

Get Serious!

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At the Feast of Tabernacles each year, the late Herbert Armstrong often asked the question, "Why are we here?" Still, in our time, at the Feast every year, Church of God ministers and other speakers often repeat this same question. "Why are we here?"

Let me ask you this same question this morning and some other questions too. Although many of the questions I will be asking today do apply to our adult members—including me—I would like to specifically address our young people today. What is a young person? I want to speak specifically to the teens and all the way up to those in their thirties. Some of these concepts, I hope and pray, will be helpful to you older members, too.

In recent years and months, I have been increasingly concerned for the physical and spiritual welfare of our young people. The purpose of my sermon today is to encourage our young people to "stick with it," to stay with God's church, and, more especially what I want to urge you to do, is to get serious! We want you young people to be with us, helping and teaching. We want you in God's Kingdom with us, by our side.

The youth of today's church have a plight; they are faced with much difficulty. I would like to begin by reading an excerpt from an August 2008 Barna Survey and Report, entitled, "Young Adults and Liberals Struggle with Morality":

A nationwide survey by the Barna Group indicates that Americans have redefined what it means to do the right thing in their own lives.... One of the most stunning outcomes from the Barna survey was the moral pattern among adults under age 25...

The younger generation was more than twice as likely as all other adults to engage in behaviours considered morally inappropriate by traditional standards.... Their choices made even the "Baby Boomers"—never regarded as a paragon of traditional morality—look like moral pillars in comparison...

They asked these young people if they had done these things in the past week. Keep that in mind.

For instance, 64% of the under-25 segment had used profanity in public, compared to just 19% of Baby Boomers. [They were]

- Nine times more likely than Baby Boomers to have engaged in sex outside of marriage (38% vs. 4%),

- Six times more likely to have lied (37% vs. 6%),
- Almost three times more likely to have gotten drunk (25% vs. 9%),
- Three times more likely to have gossiped (26% vs. 10%),
- Twice as likely as Baby Boomers to have observed pornography (33% vs. 16%),
- Twice as likely to have engaged in acts of retaliation (12% vs. 5%)...

According to George Barna, who directed the survey, the results reflect a significant shift in American life:

"We are witnessing the development and acceptance of a new moral code in America," said the researcher and author, who has been surveying national trends in faith and morality for more than a quarter of a century...

I am not picking on the Americans, and I have no doubt that it is the same in Europe, Africa, Canada, and other countries.

Young people have had little exposure to traditional moral teaching and limited accountability for such behavior... The moral code began to disintegrate when the generation before them—the "Baby Busters"—pushed the limits that had been challenged by their parents—the Baby Boomers... The result is that, without much fanfare or visible leadership, the U.S. has created a moral system based on convenience, feelings, and selfishness...

The consistent deterioration of the Bible as the source of moral truth has led to a nation where people have become independent judges of right and wrong, basing their choices on feelings and circumstances...

It is not likely that America will return to a more traditional moral code until the nation experiences significant pain from its moral choices.

This is a very solemn and sobering warning, and this is the America that our young people have to thrive in!

These conditions listed in the survey just exist out in the world, not in God's church, right? Wrong! Some of these conditions are happening and have been happening in various groups within the greater Church of God—not totally excluding our own!

Because of the terribly disruptive events that have happened in God's church over the past twenty years, the church's younger generations arguably may have suffered the most. Young people of today's Church of God, you have not enjoyed many of the benefits and opportunities that other recent eras of Church of God youth have. Here are some examples:

- Most of you did not participate in the Youth Educational Services (Y.E.S.) program.
- Most of you did not participate in the Youth Opportunities United (Y.O.U.) program.
- Most of you did not attend the Summer Educational Program (S.E.P.) camps.
- Most of you did not attend Ambassador College.

Were these church programs perfect? No! I certainly do not believe that they were. However, from the results that I saw, all of them offered at least some good potential benefits for the church's young people. It is, of course, too late to totally correct the lack of such youth programs in the church. We do not have the availability to be able to do it as it was done back then.

Some of our young people have grown to physical maturity. Some have lost interest; some have become disillusioned; and some have left the church altogether. Maybe some of you young people, sitting here today, are leaning in that same direction, i.e. leaving the Church of God. I hope not, and this is just one reason that I am very concerned for your physical and spiritual welfare and why I am giving this sermon.

The title of today's sermon is "Get Serious!" This is my advice to you young people today. In saying this, I am not wanting to be a kill-joy! I am certainly not telling you that you should not enjoy your young lives. It is very right that you should enjoy your young lives—but in proper, safe, and wholesome ways, of course! In today's sermon, I want to be very straightforward, frank, and candid with you. In saying the things that I need to say to you today, I want you to know that it is not my intention to pick on any individual or any group, nor to offend or to judge any of you. After all, judging is God's job, not mine!

No. I will be saying these things for four very good reasons:

1. Because I care about what God thinks.
2. Because I care what He requires of me.
3. Because I care what He requires of you, young people!
4. Because I care about you and your future, both short term and long term.

Let us go back to Herbert Armstrong's Feast question again: Why are you here? Young people, why are you here in Columbia, Missouri? Why are you at this Feast of Tabernacles? Why do you attend the Feast of Tabernacles each year?

Young people, do you attend the Feast

- To have a good time?
- To be with your friends?
- To get a girlfriend or a boyfriend?
- To meet your potential spouse?
- To get out of school for eight days or so?
- Because your parents force you to come?

There is nothing inherently wrong with most of these reasons. If, though, any of them are your primary reasons for being here, then they are the wrong reasons! Let us go to God's Word and read what are the right reasons why you should attend the Feast each year

Some of the brethren have asked if the sermon and sermonette men have pre-planned and got together on either the scriptures or the subject matter, and I would like to assure you that that did not happen. It is not just coincidence, either. All of the men, for the most part, put their messages together before the Feast, so the repetition is what God wants us to hear.

Deuteronomy 14:23 And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, [Why?] that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

God commands parents and grandparents to teach our children these same important things:

Deuteronomy 4:9-10 "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, and I will let them hear my words [Why?] that they may learn to fear me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'"

Although some teaching of our young people definitely can be done at Feast and Holy Day services, Sabbath day services, and Bible studies, and in other church programs, too, the main responsibility lies at home, with the parents and grandparents.

Deuteronomy 17:14, 18-19 "When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me'...Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it [God's written Word and law] shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, [Why?] that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes."

These verses were God's instructions originally directed to Israel's future kings. How do these verses apply to you young people of the Twenty-first Century? Believe it or not, every young person in God's church is a potential prince or princess. You young people are royalty in training! This is no fairy tale! This is the truth from God's Word! You are, in some respects, like Prince William and Prince Harry of the British royal family, except that—depending on the timing of Christ's return—you will take your positions in the Kingdom of God. You very much need to be learning to fear God, even more so than the princes of ancient Israel. For you young people

to learn, you need to be listening.

Deuteronomy 31:9-13 And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bore the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel [These were Israel's leaders before their monarchy began]. And Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and your stranger that is within your gates, that they may hear [listen!] and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: And that their children, which have not known anything, may hear [listen!] and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land where you go over Jordan to possess it."

We have been over these scriptures already during the Feast, and we have directed them primarily to the adults. Today, these scriptures are directed to you young people, for they apply to you, as well. These scriptures tell us repeatedly that one of the main reasons for you young people to attend the Feast of Tabernacles is for you—not just your parents and grandparents—to hear, to listen, and to learn to fear our great God.

Let me ask you, young people, "Do you fear God?" Bible author and scholar Richard Halverson wrote, "Men who fear God face life fearlessly... Men who do not fear God end up fearing everything." Again, how about you, young people of God's church? Do you fear God? Are you learning to fear God? Year-by-year at the Feast? Week-by-week at Sabbath services? Some of you are, most of you are, I believe; and the fruits are evident.

I would like to break in here and say with all sincerity that from what I have seen at the Feast this year, we have an excellent group of young people here. As far as I am aware, there have been no problems. Last night at the dance, it was an absolute joy to see you dancing and having fun. It was wonderful to watch you enjoying yourselves in such a wholesome manner.

However, these forces are out there, and I want to warn you about some of these things. There are some few who choose to yawn and giggle, whisper, pass notes, draw silly pictures, and read unacceptable magazines or books during services, instead of following along with the messages in your Bible. Those young people do not show fear of God!

Are you one of those few who do not even bother bringing your Bible to services? If so, you show no fear of God! Are you one of those few who purposely keep your lips tightly closed during the hymn-singing at services? That does not show fear of God!

I do not believe that we have had much problem with these things at the Feast this year, but there are some few who choose to stay up until the early hours of the morning, so that when they do come to services they are too sleep-deprived to participate in services in a respectful

manner. They show no fear of God!

Back home, there are one or two perhaps, I do not know who they are, who choose to go out drinking on Friday nights, during God's holy Sabbath time. Those people do not show fear of God!

I am not just talking to our younger teens; I am also addressing you who are in your late teens and some who are in your twenties or even your thirties. If you are still doing some of these things, then you older ones should know better, and it is about time you grew up! Again, I do not want to be tough on you, but it is true. It is past time for you to get serious!

You young people of God's church are rapidly approaching the "age of decision," the age at which you will have some very serious decisions to make. I want to give you some examples of those serious decisions with which you will be faced in the next few years:

1. Belief in God and obedience to Him.
2. Sabbath keeping: Are you willing to obey God's fourth Commandment? Happily, without complaining? Or are you not?
3. Church attendance: Are you willing to attend church services every week? Happily, without complaining? Or are you not?
4. Behavior: At church services and functions and at school, at work, and at home.
5. Dress and appearance: At church services, when you are coming before God and also at school and at work.
6. Entertainment: Music, TV, movies, etc. I had more to say on that but I am not going to say it. You know what I am talking about. You know what is out there. You know to what some of your church friends are listening and what they are watching. You know the harm that is in there when you hear or see these things and those tunes, words, and images get into your mind.
7. Bad language: I do not know what kind of language you use, but I know that there are things that young people would not say or write before God but that they feel is acceptable to write to their friends. I want you to know that it is not my opinion on these things but God's word that should be our standard:

Colossians 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

Is it a light matter to use bad language? Let us see what God tells us through the apostle James:

James 5:12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your Yes be Yes; and your No be No; lest you

fall into condemnation.

"Condemnation"! That is a heavy term! This is no light matter! Foul language is a big deal!

Some other things that you need to be thinking about as you mature:

8 Prayer and Bible study. If you were brought up in the church, your parents should have taught these things to you from a very early age. If they did not or if you have lost interest for any reason—and if you truly want a relationship with God—you need to get started on these things right away.

Later this afternoon, we are going to have a baptism ceremony. This is great! Maybe you are planning on being baptized sometime later in the year, and that is great. I do not want to say anything negative about that, of course. If, though, you do not have daily communication with God through prayer and study, it is highly unlikely that you have really even started developing a real relationship with Him. If this is the case with you, you may be better deferring your baptism until you have started towards a solid, regular, two-way communication with God. As you prepare for baptism, they are a few things to keep in mind.

9 Tithes and offerings. Again, your parents should have taught these practices to you from a very early age. However from your mid- to late teens, you should be policing yourself on these things. Your parents should not have to tell you to prepare your Holy Day offering.

10 Hymn singing. This may seem to you to be a very minor matter, or perhaps you might think that it is just a personal peeve of mine! It is not! It is a terrible and dangerous insult to our great God for a person—young or old—to stand there, purposely tight-lipped, during the hymn-singing, thinking that he or she is so cool and so brave. When someone does this, what he is saying, in effect, is, "Look at me, everyone! I am refusing to worship God, and I am getting away with it! There is no lightning striking me!" This is a very dangerous attitude!

Most adult members of the Church of the Great God love this branch of God's church partly because of the "strong spiritual meat" we receive each week from God, through the ministers. "Strong spiritual meat" can tend to fly over the heads of our young people, though. As a result, our young people may receive very little in the way of immediate spiritual benefit from Sabbath services. Please do not get me wrong! This is certainly not a criticism against our ministers. I have no desire to go back to a regular diet of the "milk of the word," and I do not think that God wants the long-time members to do that.

Hebrews 5:12-13 For though by this time you ought to be teachers,

you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food (KJV: "strong meat"). For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

This is not to say that there is anything wrong with the "milk of the word." Certainly not! The milk of the word is "the first principles of the oracles of God," the basic truths and doctrines of true Christianity. In fact, this is what our young people need in order to begin their spiritual growth:

I Peter 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby.

My hope is that all of you young people will develop a desire for the "pure milk of God's Word."

Strictly speaking, a young person who is not yet baptized is not yet symbolically counted as a "newborn spiritual babe" because he does not yet have God's Holy Spirit dwelling within him. Rather, you are God's children's children; you are God's grandchildren. As an experienced grandfather myself, I know how much I love my grandchildren; and I have an idea of how much God, your grandfather, loves you. He loves you very much.

As the ministers have the opportunity throughout the year, we try, on occasion, to give some more basic messages in order to help you young people to understand the central doctrines of the true Church of God, why we believe what we do, why we believe differently from other religions, where we get the authority to say what we say, and why you young people are so very different from your friends in the world. (I know that you do not like being different. We will come back to that later.) But please do not misunderstand me! There is a big difference between preaching basic messages—"the milk of God's Word"—and preaching what the Bible calls "smooth things." You young people probably know that, if you stay with Church of Great God, you will not hear your ministers preaching "smooth things." There is a good reason why not!

Here is a stern warning from God, both for His ministers and for you young people:

Isaiah 30:8-11 Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it on a scroll, that it may be for time to come, forever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children [young people] who will not hear the law of the LORD; who say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us"...

The rebellious, lying young people described here are, in effect, saying to God's ministers of their day: "Do not tell us the truth! Do not give us unpleasant warnings! We do not want to hear them! We want the freedom to do whatever we want! Yes, even if it is harmful to us!"

Isaiah 30:12-14 Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: "Because you despise this Word, and trust in oppression and perversity, and rely on them, therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, a bulge in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant. And He shall break it like the breaking of the potter's vessel, which is broken in pieces; He shall not spare..."

There are many churches and ministers out there speaking smooth things. They would be happy to have you attend with them. Maybe some of your friends have chosen to go to one of them. It is not my purpose to criticize other churches, and I am not saying that Church of the Great God is the only church of God that is preaching strong meat. What I want you to know is that you will not hear Church of the Great God ministers preaching "smooth things" in order to be popular or in order to get more members. What you will hear Church of the Great God ministers preaching is the Word of God, the words of eternal life! This is something that is going to be offered to you, too.

Initially, you may find their words a little hard to understand, but that is okay. Some early church members found the apostle Paul a little hard to understand, too! Before Jesus' disciples received the gift of His Holy Spirit, they had similar difficulties, as well. The disciples could not understand when Jesus spoke the following words to them:

John 6:60-61, 63, 65-67 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?...It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are Spirit, and they are life...And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by my Father." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

I will ask you young people these same questions: Do any of you also want to go away? Do any of you want to go back and not walk with us anymore? Some have! We do not want you to.

See how Peter answered Jesus' questions:

John 6:68: But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Even if you do find our ministers' words a little hard to understand right now, that is okay. Please be patient and bear with them. If you do, you will find that their words are very beneficial to you, especially in the long term! They are emulating Jesus by preaching His words of eternal life.

Let me ask you young people some very basic questions, and let me give you some very basic answers to those questions. Please think seriously about each question and be very honest with your answers to yourself:

1. Do you believe in God? This is the most basic question that we can ask. Do you believe that God exists?

You should, because He certainly does exist! I have proved it to my own satisfaction. You can, too. However, it is beneficial for you that you prove it as early in life as possible. If you choose not to prove it now, God will prove it to you at some later time!

If, however, you do not believe that God exists and if you do not care to learn about God and what He wants of you, then here comes Herbert Armstrong's Feast question again: Why are you here? What are you doing attending God's Feast of Tabernacles services? You can prove that God exists.

The next question is in three parts:

2. A. Do you believe that God is a loving and beneficent God?
 - B. Do you believe that He loves you?
 - C. Do you believe that He wants you to be happy?

The answers are obvious. Yes, God is loving and beneficent; yes, He does love you; and yes, He does want you to be happy. To prove it to yourself, just try slowing down a little. For example, on the Sabbath day, just take some time to stop and think about all that God has given you, and your family, and your country, etc.

Perhaps some of you might be thinking: "It is okay for him to spout off about God's love and beneficence; he has not been dealt the hand that I have!" Is all not perfect in your family? Mine neither! Never was, never will be! Not in this life, at least. Please look around you and ask others if they have been dealt a perfect hand. I do not know even one person who has.

However, most of you listening to this sermon live in comparative physical luxury. Whether or not you think so, young people—especially you North American young people—you are rich, very rich in comparison with the vast majority of the young people around the world. Do you enjoy three square meals every day? Do you live in a fairly decent, fairly comfortable home? Do you have reasonably nice clothes to wear? Most young people in the world do not, but most of you do! You are members of the world's privileged, comfortable minority.

Yes, our nations are very much blessed by God, not because our peoples are any better or more righteous than those of other nations, not because we deserve these blessings, but because of God's love and mercy! Also, this church is very much blessed by God. Again, it is not because its members are better or more righteous than those in other churches, not because we deserve these blessings, but because of God's love and mercy!

It never ceases to amaze me that God called and chose us, apparently not just once, but twice!

Our "second calling" was in the 1990s, when many of our fellow ex-Church of God members went sliding back into Protestantism. Do some of you sometimes wish that you had slid right along with them? Do you ever see some of your old church friends who are now in Protestant churches or perhaps even right back in the world, doing whatever they want, when they want? Do you envy them? Please be very careful how you answer this question, because the moment you choose to "escape" from the true Church of God will be the moment you will "escape" from His blessings and protection with which He covers His children and His grandchildren! It is something that you need to hold on to.

Do you believe that God wants the very best for you? Yes, of course, God does want the very best for you—but that does not mean that He wants you to be a spoiled brat! He wants to benefit you over the long haul, not just to satisfy your every whim right now. Instant gratification will not bring true happiness now or in the long run.

Do you believe that God wants to be involved in your life? As you have probably heard before, the true Christian life is not the easy path. Still, God does want you to be working towards it, towards baptism and commitment to Him and to His way of life. I am certainly not trying to push you into baptism prematurely. That would not be right! God does the calling in His good time. You young people should not be baptized until you are mentally and emotionally mature and until the time that is mutually right for God and for you. However, even if you are not ready for baptism right now, you are in a training period, which should eventually lead to your baptism. Please use this precious training time wisely!

Do you believe that God can see and hear everything you do and say, what you are writing in your notes, letters, Internet e-mail, chat, and Facebook? Also, that He can hear what you are saying? That He can even see or "hear" your very thoughts? Yes, He can! I am not trying to scare you here; that is not the idea.

Psalms 139:1-4, 7, 11-12 O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether...Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?...If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.

The all-powerful God is not restricted by His physical creation. He created it! He is Sovereign over it! Nothing is impossible for Him!

Despite the fact that you cannot see Him, He can see and hear you, even through a stack of roofing tiles, concrete, wood, and drywall! He can see everything you do, think, read, write, watch (on TV and in movies). He can hear what you say and the language you use and the

music you listen to.

Please do not mistake what I am saying here! God's church is not a "fear religion," per se, but it is still beneficial for you to maintain a proper, healthy fear of God! For you young people, there are some very good reasons for that:

Firstly, it may be close to the end of this age. None of us can be sure of the exact date, but when we compare world conditions with Bible prophecies, it certainly does seem that we are getting there. Some scriptures strongly indicate that, as the end time approaches, events will speed up and will come upon the world suddenly. Here is just one example:

I Thessalonians 5:1-4 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

Even if the end of the age is not imminent, still, our human lives, and your human lives, are very short:

Psalms 90:10 The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Most young people have a hard time really believing the truth of this. Perhaps you think that you have lots of time, just as I did, to sit on the religious "fence" for a little while longer and defer getting serious until later. The older you get, the more you will realize that the time of your human life does fly by. How do you know what tomorrow will bring? I do not wish to be morbid or fear-mongering, but how do you know that you will not be stricken with some deadly disease? The chances of this seem to be getting increasingly higher, and even more especially if you choose to go out into the world, adopt its habits, and sow your wild oats in an immoral way. In the *Sex Has a Price Tag* video, Pam Stenzel strongly establishes that out-of-wedlock pregnancy is not the worst potential result of out-of-wedlock sex! Serious, even deadly disease is.

How do you know that your life will not be cut short by a traffic, train, or plane wreck? Do you think that God would not let this happen to you? Do not be too sure! I have had at least three young church friends (two very recently!) whose young lives were cut short prematurely and unexpectedly.

This warning is not just my own. It is backed up by Jesus Christ Himself. I do not necessarily think he was speaking of a young man, but we cannot guarantee, inside of the church or outside of the church, that we are going to reach our full seventy or eighty years.

Luke 12:16-20 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul [your human life] will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'"

There is no guarantee, brethren, or you young people. Again, I do not wish to be morbid or fear-mongering; I am just trying to make a valid point and to give you a realistic warning.

In terms of the carrot and the stick, I have given you lots of stick. Now I want to give you some carrot before we end.

There is a well-known song written in the late-1960s by ex-Beatle, Paul McCartney. It is still frequently played on popular music radio stations. The lyrics go something like this: "If you want it, here it is. Come and get it! Make your mind up fast..." The song later adds, "But you had better hurry because it is going fast!"

I am not too sure of the original intent of these lyrics. They could be taken in either of two ways: Firstly, to influence the song's young listeners to rush into decisions to participate in activities that may be pleasurable, but ultimately harmful. Satan makes these offers to us all, not just to young people, but we get those temptations and offers every day. The second possibility is that the lyrics are a kind of satire on the first explanation. In other words, the writer may be warning his listeners to beware of being pressured into rash decisions.

I would like to give the song a third possible meaning, which fits in with my subject today: Many if not most of you young people here today were born and raised in God's true church. You have listened to the church messages since you were babies; and much of the information has sunk into your minds. Now that you are making more decisions for yourselves, God is making His offer to you: If you want it, here it is. Come and get it!

He wants His beloved grandchildren to accept what He has to offer. Unlike Satan's offer, though, the results of God's offer are good for you, both now and forever into your future. Even so, God still does not want you to rush into your decision.

Luke 14:28-31 "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?"

God does not want you young people to rush thoughtlessly into these supremely important decisions. Still, as the song says, you must be prepared to "make your mind up fast," relatively fast, anyway.

Why? Certain natural time restrictions do exist for you, for example maturity and mortality and other deterrents to going God's way, too, such as peer pressure. This is very, very strong. I want you to know that it is never too early for you to act on these things and to begin turning your life's direction towards dedication to God and His way of life.

Is this dull stuff to some of you? Does a lifetime dedicated to God and His way of life sound boring? Despite what Satan would have you believe, a life of dedication to God is certainly not boring or unhappy. You did not look unhappy to me at the dance last night, quite the opposite. A Christian life will be filled with many interesting challenges, and the results of God's way of life will be much, much better than the results of the world's alternative lifestyles, the alternatives to God's way of life.

Some of you may be thinking, "I have heard it all before." We are going to be repeating all of this because we, your parents and grandparents, your ministers and your other adult church friends, love you and care about you! God wants the very best for His "grandchildren," and so do we!

Young people of God's true church, you are unique! I realize that many young people do not want to be unique. I know that you may not want to conform to some of the ways of the older generations. I know also that you do want to be the same as your peers and your role models.

Who are your peers and role models? Are they ones of whom Jesus Christ would approve? Do some of you not care whether Jesus would give His approval? Is the approval of your peers more important to you than the approval of the One who created you and gave you the breath of life, the One who can give you eternal life?

Your potential relationship with God is unique. You are His spiritual grandchildren right now. Just think how much your human grandparents love you, their grandchildren! God, your heavenly Grandfather, has infinitely more capacity to love you than they do. Once you reach the point where you are ready to make a solid commitment to God and to be baptized into His Family, you will be changed from His spiritual grandchildren into His begotten spiritual children!

Please, young people, think about these very basic but very important, life-affecting things that I have said to you today. Please turn them over in your minds, think on them. Please talk to your parents about them, and your church friends—but most importantly, talk to God about them.

Young people of God's church, it is time for you to get off the "religious fence." It is time for you to take action, time for you to get serious!