

The Reality Of The Feast

Keeping Holy Days Sanctified

Mark Schindler

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A couple of weeks ago I gave a sermonette that was titled "Perception is Reality." One of the main points of that sermonette was to show that there is a way of thinking in this world that drives businesses, government and just about all the things that we do. When combined with human nature it is subtly deceptive and can ultimately bring destruction. It is the driving force of all advertising and marketing, not only of products and things, but of people and ideas.

Though it may seem ridiculous at first blush, the truth of the matter is, perception becomes our reality! I once read a pretty insightful statement that has been proved by our very own witness over the last couple of decades, and more obviously over the last few years and months.

The statement read: "Perception is everything! Your perception determines your reality: not reality, just your version of reality. The problem then arises when your version of reality and actual reality collide!"

Now "Perception being Reality" is not of and by itself a wrong concept. We can see for ourselves in John 14:7, where Jesus tells us, "If you had known me, you should have known my Father also: and from henceforth you know him, and have seen him."

But the farther away perception is removed from the reality of truth, the more quickly and surely we move toward destruction.

We have been eye witnesses to this recently in business, with individuals like Bernie Madoff, corporations like Enron, and whole industries like Credit and Banking giving the appearance of solvency and stability, while all of the time on their way to destruction!

While most people considered companies like Enron to be the exception it turned out that they were just the tip of the "Perception is Reality" iceberg. The perception of reality that business has proclaimed by words, deeds and greed, collided with what actually is reality, and was very instrumental in creating one of the greatest global economic meltdowns in history!

Politicians are masters of this world's "Perception is Reality" concept and now the facade has become more blatantly obvious than ever. Anyone who wants to do a little

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research beneath the media deception of perception can see the great gulf that exists between the perceived reality and the truth!

Now in reflecting back on that statement about "...your version of reality..." we can clearly see that we are truly headed on a worldwide collision course of destruction caused by a false perception of reality and actual reality!

So what is the point for us? Why are talking about this? As you know, because we are human and exposed to the same carnal nature, what happens in the world often is mirrored in the church. Because we live in a world that is being driven by a mind that is deceiving the whole world into buying into a perception of reality that gets farther from the truth all the time and will end in destruction, we, too, may be drifting on the same wave of destruction!

Unless we are clearly anchored in a love of the truth and the battle to live it from our hearts, we will allow a perception of reality to destroy what God intends us to become in truth!

I have had a real problem with putting this message together, because I do not speak to you that often and I wanted my message to be as uplifting as possible. However, I think God wants more from us than we seem to be willing to give these days, and we need to recognize where we might be allowing ourselves to drift and beseech God to get us back on course!

Two weeks from today, fourteen days, is the Feast of Trumpets; in twenty-three days is Atonement and four weeks from today, just twenty-eight days is the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles! What better time to take stock of just what is our perceived commitment to the Father, the Son and one another, and whether it does, in fact, fall in line with the truth!

I would therefore like to ask a few questions that all of us need to be sincerely asking ourselves and God over the next few weeks, and I would like us to think of them in terms of keeping the Holy Days. We, within the Body of Christ at this time, more than anyone who has ever lived, are accountable before our Father's throne to understand and observe these days with an intense fervency of desire to please and glorify Him!

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of John are all chapters relating to the Holy Days. Although many commentaries tie Chapter 5 into Passover, Jesus' message seems to be much more appropriate to the Feast of Trumpets. Chapters 6 and 7 specifically state they were at the Passover/Days of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last

Great Day respectively.

John 5:1-15 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

I would like to cite a few excerpts concerning these verses from a Bible Study that John Ritenbaugh gave on the Book of John:

Jesus came across a man with an infirmity for thirty-eight years and this healing was completely inaugurated by Christ. Christ asked him if he wanted to be made whole, but there are implications within that question which must be considered. People under this kind of infirmity often develop a mindset brought about because others were always having to take care of them, therefore, if healed he would then be under obligation to face the responsibilities of having a whole body!

John Ritenbaugh went on:

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A great spiritual lesson; whether it is a physical healing or healing of our minds with understanding; along with the blessing there comes the responsibility of taking advantage of that blessing! Are we going to carry through and glorify God within the blessings of His deliverance, or are we going to forget and lay back?

So let us ask ourselves some questions:

Because of what God has done we have an opportunity to understand these days and our part in them, probably better than anyone who had ever lived up until the early part of this last century, except Jesus Christ. Are we living up to the expectations that God has for us concerning keeping these days properly because of this, or are they still closer to holidays than Holy Days?

Has the world's overwhelming perception of celebrating holidays crept into our own perception of God's Holy Days? Do we really treat them as the sanctified time set apart unto God's purpose that we have been given the privilege to know?

The first year Nancy and I were preparing to attend the Feast of Tabernacles with the Worldwide Church of God, we had noted the scriptures in places like Deuteronomy 14:22-26, and people within the Church had told us that this was a wonderful family time and a great time when God had given us the resources to be able to have money to spend for whatever our heart desired. It was a good time to be generous with our God-commanded savings and give gifts.

One of the things that Nancy and I did that first year was go to Toys 'R' Us to purchase gifts to give to our four young children during the Feast. As we were going through the store and piling things up in shopping carts, it suddenly dawned on me, and I am sure it was God's direction to a babe in His church, that we were using His Feast of Tabernacles as a substitute for the Christmas and birthdays.

We talked about it and left the shopping carts right there in the middle of the store (although, probably the right thing to do would have been to put everything back on the shelves). We had wanted our kids to understand that God's way was a way that produced great blessings and rewards but, in fact, we were merely going to show our kids that a rose by any other name still smells as sweet. They would just have Christmas in October!

Please do not get me wrong. God does command us to use the blessings that He has

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set aside for us to give good gifts as another small 'hands-on-experience' of the blessings that are to come and the opportunity we have to share those blessings, but many times our old perceptions of reality rob us of the true depth of the truth of God's word.

The man by the pool at Bethesda had been infirmed for thirty-eight years and yet from all the blind, halt and withered, dying by the side of the pool Jesus chose him!

John 5:6 is interesting as it reads, "When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

This could very well mean exactly what it seems to say. Jesus saw the man and by his condition knew he had been there for a long time. But consider this; this man may have been designated by God from his youth to be the one who Jesus would chose to heal!

He may have been suffering all those years, because God knew that he was the man who would respond and take that first commanded step when he had been healed. At that moment the years of his infirmity would leave no doubt in anyone's mind that he had been healed and in this He would bring honor and glory to God!

In much the same manner brethren, God called us from years among the blind, withered, and dying spiritually, intending for us to respond and begin the road to glorify God. Also, just as with this man, verse 14 gives us our marching orders: "Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

Consider this, in terms of what John Ritenbaugh has been teaching us about being born into the living Body of Christ. Jesus found him in the temple, as Jesus now finds us in the real temple of His Body and He has commanded us: "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you!" We too must follow this same path, keeping in mind, brethren, to whom much is given, much is required and knowing that sin is not only just breaking the commandments, but it is also a failure to hit the mark!

With that in mind, are we failing to hit the mark God has expected from us concerning the holy days? Have we truly moved very far from the shopping cart in the middle of Toys 'R' Us?

Brethren, for this man being healed and made whole and immediately responding to it was a baby step! What he was commanded to do for the rest of his life by overcoming with introspective hope, faith and love would not nearly be as simple.

How many trials and persecutions did he have to face the remainder of his life, because of his association with Jesus Christ and this incredible miracle, we do not know; although you can imagine...based on what John 12:10 and 11 tell us about the chief priests' evil plot to kill Lazarus, after his resurrection, in order to get rid of the evidence of Jesus' power and authority. Brethren, we are the evidence of Jesus' power and authority as we give a light to the world!

But, whatever it was for him, and whatever it is for us, the only way to survive is by drawing closer to the Father and the Son in our relationship with them and knowing them with the same clarity of vision that they know us!

An important part of this true vision of reality lies within the sacrifice to faithfully overcome the overwhelming barrage of trials and tribulations that seem to be part and parcel of the daily lives of those to whom much has been given!

Leviticus 23:1-2, 37-38 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts. These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, everything upon his day: Beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the Lord.

We all know that this is the listing of all the feasts of the Lord and some of the sacrifices that were required of all that were of Israel. This is a huge list, brethren.

I would like you to take a look at that word "proclaim." It is Strong's OT: 7121 qara (kaw-raw') and it can be translated as (give) name, preach, (make) proclaim (-ation), pronounce, publish, renowned, say.

Any one of these definitions can add a different dimension to the verse, but I think what Vines has to say about this word may throw some additional light on to how important these days are, and our sacrificial participation in them.

Vines writes:

[kaw-raw'] may signify the "specification of a name." Naming a thing is frequently an assertion of sovereignty over it.

These are the Feasts of God, and He specifically points out here that an important part of our service within them is to be the sacrifices above and beyond what He would normally require.

If you take the time later, go to Numbers chapters 28 and 29, and you can review the incredible list of sacrifices that God demands in observing His Holy convocations. But, of course, those sacrifices are done away because, for us, how much can be learned that is forever from the blood of bulls and goats. However, our sacrificial offerings above and beyond, have been kicked up much more than just merely a notch.

Romans 12:1-5 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Regarding the Holy days we know great sacrifice above and beyond normal was commanded of the Israel of the Old Testament. But how much more, according to these words is commanded of each of us in sacrifice especially at the Holy Days under the New Covenant?

Another thing that you might want to consider, in your examination of yourselves before God's Holy Days, is what the Apostle Paul writes in verses 3 through 5.

Romans 12:3-5 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have

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not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Brethren, we are all members of one body, but all members have not (nor will they have) the same office. The word in verse 4, translated as "office" is from Strong's 4234 (prax-is) which not only means office, but also work or function. We will not all have the same function as we do not all have the same function now.

Do you think it is possible that since God has scattered us into different groups, He may have done it purposely to prepare different groups for different responsibilities as part of the Body of Christ all the way through the sanctification and glorification part of our journey into the kingdom? Therefore, is it not possible, and I propose probable, that God has tuned each of us into a particular shepherd's voice for the maximum growth that He expects, and in doing so He makes it part of our mission of self sacrifice unto the sovereignty of God, to work diligently to remain within the group where He has placed us?

One more thought that we might want to consider on this subject of not having the same function or work, as the other converted members of the Body of Christ.

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpens iron so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

Brethren, can you tell me, how can we do this if we are not around each other at the appointed time to do it?

At this point, I would like to add something. The Church of the Great God has never, from its beginnings seventeen years ago, considered itself the only one of God's true churches. Nor has the church discouraged its members from fellowshiping with other groups, or even attending other Church of God weekly or Feast Sabbaths occasionally. They are our brethren, and just as Paul writes later in Romans 12:9-16, we are all to have these same general things in common.

Romans 12:9-16 Let love be without dissimulation [or without deception]. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity

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of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Especially during these days when our lives become more difficult every day, circumstances make it next to impossible for many of us to get to the place where God would most like us to be, but we need to ask ourselves are we doing everything we can in faith as a living sacrifice to accomplish our responsibilities?

One more thing I would like us to look at:

John 7:1-10 After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. "For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." For even His brothers did not believe in Him. Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. "You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come." When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee. But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.

We see here even to Jesus' closest of kin, without a mind that would submit to the sovereignty of God, and a true belief in His Son, driven by the same spirit, the Feast may have been just an obligation and an interesting place to see new and fantastic things!

I think that verses 6 and 8 give us a pretty good idea of the proper way to approach the Feast Days, and all our life's opportunities.

John 7:6, 8 Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. "You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come."

The word for time there can be translated opportunity. Jesus was always seeking the best opportunity to fulfill the work of His Father no matter what the cost or circumstances, so long as it fulfilled the Father's will and this is the same mind that we need to have! But the farther our perception of reality drifts from the truth, the more likely we are to think any opportunity will do at any time!

Are we diligently, faithfully, and sacrificially seeking to fulfill every opportunity that God has given us according to the way that He wants it done?

From all the blind, halt, withered and dying God has chosen us to be a witness to the world of the miraculous power of God to transform our minds and hearts from a false perception of reality to becoming more like the real thing all of the time!

Perhaps because God has blessed us with the answer to our prayers for deeper understanding and the real knowledge that we are now part of the Body of Christ the trials become more difficult, because to whom much is given much is required. Our lives become more fraught with pain and suffering every day.

More of God's people are dealing with circumstances that have made things beyond their control. Many cannot keep God's Holy Days in the place that they want because of trials so severe that nothing but a miracle will change the situation!

However because of this, brethren, we cannot let ourselves fall into the mindset that any opportunity will do!

We still need to look to God to make sure that we have done everything we can to be a living sacrifice like our elder brother Jesus Christ and be in the place He wants us to be when He wants us to be there!

I Peter 2:9-10 We are now a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that we may proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light; We, who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. We are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Brethren, let us all try to be acceptable sacrifices to God, through Jesus Christ, as we march toward the holy days and consider them with more of the reality that is involved in them than we ever did before.