasingly intensified, it becomes more necessary also to ask God for protection...

"Keep in mind that you are speaking to GOD—not the listening audience before you. Remember it is a prayer! ... Be sincere... It is a prayer meant to open the services. There is [no] time or need to cover the entire spectrum of current events...

"Do not use the opening prayer as an opportunity to give a

sermonette... Get your mind OFF SELF and say what you have to say. Be confident without conceit. Be humble, but not groveling. Use a normal, clear voice and avoid any form of theatrics."

Similar guidelines apply to a *closing prayer* at the very end of the Church's worship services. The article in *The Good News* continued:

"Often, closing prayers are so general that they are totally unrelated to the message that preceded them! Express gratitude for the spiritual food God has provided."

One word of caution is in order here! It would not be appropriate to try to evaluate the contents of the messages—either directly or indirectly—or to give a lengthy repeat of the contents of the sermonette or the sermon. Remember that the opening and the closing prayers should be SHORT. For instance, when a sermon discussed seven points, it would be unnecessary to repeat them in the closing prayer. It might be perhaps beneficial to very briefly mention one or two points, which had the biggest impact on you.

Beware that the closing prayer is not supposed to be a sermonette—rather, it is a SHORT prayer to God. On the other hand, a closing prayer which has no relationship to the sermonette and the sermon would probably not be most effective. As in all aspects of Christian life, balance is the key. If you have specific questions in this regard, or in regard to anything else which is mentioned herein, please ask your local minister.

The article in *The Good News* went on to state:

"Of course, it is not necessary to summarize, or add an 'additional point' to the sermon in the closing prayer!... It is also appropriate to ask God's protection on the brethren traveling home following the services..."

"The announcements may have contained news of a very sick person or some other crisis in God's Work. This could certainly be alluded to in the closing prayer. Many men neglect to acknowledge the sermonette in the closing prayer... the sermonette is part of our spiritual food every Sabbath, and we ought to thank God for it..."

"Be sincere, but not overemotional. But the closing prayer, as the opening prayer, should not be overlong [sic].

"If you are called on to lead an opening or closing prayer, look upon it as an opportunity and a blessing. And be sure your prayer is one to

which the whole congregation can sincerely say ‘Amen’ (so be it!).”

In addition, it would be appropriate to ask in the closing prayer for God’s blessing on the meal which we might partake of after services, and to ask God for His blessing and protection for special activities which the Church might have planned for the time after the Sabbath, or for activities on days during the annual Feast of Tabernacles, which are not weekly or annual Holy Days, or for special occasions such as weddings or funerals.

Don’t Read from Notes

We should not read from any notes when we give an opening or closing prayer. Rather, we should allow God to inspire us through His Spirit at the moment we begin to pray aloud in front of others. Let God speak through you, and don’t allow yourself to become distracted by any notes that you might have written beforehand.

Have FAITH in God that He will inspire you when you are about to pray, and that He will put His words in your mouth, and then speak with confidence, knowing that God has heard you, and that He is answering your silent prayer to Him for inspiration. This includes, of course, that we pray habitually in private, so that we are not unprepared when we are to give a “public” prayer in Church.

This principle of allowing God’s Spirit to inspire us when we pray is clearly set forth in Scripture. For instance, note what Christ told His disciples regarding how to behave when they would be asked to explain their convictions, perhaps in the context of a court proceeding: “... do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speaks, but the Spirit of your Father [which] speaks in you” (Matthew 10:19–20, compare Mark 13:11, Luke 12:11–12).

Even though Christ is addressing here specifically the time of arrest and the subsequent opportunity to testify for Him and God’s Way of Life, the principle applies nevertheless in other circumstances as well. This is not to say that we should not prepare our messages and reduce our thoughts to writing, and that we should not have any notes when delivering a sermonette or a sermon, but it is to say that speakers must not be too “note-bound” when they deliver their message. Rather, they should and must allow God to inspire them, while speaking. This is

addressed in more detail in the next and final chapter, dealing with the art of preparing and delivering powerful sermonettes.

However, insofar as opening and closing prayers are concerned, it is our belief that notes should not be used in that regard.

No Prayers by Women

We would also like to explain here why we do not believe that women should give opening or closing prayers in Church services.

The Bible is very clear such conduct would be in violation of Scripture. We are setting forth below excerpts from pages 13–14 of our booklet, *The Keys to Happy Marriages and Families*:

“Notice 1 Timothy 2:11–15 where Paul says, ‘Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence...’ Notice, too, the parallel passage in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, ‘Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak... And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.’

“These passages clearly teach that women are not to give sermons or Bible studies in church. Older women can teach younger women in private, but not from the pulpit (compare Titus 2:1–5). We also note that Aquilla and Priscilla took Apollos aside to explain to him the Way of God more accurately (Acts 18:24–26). Priscilla did not teach Apollos publicly, in front of others...

“*Rienecker’s Lexikon zur Bibel* points out, under ‘Women,’ ‘The relationship between man and woman, ordained by God, can also be seen in the role of service and function within the church... Paul does not allow the women to teach, that is, to fill the office of teacher in the church (1 Timothy 2:12). It is different when Apollos is introduced more fully, in a personal conversation with Aquilla and Priscilla, to the teachings of God (Acts 18:26).’

“The message of Scripture is unambiguous: Christian women are not to teach Biblical or spiritual matters in church or in a public forum. It may be difficult for some to accept and apply God’s Word on this issue...”

The biblical prohibition for women to preach or teach or “speak” in Church services—or to give “testimony,” as is so common these

days in certain Pentecostal services—applies equally to the prohibition for women to give opening or closing prayers in Church services.

This is not to say, of course, that a woman should never pray; nor, that she should not pray at home with her children, or sometimes in private together with her husband; or, that she should not, on occasion, ask for the blessing of a meal at home, in the presence of her husband and their children. We are strictly addressing here prayers by women “in public,” and we emphasize again that the opening and closing prayers are an integral portion of Sabbath services that invite God to be present in spirit and inspire them, and subsequently to thank Him for doing just that. Baptized members of God’s Church, when called upon to give the opening or closing prayer, should not take this opportunity lightly, and they should carefully consider these guidelines that they may deliver a prayer in the correct manner and in a right frame of mind.

Chapter 7

Guidelines for Preparing and Giving a Sermonette

As we pointed out in the previous chapter, discussing opening and closing prayers, the *Church of the Eternal God* in the USA and its corporate affiliates, the *Global Church of God* in the UK, and the *Church of God, a Christian Fellowship* in Canada, trace their roots to the *Worldwide Church of God* under the late Herbert W. Armstrong (who died in 1986). During his lifetime, Mr. Armstrong established the way in which Church of God services should be conducted, and we have substantially adopted these procedures.

As a consequence, our weekly and annual Sabbath services include opening and closing prayers, a song service, announcements, occasional special music presentations (especially during the Feast of Tabernacles), and a sermonette and a sermon (sometimes, we may have two split sermons instead of a sermonette and a sermon, and we may on rare occasions dispense with a sermonette in lieu of a longer announcement session).

As pointed out in the previous chapter, only *baptized* men are to give sermonettes and sermons.

We present the following guidelines that the Church has developed over the years in regard to the preparation and presentation of sermonettes. This is not a rigid outline or formula, but it is meant to give valuable principles.

The *purpose of the sermonette* is to prepare the audience for the sermon, not just as a “general” or “ordinary” message, but rather as an inspired message from God. Normally, a sermonette should not be longer than 15 minutes, unless the responsible minister has given special prior permission for a longer message.

To give a sermonette is a privilege, not a right. Sermonettes provide opportunities for baptized men to teach—not to preach or correct. (This prohibition and the following statements are not necessarily applicable

to ordained ministers when they present sermonettes.) A sermonette speaker won't be able to "fix" or "save" someone in a short message anyway. Correction is the responsibility of the minister. Sermonette topics should be carefully selected. Topics which are corrective or overly broad or are "new" or speculative would be inappropriate. A topic that challenges Church teaching is absolutely forbidden.

Appropriate topics could be broken down into the following categories:

1. An explanation of "difficult" or misapplied Scriptures in light of Church teaching (e.g., 1 Timothy 4:4 or Acts 10:12–13—do these passages justify eating unclean meats; or John 14:2—is heaven the reward of the saved?; or Luke 17:21—is the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men?).
2. An explanation of two Scriptures that apparently contradict each other (e.g., Acts 9:7 vs. Acts 22:9—did or didn't those with Paul on the road to Damascus hear the voice of Christ?).
3. A clarification of a particular Scriptural point (e.g., Mark 9:48—are there immortal worms?).
4. An explanation of how to apply Scripture and Church teaching in practice (e.g., how to use our second tithe; or how to dress for Sabbath services; or what is right conversation after services; or how to participate during the song service; or how to teach our children to rejoice at the Feast of Tabernacles; or what does it mean that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, as related to drugs, smoking, excessive drinking or tattoos). However, as mentioned, it should encourage the audience to do or not to do something; the purpose is NOT to correct the audience.

The sermonette speaker has to make sure, of course, that the explanations he is giving are the right ones! He is not to rely on what he might have heard someone say many years ago. He also has to make sure that the written source material he may be using is accurate and current. This is true for "worldly" commentaries and encyclopedias, but it can also include "old" Church articles which are by now outdated or which have been subsequently revised.

The *Church of the Eternal God* and its corporate affiliates have

published a wealth of current information on biblical topics, including, with this booklet, 48 booklets in the English language, as well as numerous booklets in German, more than 860 weekly Updates (many of which include a Bible Study or a Q&A and a Bible-oriented Editorial); over 180 member letters, as well as hundreds of posted sermons, split sermons and sermonettes. We have posted all of our literature and many of our audio and video-recorded messages on our websites. Many of our video-recorded messages can also be found on YouTube and on Facebook.

The sermonette speaker must be supportive and promote unity. The material he presents must be correct, and he must never publicly disagree with any Church teachings. If he has questions, he must check them out with the ministry. It is not wrong to have questions or a lack of understanding, but one must get them sorted out if one is to be a fully supportive member of the Church. If in doubt, it is always advisable to discuss the proposed sermonette with the local minister before giving it.

The sermonette speaker is not to use the sermonette time to air personal gripes or complaints about the Church, the organization, members of the local congregation, the ministry, or any other Church problem. He is not to take a personal problem of an identifiable attendee in the congregation and give a sermonette about it.

The sermonette speaker should pray about his sermonette and begin to prepare the message early—not just the night before or the very same day when he is to speak. When preparing and delivering the message, the sermonette speaker has to keep in mind proper and clear pronunciation and grammar; as well as vocal variety and quality. Inappropriate language is to be avoided. The pulpit is not the place to describe explicitly the sins of mankind. Paul and the other apostles do mention certain types of sin, but they do not describe them in detail. The same goes for slang that borders on bad language.

When giving his message, the sermonette speaker needs to maintain eye contact with the audience, which prohibits just reading from many notes or a transcript. This is not to say that we should not prepare our messages and reduce our thoughts to writing and that we should not have any notes when delivering a sermonette or a sermon, but it is to say that speakers must not be too “note-bound” when they deliver their

message. (Exceptions exist for messages, which are being translated simultaneously into other languages, for instance during the Feast of Tabernacles, or for speakers whose messages are not given in their first language.) In any event, they should and must allow God to inspire them, while speaking.

In addition, a sermonette speaker needs to be well groomed, and he needs to smile and be warm and friendly, without being overly jocular or just plain silly. Remember, we are appearing in front of GOD during the entire Sabbath service.

Each sermonette should follow the usual **Outline** of a powerful introduction, a clear and precise Specific Purpose Statement (SPS), a body or main contents of the message, and a gripping and memorable conclusion. (Before beginning with the introduction, it is important that the speaker recognizes and welcomes the audience. A warm short greeting with a smiling face will be much appreciated by the audience. Just jumping into the message without first addressing the audience would be inappropriate.)

The **Introduction** must grab the attention of the audience. It must give a reason why they should listen and why it is important for them to know the information that is going to be presented. It could present a challenge or give some startling facts or ask a question. A sermonette speaker should not begin with, "Let's turn with me to..." or "I would like to explain the apparent contradiction...." All of this is lifeless and somewhat boring.

Instead, a powerful introduction could perhaps be, "How can you be sure that you don't go to heaven when you die?" Or: "How would you explain to someone that we don't vote in governmental elections?" It is of course necessary that the introduction relates to the rest of the sermonette. It must lead into the Specific Purpose Statement (SPS).

The **Specific Purpose Statement (SPS)** makes clear what the sermonette speaker is going to cover in the course of the sermonette. It tells the audience what he is seeking to achieve. It introduces the ONE point that the sermonette will discuss. The introduction and the SPS of the sermonette do not necessarily have to be presented distinctly and separately. The sermonette's opening comments may be a combination of these two functions.

The **Body** or main contents of the sermonette must of course respond

to and relate to the SPS, and also must deliver what was stated in the introduction and the SPS. It must fulfill what was set out to achieve, without containing new or unrelated material. The points within the body should flow in logical sequence (chronologically, historically, etc.), but there should not be too many points. A sermonette is to have ONE main point; it can of course have a few sub-points that all relate to the main point.

A sermonette is not to have too many Scriptures either. The Church has suggested at times that a sermonette should have no more than three or four Scriptures. This is a sound guideline, but not an iron-clad rule. Some sermonettes can be very effective, even though they may include more than four Scriptures, while other sermonettes with three Scriptures may not be that effective. But it is most certainly not good to load the message with Scripture after Scripture where most of the time is taken up reading them and little time is left to comment on them or give supporting material.

The **Conclusion** of the sermonette is vitally important. The last words will stay the longest with the audience. Common mistakes are to just stop speaking almost without warning at the end of the body of the speech; to give a conclusion, which is not related to the rest of the sermonette; or to introduce new material.

The conclusion should be memorized and should not be read, and the speaker should NOT end his message with, "Thank you." Rather, the conclusion must be effective. It could emphasize the ONE point that was made in the sermonette. It might include some catchy phrase related to the sermonette, or leave the audience with a challenge to apply what has been said.

Since giving a sermonette is an opportunity for a non-ministerial speaker to receive training in leadership and effective public speaking, as well as in serving the congregation, he should expect and welcome constructive criticism and an evaluation of his sermonette from his minister.

Being asked to give a sermonette is a wonderful opportunity and responsibility that must not be taken lightly. A sermonette speaker should carefully and prayerfully review and apply these guidelines, so that he may deliver a message that is inspired by God and is pleasing to Him, as well as helpful to the congregation.

Conclusion

In this booklet, we set forth guidelines and advice as to how to keep God's holy Sabbath, and how to conduct ourselves in Church services. We recommend that you review this booklet from time to time, and especially, when particular questions arise, which we discuss herein.

Always keep in mind: God orders you to keep His Sabbath, and He tells you what He considers acceptable and unacceptable Sabbath behavior.

The following booklets are available, upon request:

And Lawlessness Will Abound...
Angels, Demons and the Spirit World
Are YOU Predestined to be Saved?
Are You Already Born Again?
Baptism—a Requirement for Salvation?
Biblical Prophecy—From Now Until Forever
Do We Have an Immortal Soul?
Do You Know the Jesus of the Bible?
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God's *Commanded* Holy Days
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