

June 2024

Dear Brethren:

True Christianity requires a volunteer spirit. That statement means vastly different things to different people.

Many will assume that a *volunteer spirit* addresses the need to devote personal time for good works in the community, such as helping the poor and the elderly, or getting involved in meaningful church or civic projects. There are many who practice their Christian faith in exactly this manner. But to us—those called by God out of this world to understand real Truth—it means something very different and with much more meaning. How can we begin to understand?

A Call to Accountability

A key doctrine of the true Church of God—not understood by mainstream Christianity—is the fact that one must first be called by God before a close relationship with Him is even possible. The majority believe that salvation is open *right now* to everyone and that eternal damnation awaits any human being who does not profess Jesus Christ as Savior in this present life. They glibly quote John 3:16, but fail on the whole to quote John 6:44:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44).

Understanding that *only a few* are being called *at this time* to qualify for eternal life—and that, in love, God is keeping the majority of people in spiritual darkness until their own future time of calling—explains why we are not out evangelizing, trying to get everyone "saved." God is the One who will offer to *everyone* salvation at His chosen time. In the meantime, God has intentionally hidden much of His Truth from the majority. Jesus Christ said that He spoke in parables, not to make the Truth more plain, but in fact *to hide it*:

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias [Isaiah 6:9–10], which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time

they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matthew 13:13–15).

Why would a loving God deprive any of His dear children of spiritual understanding and the blessings that derive from that knowledge? Because, with understanding comes accountability, and once one truly is capable of "seeing" the Truth, to *afterwards reject that Way of Life* does indeed result in *eternal damnation*. A loving Creator God is shielding the majority of humanity from the risk of damnation by reserving the time of their calling to a later era.

That brings us to the significance of the Day of Pentecost, and the obligations for those who are called *at this time* to be part of a small, firstfruits harvest (Leviticus 23:10, 17, 20).

A Spiritual Invitation

Those few who indeed have been enlightened today have *right now* been granted *their one and only chance to be saved* (Romans 5:11). These are the ones pictured in God's Master Plan by the Day of Pentecost. The miracle of a calling by God is actually an invitation—a spiritual invitation.

If you receive a personal invitation to a swanky social event, you are being provided *an opportunity* to attend a prestigious private function not open to the public. It is not *an order to attend*, as would be the case with a subpoena to appear before a magistrate in a court of law. The fact that you have *a choice* in deciding whether to attend or not is the defining principle. A wedding invitation will likely include a request to RSVP (from the *French*, meaning, *please reply*). This means that you are asked to reply to let the host know if you plan to accept the invitation or not (either acceptance or else offering *regrets*). Failing to provide this RSVP is considered to be poor manners. It is common courtesy to declare your intentions so that the host will know how many guests to accommodate. If one sends his "regrets," it allows the host the option to invite others instead.

The point is that we are talking about *a choice to be made* by one who is invited. Jesus Christ specifically chose to compare our spiritual calling to such a wedding invitation:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants *to call them that were bidden to the wedding*: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise (Matthew 22:2–5) [emphasis mine throughout].

In this parable, the invited guests unanimously replied (returned their RSVPs) and sent their regrets, saying they would not be attending. They each had a choice, and they each used their free choice to decline the invitation.

What, then, does any of this have to do with defining a *volunteer spirit*? It has everything to do with our unique spiritual focus compared to that of the rest of the world!

The Firstfruits Must Choose!

A volunteer is one who *chooses to participate* in some kind of activity. He is one who offers to perform a service *voluntarily*. Therefore, we understand that a true *volunteer spirit* is a way of describing the attitude of one who responds to God's calling and *voluntarily agrees to accept His invitation!* This is supported absolutely by God's requirement that we choose:

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: *therefore choose life*, that both thou and thy seed may live (Deuteronomy 30:19).

God will never force any human being to accept Him. He made all of us to be *free moral agents*, with the absolute right to choose for ourselves what we will accept or reject. God did not create us to be robots, following some fatalistic, predetermined path. You truly have the right—and the obligation—to choose! Anyone who is eventually welcomed into the God Family to become a King and a Priest—dwelling with the Father and Jesus Christ forever—will be one who *voluntarily accepted an invitation* to God's Wedding Feast. In that context, a *volunteer spirit* is shown by one who answers God's call and replies positively with an RSVP. Anyone who chooses not to attend is free to do so, but then he also forfeits any hope for an eternal reward (Matthew 22:7).

Power From on High

Another key attribute of God's planned Wedding Feast is that it is not actually easy to attend. It is not enough to *desire* to attend and *mean* to attend—having good intentions. The actual follow-through is very difficult, and that also is by God's design. It is impossible for any human being to do the spiritual work of overcoming sin (the requirement for salvation; Romans 12:21; Philippians 2:5) without significant outside help. That is the role of the Holy Spirit, likewise pictured by the Day of Pentecost.

God recorded the entire history of ancient Israel to confirm the futility of human effort alone to be able to please God. Israel was given the revelation of God's Truth, and an invitation

to inherit a promised land filled with every good thing, physically. Why, then, did they never actually enjoy that bounty for very long? It is because, in spite of their earnest desire to show honor to God and to receive what He was offering, it was not within them to actually follow through to receive the reward. By nature, they did not agree with God!

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever! (Deuteronomy 5:29)

God knew from the outset that they truly would never be able to obey Him. It just was not in them to do so. They were like ones accepting a wedding invitation, planning and preparing to attend, but then becoming derailed by circumstances of life so that on the fateful day, they became "no shows." God recorded this history to teach us the need for a missing ingredient, the power of *the indwelling Spirit*, which generations later *was* given for the very first time on Pentecost:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. *And they were all filled with the Holy [Spirit]*, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1–4).

Peter then explained what had just happened:

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [Joel 2:28–32]; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh (verses 16–17).

Yes, this was the very first time in human history that *the gift of the Spirit* was offered as *an indwelling element* to meld with the natural mind of man, and it is comparable to the begetting of a new life in the womb (1 Peter 1:3).

It is this *fortified spiritual mind* that gives a carnal human being the opportunity, finally, to do what the ancients were never able to achieve.

Additional Volunteer Work

The willing acceptance of God's invitation to salvation is not the end of the story. One can willingly accept an invitation, return his RSVP, and then still fail to be part of the ultimate

celebration. According to God's ingenious Master Plan, the path to salvation is difficult, not easy:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few there be that find it* (Matthew 7:13–14).

This begins to explain why Christ used that parable of the wedding feast to warn against the tendency to let other *cares of this world* become more important than attending God's own holy assembly (Matthew 22:4–5). In the end, God says that they made light of His invitation. It does not mean that they necessarily mocked it in their minds, but it means that they found other priorities that were just too compelling to resist. To God, if His appointment is not first in priority, that is making light of a spiritual calling.

Have you ever tried to arrange a special dinner with someone—or some other kind of social gathering—but found it frustrating to bring to pass? Time after time you ask, and the invited party claims sincerely to desire to get together with you, but they never seem to be available for any specific dates. They may be sincere when they say, "Let's do lunch!," but if they can never make time for you in their busy schedule, how real is their interest? Even worse is to receive a commitment for a planned soiree and then have them cancel at the last minute.

This is comparable to the way God's "sincere" people often treat Him. It is why Jesus said that the actual *way* leading to salvation is very narrow. Good intentions are not enough. Another parable of Jesus likewise makes this point:

But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you (Matthew 21:28–31).

The son who initially said, "I go, sir," is comparable to the one invited to the wedding feast who eagerly returned his RSVP, but in the end did not follow through to show up. In this parable, it is actually better to be one who initially rejected his father's command—the invitation—but then later repented and did the hard work needed to attend. God wants His children to be there. The follow-through is critical, and the Holy Spirit is required to help us do so. We *voluntarily submit* to the hard spiritual work required to actually receive salvation.

So we voluntarily respond to our initial calling, and then we *voluntarily follow through* to become converted spiritually.

The Right Kind of Work

If you are one who is demonstrating a *volunteer spirit* by responding to God's calling and also committing yourself to lifelong spiritual overcoming, that is great, but you are still at risk of failure. That is because it is not enough just to do *some kind of* spiritual work. God requires that we do the *specific work* that He expects. Effort is good, but effort alone is not enough:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:21–23).

This parable describes some who are very religious, spending a lot of time in devotion to serve God. They surely demonstrate a volunteer spirit. But in the end, Jesus Christ rejects these individuals from gaining salvation. Why would this be?

Jesus reveals that they were actually justifying sin (iniquity) during the entire time that they were doing grand religious works. This is a warning against seeking to serve God according to our own devised programs. God is not looking for people who embrace the *name of Christ only* and then go out to "worship Him" according to their own concepts. God Himself has laid out the requirements to show honor to the King. Christ addressed this in the second portion of the parable of the wedding feast:

Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there *a man which had not on a wedding garment*: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And *he was speechless*. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and *cast him into outer darkness*; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:8–14).

This describes the one who voluntarily responds to God's call, sends his RSVP, and then seeks actually to show up at the appointed time to receive a reward. He has made many

sacrifices to attend the wedding feast, rather than to do something else with his time. And yet, he is still rejected by the King, suffering eternal damnation. Why so? After all, he was not like the ones initially called who spurned God's invitation. Why would God reject one who went out of his way to respond favorably?

The man who showed up *not wearing an appropriate wedding garment* is exactly like the one Christ described in Matthew 7:21–23, who did many "wonderful works" in Christ's name, but all along failed to do exactly what God commanded. This brings out another common element of many fancy weddings—a dress code for attendees!

An invitee must voluntarily provide an RSVP, do the hard work to rearrange his personal schedule to be able to attend the wedding, but, then, also to show respect for the host by *complying with the required dress code*. If the wedding is a *black tie affair*, showing up dressed in shorts, sandals, and a camouflage t-shirt is just as bad as rejecting the initial invitation!

A proper *volunteer spirit*, then, requires that we *voluntarily comply with every aspect of God's instructions* in order to receive the ultimate reward. Doing only two out of three is not sufficient. This jealous God that we serve (Exodus 20:5) will not compromise with us. He wants us *voluntarily* to say, "Yes, Lord!"

A Proper Wedding Garment

If showing up to God's Wedding Feast inappropriately dressed is counted as an unpardonable sin, what does it take for us as Christians to apply this principle in the real world? What behavior (spiritual works) is symbolized by appropriate wedding attire?

If ye love me, *keep my commandments*. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you (John 14:15–17).

As opposed to those who want to quibble with God about what is right or wrong, the faithful—who actually receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are transformed by it—are those who accept what God revealed to be Truth, and who resist asserting their own private interpretations. "If any man will do his will, *he shall know of the doctrine*, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17).

Recognizing the true doctrine of God—His rules for right versus wrong and how to worship Him properly—is key to avoiding being rejected. And that doctrine was given by Jesus Christ from the outset of His work with a chosen people:

But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because *ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth*. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. *Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning*. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life (1 John 2:20–25).

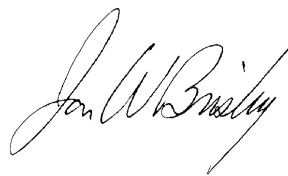
Who are the ones deemed by God to be properly dressed when they seek to appear at His Wedding Feast? Those who voluntarily forsake their own scholarly interpretation of "truth" and who *willingly embrace* God's revealed Way of Life which He made sure to give to the Church *through chosen servants!*

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for *the faith which was once delivered unto the saints* (Jude 3).

It just so happens that one of those revealed Truths of Jesus Christ to His Church is the knowledge of the one-and-only Day of Pentecost. Jesus Christ did not leave us in darkness. Through a chosen servant in our age, He confirmed a Monday Pentecost. That was part of that Faith which was surely delivered to us by a purposeful God. Those of God's called who acknowledge that revelation of Truth are voluntarily setting aside their own interpretations and agreeing to dress as the King requires for His Wedding Feast. They manifest a volunteer spirit to answer a call, to do the hard work to crucify their own natural inclinations by putting on the mind of Jesus Christ instead, and then they show up on the appointed day of celebration, dressed appropriately for that grand and glorious occasion.

May God grant each one of you volunteers to be there.

Yours with love and devotion in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Jon W. Brisby