

September 13, 2019

Dear Brethren and Co-Workers,

Here we are at the time of year when we make the last big push before the Fall Holy Days begin. The Feast of Trumpets is on Monday, September 30th. The Day of Atonement is on Wednesday, October 9th. The Feast of Tabernacles begins Monday, October 14th, lasting for 7 days, culminating with the Last Great Day on Monday, October 21st. All of these days begin, of course, with the previous evening, at sunset. With only a few short weeks away, now is the time when we make sure all of our arrangements are in order. We inform employers and teachers, finalize our travel plans, and prepare hundreds of other details so we can observe these Holy Days with the fullness of our hearts and minds. There is always a lot to do during this time of year.

As busy as we are with our preparations, Satan is just as busy with his discouragements. His desire is to steal the joy of keeping the Feast days away from us, intending to harden our hearts, enticing us to turn away from God. If Satan is successful in convincing us that all of the work it takes to keep the Holy Days is not worth the effort, he will pull us further away from the Truth and from our love of God. His evil efforts have a purpose, and they are not for our benefit. Satan wants to draw our attention away from God, away from righteousness, away from obedience, luring us into the trap of death.

I suppose that's a very grim way of putting it, but the fact is that we cannot allow ourselves to be convinced that God's Way of Life is too hard, so that we begin to make compromises. It is no exaggeration to say that our salvation is at stake when we choose how we demonstrate our obedience. We cannot forget that Satan's desire is for our destruction. It may not seem that our very lives are threatened in our day-to-day experiences as we encounter difficulties. However, his most effective methods involve deceiving us to believe that our lives will be "just fine" if we choose to do something for our own convenience, rather than adhere to God's Way. The deception that the observance of the Feast days in God's Way is too hard, and that we can choose not to keep them to suit our convenience can lead us irrevocably down the path to destruction.

Our best defense against Satan's attack is to make sure we understand why we're keeping the Feast days in the first place. We can learn from the parable of the sower, in which the seeds sown by the wayside were devoured. Jesus Christ explained the meaning, "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside" (Matthew 13:19). If we hear the instruction of God, but fail to develop our understanding of why it is important for us to obey, the Truth becomes vulnerable to being taken away from us. Our understanding of why we keep the Feast days will strengthen our defenses against the onslaught of Satan's temptations to compromise.

For this reason, we ask the perennial question, "Why are we here?" Our answer illuminates our understanding of the Truth and its meaning for us. Are we keeping the Feast this year because our friends or family are going? Are we keeping the Feast because we need a social vacation? Are we keeping the Feast for any other reasons that are exclusively motivated by worldly delight? If so, it will be beneficial for us to think a little harder about the meaning of the Feast days that God commands. If we don't understand the importance of keeping the Feast according to God's commandments, we are vulnerable to losing the Truth and falling away.

But rather, if we choose to keep the Feast because we love learning about God's plan and dedicating

our lives to living in Christian righteousness, we're on a much more promising path. Our understanding of why we love the Truth protects us against deception and discouragement. The Truth must have meaning in our lives if we intend to keep it. Staying close to God begins by loving the Truth He gives us.

The inevitable obstacles that we will encounter over the next month as we make preparations to observe the Fall Holy Days do not need to trip us up. By solidifying our understanding of why we care to obey God, we fortify our defenses against Satan's deceptions. The stronger our convictions are to uphold righteousness, the more powerful we become to endure adversity. The love of the Truth strengthens us to prevent us from falling away.

While we commit to the hard work ahead of us, we also need to remember that our efforts are not in vain. We have a great deal of joy that we have to look forward to! Indeed, God makes the commandment to rejoice during the Feast days we observe. Recall the instruction from Deuteronomy 16:15, "Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice." It is so encouraging to know that God wants us to be joyful in our observance. Satan would have us believe that these observances are burdensome, but we know much better. We have a tremendous amount of happiness awaiting us in the weeks ahead while we draw close to God and our brethren, to worship together in one spirit.

In Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eric Rank". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the printed name.

Eric Rank