

## Breaking with Diotrephes

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**Publisher:** Church of God, Bismarck, Darwin & Laura Lee, **Editor:** Laura Lee, **Assistant Editor:** Darwin Lee We do not necessarily agree with all contributors, or their works submitted and printed in this newsletter. It is up to you to get out your Bible and see whether these things are true. Iron sharpens Iron

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## Articles

## Breaking with Diotrephes

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*Many Biblical Examples exist of Political Situations within the Church. One notable situation was the Congregational Regime related by the beloved Elder and Apostle John as he concluded his Third Epistle.*

In these latter decades, especially as the Church of God grew, becoming its most significant work in centuries, then when coming under extreme duress, both from without and especially from within, a concept of government was developed to

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meet the challenges of the times. Not all members were entirely comfortable with what developed, and not all were treated equitably as it all played out. But comfortable or not, it impacted all of us in rather profound ways, and forms at least a part of the methodology under which we operate today.

Partly due to concerns of aberrant doctrines being brought among the membership and partly due to concerns that wrong leadership might take control of the Church, or at least draw away a following, a concept of government developed with intent to protect the flock. With commendable intentions, the Church made itself vulnerable to being ‘taken over’, if not widely, at least locally, by a certain few who coveted the prestige and power inherent with the ministry. This was not new. In fact, in a notable situation related by the Elder John, he and his epistles were ‘excluded’, being refused admittance, as were those who appreciated his fellowship in at least one local congregation.

### **Not Receiving the Brethren!**

The Elder John relates this situation with brief but potent implication in his third epistle: 9: *“I wrote unto the church: but **Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.** 10: **Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, *prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.*”** Though we’d like to regard this as a rare and isolated situation, too many have, in differing situations over the centuries, found it to be an unpleasant reality and it still is with us today!*

Though this phenomenon can often be found within individual local congregations, even more significantly is its adaptation into the methods of operation of many separate organizations that have come into being in this generation. Organizations that form around the ministry of one preeminent individual, and even those that have formed around groups of ministers can often exhibit similar exclusive disdain toward all others. The basis of fellowship isn’t so much the content of ones’ beliefs, or the indwelling of God’s Spirit, as it is a person’s organizational affiliation. There may be Spirit imbued people ‘outside’ of the particular organization, but many have decided to not have anything but a negative regard for them!

### **The Authority Factor**

We can conclude that the Apostle John’s ‘problem’ with Diotrephes wasn’t based on doctrinal matters. Though perhaps that could be inferred, more likely it was the issue of ‘authority’. His *‘prating against them’* being based on a repulsion of the ‘challenge’ to his hold on his personal turf that a wider fellowship might pose. John, of all people, in both his writings and in person, represented the love of and toward Christ that put **Him** in first position, focusing on His supremacy, obviously lessening the inappropriately high level of esteem toward any self-promoting ‘intermediarian’.<sup>1</sup>

John recognized the danger of any man setting himself as a sole authority in any Church. Because to do that, one has to **stand in an intermediary position** between the individual Saint and his Lord. The action of *“casting them out of the church”* speaks volumes! It strongly suggests a belief on the part of the membership that affiliation with and acceptance of fellowship within this one enclosed group has direct bearing on ones’ possession of the Spirit of God. It wouldn’t have been effective if the membership didn’t believe that. People are intimidated into conforming to the dictates of their esteemed leader, acquiescing to his every Rule in order to maintain their standing with God!! It is alleged that being ‘insubordinate’ (independent / disloyal / rebellious / dissident, etc.) to that one chief leader puts ones’ salvation in jeopardy. In this we can see how ‘the hold’ works. Way too many **remained with** the apostate organization of the Worldwide Church of God under this perception. Long after its (obvious to most) repudiation of all it once stood for, people hung on and on, refusing to walk away, offering the explanation that ‘this is the Church I was called-into’, or ‘God will intervene and fix this problem’. Most believing firmly that to walk out would put their salvation and their access to God’s Spirit in jeopardy, when in fact, the very opposite was the case! (See Revelation 3:12)

But such is the hold intermediarians<sup>1</sup> have on their followers. They present themselves as God’s sole official spokesmen (or in some cases, ‘spokesman’) suggesting that their official proclamations carry the very authority of God in Heaven. To challenge their local dictates is seen as an offense against God! This works especially well when members effectively lay down their bibles and discontinue using the Berean approach. This also is a method of operation. I recall well a pointed conversation with a speakin’ deacon, who admitted to doing this. He felt no continuing obligation to continue ‘proving all things’ as we’re pointedly commanded to do. I was somewhat aghast at his adamancy! He strongly felt and freely admitted that, having once proved WHO the true Apostle was, it no longer was incumbent upon him to prove anything further! His quest was **over**, his lock on the eternal Truth by now was a foregone conclusion. It made his

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‘spiritual life’s routine’ much easier, but in doing so, he put himself in a danger far greater than either of us would ever have guessed at the time.

### **Unsolid Ground**

Needless to say, when “the Church” began its wholesale exchange of doctrines, this fellow was thrown into a tailspin! He, being in a double bind, because at that time to challenge any changes, his ‘deaconship’ also would have been forfeit. So, the **new** intermediary with its organizational structure prevailed on him. He was soon ‘gone’, in more ways than one! The primary facilitator of his disillusionment being his reluctance to restore his method of operation back to a Berean approach and to follow scripture rather than men. It had been too long since he’d done that. He had himself become Diotrephized! In reality, his faith was mis-based!

There is an area in everyone’s Christian life where we’re eventually compelled to evaluate what drives us. Not everyone looks into the depths of his or her personal sub-conscious with the same clarity of mind. When new to the faith, this consideration can pose too formidable a challenge. But we who are supposedly of full age and in whom God is working are eventually put in a position where we must consider and answer the matter. It’s what we had to face during our Worldwidian experiences, without necessarily realizing it. Many fear to directly consider it, but when and IF we are to ever attain the level of maturity appropriate to our true calling, it’s something that must be answered, and once answered, confidently followed!

Paul penned these words to Christians at Corinth. *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 13:5) He wrote this to challenge people who for all intents and purposes were presumed to be Christians. But of apparent Christians, he asks them something important: that they should **examine themselves** as to their true situation. This wasn’t urged upon non-professing types, but upon Christians! It establishes that unless Christ is within a person, thru the indwelling of His Spirit, then that person is a reprobate!! But, in many situations, the reprobates appear much the same as the true! Some may *appear* even better than the true! What makes the difference? Paul’s urging shows that there **is** an evident proof that’s demonstrable! The key is found in the answer to the question: Who do we really follow and imitate, Christ, or a minister? Would Jesus Christ do what **we** do?

### **Others Will Gladly Tell You!**

In a Diotrephesian culture, there’s always someone all too willing to declare another’s true conversion status, and they do so by evaluating a person’s perceived loyalty to their local Diotrephes. Anyone of their fellowship not as fully committed to their discipline as they deem appropriate, are declared **unconverted** as **they** define conversion. Such is the nature of the situation.<sup>2</sup>

Rather, as people mature in the Faith, they will be found living more by Faith than simple sight, or in other words, just doing what they’re told without due consideration. What living by Faith accomplishes in this area is the removal of any ‘intermediary’ that stands between the individual and his God and following God where-ever He leads. This is a response or condition on the part of the individual that gives Diotrephesians fits! When a person’s motivating force is the indwelling Spirit of God and not a fearful regard for a dominating human leader, then the power over that person on their part is effectively circumvented.

### **Only One Mediator**

Despite our knowing this: (*“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;”*) (1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 2:5)) that there is only one True Mediator between ourselves and God our Father, yet some effectively attest that **there is** another by their actions. When we allow ourselves to become too enamored of a leader or even an organization to where we fail to maintain that direct one-on-one relationship with our God, we set ourselves at odds with one of God’s Commands. We put someone between ourselves and God: a First Commandment issue. Action often justified with the excuse that “This is God’s minister and God would want me to acquiesce to everything His minister says!” What many haven’t addressed adequately is the question, “Is that what we’re really supposed to be doing as it regards God’s ministers?” Further, do we regard that man as our master or as our servant? That too defines us!

So long as we adhere to this kind of situation, we incur another shortcoming. We inhibit ourselves from growing in grace and knowledge as we should. The only ‘growth’ some people experience is just from what their minister feeds them!

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Just think what would happen if everyone rejected and stepped away from these Diotrephes situations. Personality-based cults and cult type organizations would disappear overnight! That fact indicates that **we also** are complicit in creating the situation!

**What? Who Me?**

Christ had to deal with these human tendencies even while facing the most excruciating distress, that of His impending death. His disciples jostled for **position** among themselves, wanting to become ‘preeminent’ over the others. Matt. 20:20 *“Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. 21. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.”* The text shows that the sons were in on it but didn’t have the guts to ask! His reply was *“...to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. 24: And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. 25: But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise **dominion over them**, and they that are great exercise **authority upon them**. 26: But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27: And who-soever will be chief among you, let him be your **servant**: 28: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”* Would a Diotrephes commit himself to selfless servitude of others?

But it’s the issue of ‘domineering’ or ‘overlording’ that fires this engine. Loving pre-eminent position! We are built to be that way and to want that way. Walking by Faith on the other hand is a really scary path. It takes the indwelling of God’s Spirit to walk out onto that water, especially when it’s turbulent.

Our first service to the Church of God is to **walk by Faith**, examining carefully those “Works” we deem worthy of support, distancing ourselves from those destructive organizations that seek to control us for gain, and extending the right hand of fellowship toward **all** who are blessed with the Gift of God’s Spirit no matter what their affiliation. We see no real gain from any Diotrephesian condition.

**Further Thoughts on the Diotrephes Situation:**

While we tend to consider this negative assessment of the man Diotrephes as we do, we may be over-looking what it is revealing about the authority situation that is (and should be) within the Church. Those organizations that tend to embrace the hierarchal approach view such passages as we find in Ephesians 4:11 as a “top-down authority structure”, with each “office” subordinate to those “above” him. Is that really how they saw the matter in their day? Did they think as we think?

The opening chapter in my booklet:” *Church Government – an Historic Challenge*” describes each of these so-called “offices”, explaining how they differ from one another and how the supposedly “higher” ranks are more detached from involvement with the local congregations and each of us as individuals in particular. The Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists, if doing what their job descriptions call for, would tend to function in more of an “at large” capacity.

Being that we have tended to think as we do, viewing these high offices as being greater in authority over those regarded as lesser in rank, what should be obvious, I believe, has escaped our consideration.

**WHO Bears Rule?**

The admonition to *“Obey them that have the **rule** over you and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that **must give account**, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”* (Heb. 13:17) has long been cited to set forth how we should respond to those who shepherd us. While we typically apply the admonition to the ministry, and particularly those in highest “ranks”, we are remiss if not noticing what the passage actually says. Those who we are to be submissive to are those who **KNOW** us! High ranking officials far removed from us don’t know us. They don’t know our names, wouldn’t identify who we are if they heard our names, and have no idea of our character or personal flaws. So, how can they give account for our spiritual condition before God if they aren’t involved in our lives?

It’s posed in the above referenced booklet that these “at large” ministries: Apostle, Prophet, and Evangelist, are not personally involved in our lives and not directly involved in our personal spiritual development, and thus not reasonably accountable for us, as that scripture indicates. We are then drawn to see in this admonition that the first **real** “authority position” we encounter in the Church is the local Pastors. (The fourth “office” listed!)

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**Is It Logical?**

Our submission, then, should be to those working with us personally, not to the prominent figureheads with whom we have no direct or regular contact: Those who are continually shepherding us in our spiritual development. That way, if they don't do their job, adequately they are accountable for that. How could those sent out into the world, those not overseeing a local congregation, reasonably bear the same degree of accountability? Does the Diotrephes situation indirectly illustrate this truth?

Does it reveal that the first level of authority within the Church is the local Pastor, and do his actions show that he DID recognize his personal accountability for their spiritual welfare?

John's response reflects this as well, does it not? The Apostle didn't interject himself, imposing his "authority" (pulling rank) and flat-out FIRING Diotrephes. While the man had a problem, (loving pre-eminence) it doesn't say he was teaching falsehoods. It doesn't indicate that was the issue. It was the potential challenge to his pre-eminence that created this sour incident. The Elder John had a well-known status among the Churches, which Diotrephes feared might overshadow his own. (And where have we seen that lately?) John, on the other hand, saw fit to not forcefully interject himself and risk possible turmoil in that congregation.

**The Bottom Line**

What we might have missed in all of this, by taking our typical approach to Ephesians 4:11, is the subtle confirmation of the local Pastor's authority position by reason of him being responsible for the flock in his care. It is the leader who knows us, who teaches us, who knows our personalities and our shortcomings, who is the worthy recipient of the respect that is called for in Hebrews 13:17.

This also demonstrates that an Apostle, even one sent out by God, did not see himself as being of greater authority than the local Pastor! Have we overlooked this consideration? 

**End Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> By "intermediarian" I mean someone who places himself in an intermediate position between the individual and God. We should know that there is one intermedicator, and He between ourselves and the Father. We don't need one between ourselves and Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> A minister back east in the early '80's relied on the formula of "loyalty to HWA" as the best indicator of a person's conversion, and appointed three local deacons on that basis, passing-over long attending people. Then HWA died! Today, while those three are long gone, their real situation was clearly proven by their rote loyalty to 'the system' but apparently without a functional regard for the Love of God. Ironically, many of those passed-over people are still faithful to God and His Truth to this day!!

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**The Seven Thunders**  
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"And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire. And he had in his hand a little book open. And he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth. And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars, and when he had cried, **seven thunders** uttered their voices. And when the **seven thunders** had uttered their voices, I [John] was about to write. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, '**Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered and write them not**'" (Revelation 10:1-4).

Here we have the apostle John witnessing this mighty angel from heaven standing upon the sea and the earth who then shouts as loud as a lion roaring which sounds like the voices of **seven thunders**. John wants to write down what they

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uttered but is then commanded not to. In so doing, the message or pronouncement of The Seven Thunders would be **sealed**. Why did God want the message of The Seven Thunders sealed?

This has always puzzled me. Can we find any clues to this **mystery**? Let’s continue with chapter ten: “And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth **lifted up his hand to heaven**, and **swore** by him that **lives forever** and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be **time no longer**. But in the days of the voice of the **seventh angel** when he shall begin to **sound**, the **mystery** of God should be **finished** as he has **declared** to his servants the prophets” (Revelation 10:5-7).

What is the **mystery** of God? “Behold, I show you a **mystery**. We shall not all sleep [in the grave], but we shall all be **changed**. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the **last trump**. For the trumpet shall **sound**, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (I Corinthians 15:51-52).

Paul is describing the First Resurrection which occurs at the last or seventh trump when Christ will return to gather His Elect from the four winds. This ties perfectly to the statement we just quoted from Revelation ten. The First Resurrection is the **hope** of all Christians who desire to be in God’s kingdom ruling with Jesus Christ for a thousand years and for the rest of eternity. God wanted to assure us of His promise of eternity by sending a mighty angel from heaven who then swears by God Almighty that the Resurrection is guaranteed by God Himself.

In the Book of Daniel, we find a parallel account similar to the one found in Revelation ten. “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which stands for the children of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. And at that time your people shall be **delivered**, everyone that shall be found **written in the book**. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall **awake**, some to everlasting life” (Daniel 12:1-2).

Here we have another description of the Resurrection. Drop down to verse six. We read about a “man clothed in linen.” This man raises his right hand and left hand to heaven and then swears by Him who “**lives forever**.” This is very similar to the mighty angel of Revelation ten. We then learn that it shall be for “a time, times, and half a time” until all these things are **finished**. Notice the similar wording.

In Revelation 12, we see a woman who must flee again into the wilderness for “a time, times, and half a time” after Satan is cast out of heaven by Michael. Most everyone believes that this “time, times, and half a time” means three and a half years. The Greek word here meaning “time” refers to a holy day. The same word is used in Galatians 4:10: “Ye observe days, and months, and **times**, and **years**.” This shows that a “time” is not a year.

The account of the mighty angel and The Seven Thunders occurs between the sounding of the Sixth Trumpet and the Seventh Trumpet. This is a clue as to the **Timeline** of the Book of Revelation. The Seven Trumpets of Revelation will sound in a **four-three pattern**. This same **four-three pattern** is found in the Seven Annual Sabbaths according to the Civil year of the Hebrew Calendar which begins with the Feast of **Trumpets**. Many believe that the last or seventh trumpet will sound on a future Feast of Trumpets. But we must ask when will the other six trumpets sound?

It is highly unlikely that all seven trumpets will sound at the same time on a future Feast of Trumpets. If the Feast of Trumpets marks the **beginning** of the Civil year, then will it also mark the **beginning** of the sounding of the **Seven Trumpets** rather than the ending? Very likely which is why they will sound in the same **four-three pattern** of the Annual Sabbaths according to the Civil year. This means that the seventh and last trump will then sound on Pentecost, the Feast of **Firstfruits**. For more details of the **Timeline**, see my article “No One Knows The Day” in issue #54, February 12, 2022.

So, the Fifth Trumpet will sound on the First Day of Unleavened Bread and the Sixth Trumpet will sound on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. In between the Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost, we usually have **Seven Sabbaths**. It is interesting that The **Seven Thunders** are pictured in between the sounding of the Sixth Trumpet and Seventh Trumpet as described in the Book of Revelation. Could the time period of “a time, times, and half a time” include the time between Passover and Pentecost? A time, Passover; times, Days of Unleavened Bread; half a time since the Resurrection will occur on Pentecost.

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This time period is also when the Great Tribulation will occur, and the Two Witnesses will be killed. The Seventy Weeks prophecy of Daniel nine also ties into this period which will be explained in another article. To get back to the question asked at the beginning of this article: Why did God want the message of The Seven Thunders sealed?

Wasn't Daniel also told to seal up something? “But you, O Daniel, **shut up** the words, and **seal the book**, even to the **time of the end**” (Daniel 12:4). I have always thought that the book that was to be sealed was the Book of Daniel. But the Book of Daniel has been available for everyone to read for centuries. What book did God mean for Daniel to seal?

Go back to verse one of Daniel 12. It says that everyone will be delivered who are found written in the **book**. That is the book that was to be sealed. Not the Book of Daniel which contains history and prophecy. Where else do we find a book that had been sealed?

“And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a **book** written within and on the backside, **sealed with seven seals**” (Revelation 5:1). Most everyone thinks this book that is sealed with seven seals is the Book of Revelation. Not so! The Book of Revelation is John's recording of the events given to him by Jesus Christ. In Revelation four, John is taken to heaven perhaps in a vision where he sees the throne room of God Almighty. In His right hand there is a book which is sealed with seven seals which no one is able to open. This causes John to begin to weep. Why?

What is so important about this sealed book which causes John to weep? It is then declared that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the book by removing the seals. This is an obvious reference to Jesus Christ. Why is Jesus the only one who can loosen the seven seals and open this book? He is also referred to as the Lamb that had been slain (Revelation 5:6). “Neither is there **salvation** in any other. For there is **none** other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be **saved**” (Acts 4:12). If we can only be saved by the name of Jesus Christ and only Jesus can open the book sealed with seven seals, then it must be God's Book of Life (Revelation 20:15).

No wonder John wept when he thought this book could not be opened. If the Book of Life could not be opened, then the names written therein would not receive eternal life. Is this the book that Daniel was told to seal? And did The Seven Thunders utter the names of those written in the Book of Life? Is this why John was also told, like Daniel, to seal up what he had heard?

Why were Daniel and John not allowed to reveal the names of those written in the Book of Life? This is where we have to ask some hard questions. For those who have repented of their sins and accepted the blood of Jesus and now walk in newness of life by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can feel fairly confident that our names are written in the Book of Life (Luke 10:20).

But, given our human nature, if we knew by divine revelation that our names are in the Book of Life, there is a tendency to not be as zealous as we should be. If an angel appeared and told you the day before you had to take an important test at school that you would pass the test, this may boost your confidence to the point that you decide to watch a movie rather than spend more time studying. We have all done this. “Therefore let him who thinks that he stands take heed lest he falls” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Thus, the Book of Revelation addresses the seven churches in Asia who have various spiritual conditions which need to be overcome. Over and over, it is emphasized that Christ is coming **quickly**. The Book of Revelation was written centuries ago. So, was John the first “used-car salesman” who grossly exaggerated the need to be ready? “You better grab this deal today because it will go **quickly!**”

Absolutely not! It does not matter if Jesus would actually return ten, twenty, or a hundred years from now. What we need to focus on are not dates, but our desire to serve our Lord with the utmost zeal. This only happens if we believe that He is coming **quickly**.

“But and if that servant say in his heart, ‘My lord **delays** his coming,’ and shall begin to beat [mistreat] the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be **drunken** [bad behavior]. The lord of that servant **will come** in a day when he does not expect and an hour when he is not aware, and will **cut him off**, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers” (Luke 12:45-46).

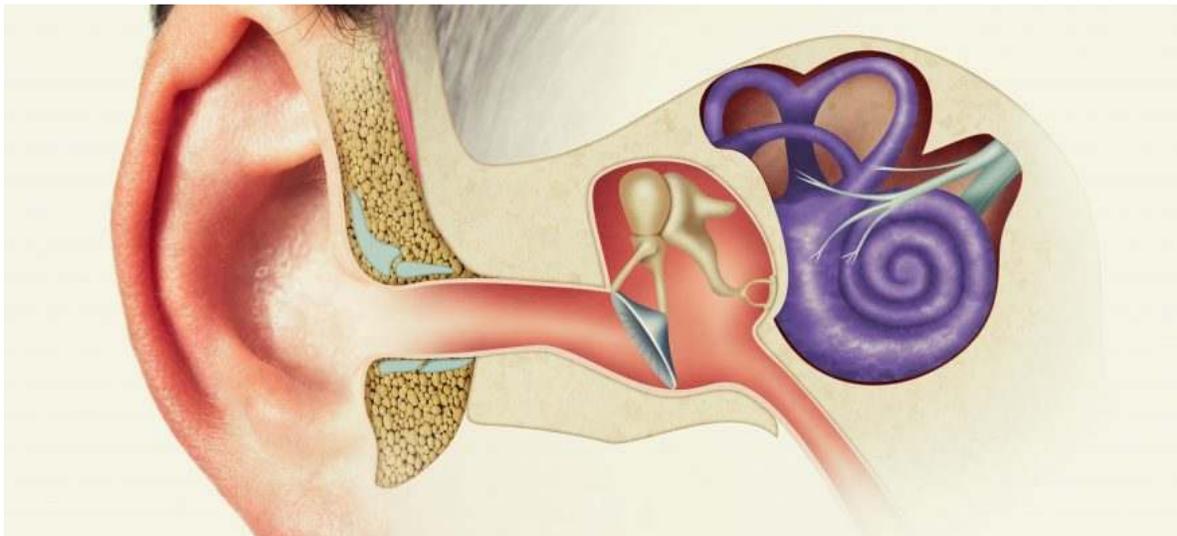
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This warning is not to be taken lightly! Let us encourage each other to be zealous because Jesus is coming **quickly**. None of us knows what tomorrow may bring. We do have God’s protection. Yet, time and chance happens to us all.

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk** as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. . . . See then that you walk **circumspectly**, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, **because** the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:8-21).

## **Wonder of the Human Ear – How Do We Hear?**

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Have you ever wondered how you can hear my voice, or any other sound? Our sensitive ears can pick up the faint whisper of the breeze, the buzz of a bee’s wings, or the patter of rain on a puddle. These same ears can withstand music blaring in our headphones, a baby screaming, or a car back-firing. How is this possible?

Well, here’s the short, simplistic version of how your ears work. Sound travels on sound waves. These waves are collected by the outer ear and travel down the ear canal to the eardrum causing it to vibrate. The middle ear, behind the eardrum, contains three small bones, one of which is the smallest bone in your body!

These bones amplify the vibrations and send them along to the cochlea, or the inner ear, a fluid-filled structure that looks a little bit like a snail. This fluid starts to move which, in turn, causes sensory receptors, called hair cells, to start to move.

Depending on where they are in the cochlea, these hair cells pick up different pitches of sound. As the hair cells move, microscopic projections on the hair cells bend to open channels. Chemicals fill these channels turning sound waves into electrical signals which then travel up the auditory nerve to the brain. And all that happens nearly instantly and without you having to think about it!

But it doesn’t stop there! We don’t just have to gather sound and somehow get invisible sound waves from the ear to the brain—your brain then has to interpret the information it got from the ear and attach meaning to it, so it makes sense and gives you information about your environment. It has to process the tiny time variation it took for sound to reach your left ear as opposed to your right and turn that into stereoscopic information which allows you to judge the direction a sound

is coming from.

And if that weren't amazing enough, the ear does double-duty by helping us maintain a sense of balance!

The human ear is truly an awe-inspiring piece of craftsmanship. No wonder Solomon writes in Proverbs 20:12, “the hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made them both.” The intricate design of the human ear points towards the handiwork of our Creator – we're fearfully and wonderfully made!

I'm David Rives... Truly the heavens declare the glory of God.

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## **America's Covenant with God** **(Copyright) by Eddie Hyatt (Tulsa, Oklahoma)**

The earliest immigrants to this land believed that they, as a people, had entered into a sacred covenant with God. This was clearly expressed by John Winthrop who, in 1630, led a flotilla of eleven ships with 700 passengers to New England and founded the city of Boston and the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

During their journey across the Atlantic, Winthrop formulated a sermon entitled “A Model of Christian Charity.” In it he exhorted his fellow pilgrims that “the eyes of the world are upon us” and that God would have them, in their new home, to be that “city on a hill” of which Jesus spoke, a shining light exhibiting a model of Christian living for the rest of mankind to see.

He also spoke of the seriousness of the covenant with God into which they had entered. He exhorted, We have entered into an explicit Covenant with God. We have drawn up indentures with the Almighty, wherefore if we succeed and do not let ourselves be diverted into making money, He will reward us. Whereas if we fail, if we embrace this present world and prosecute our carnal intentions, the Lord will surely break out in wrath and make us know the price of the breach of such a Covenant (Hyatt, [1726: The Year that Defined America](#), 28-29).

The late Harvard professor, Perry Miller, considered this to be, in a sense, America's true founding. He saw Winthrop's clearly articulated vision of being that “city on a hill”--a light for other nations--as that which came to define the nation. He went on to say,

A society that is both clear and articulate about its intentions is something of a rarity in modern history. Most of the nations of Europe and Asia grew up by chance and by accident either of geography or politics.

This was not the case with America. Those first immigrants to America came with a clearly articulated vision, which they recorded in written documents—documents which they considered to be covenants with God.

### **The Mayflower Compact Was a Covenant**

Ten years before Winthrop and his company arrived, the Pilgrims had landed at Cape Cod. Before disembarking, they drew up a written document patterned after the church covenants that were common among Separatist churches in England. Being part of a Separatist congregation, they were very aware of such documents, which knit the signees together in a solemn, contractual agreement with God and one another.

In the Mayflower Compact, each signee promised “solemnly and mutually in the presence of God” to “covenant together” for the better ordering and preservation of their community. This covenant also stated that their purpose in coming to the New World was to glorify God and advance the Christian faith.

Perry Miller, said, “The Separatists aboard the Mayflower found a covenant the obvious answer to the first problem of political organization” (Hyatt, [1726: The Year that Defined America](#), 21).

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Some have called the Mayflower Compact America’s founding document. That is going too far, but there is no question that it set the stage for succeeding communities and colonies that would base their existence on written documents—covenants—that gave recognition to God and prioritized the Gospel of Jesus Christ as their reason for being.



**New England Covenants with God**

This idea of a social compact (covenant) with God was expressed, not only in the founding of Plymouth, Boston, and Massachusetts, but also in the 1639 founding document of Connecticut entitled “The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut.” This document states,

We, the inhabitants and residents of Windsor, Hartford, and Wethersfield, knowing where a people are gathered together the word of God requires that to maintain the peace and union of such a people there ought to be an orderly and decent government established according to God . . . we do for ourselves and our successors enter into combination and confederation together, to maintain and preserve the liberty and purity of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we now profess (Hyatt, [1726: The Year that Defined America](#), 30-31).

With thousands of new immigrants arriving in New England and new towns springing up, there arose a felt need for some sort of centralized government to facilitate mutual defense and to arbitrate land disputes. To meet this need, the United Colonies of New England was formed, and a constitution was formulated, patterned on the idea of covenant. Dated May 19, 1643, the opening statement of the constitution expressly states why they had all come to the New World. It reads,

Whereas we all came into these parts of America with one and the same end and aim, namely, to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy the Liberties of the Gospel in purity and peace (Hyatt, [1726: The Year that Defined America](#), 31).

The constitution provided that each colony would choose two representatives who would form a council of eight. This council of eight was invested with power to arbitrate boundary disputes, coordinate mutual defense, and facilitate mutual advice and support. It was clearly stated that this council was brought into existence for “preserving and propagating the truth and liberties of the Gospel” (Hyatt, [1726: The Year that Defined America](#), 31).

There is no question that this constitutional system wherein each individual colony retained its autonomy, and the powers of government were limited by the constitution, was a forerunner of the federalist system that would be created at Philadelphia in 1776 and 1787. The United Colonies of New England clearly foreshadowed the United States of America in both its form of government and in its Christian character.

The Puritans clearly saw these written statements as covenants, not only between themselves, but also between their society and God. They believed that God dealt, not only with individuals, but also with social units, including families, churches, and nations. According to Perry Miller, “The central conception in their thought is the elaborated doctrine of covenant.”

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**The Blessing & Responsibility of Covenant**

These early immigrants saw Israel in the OT as a pattern for their social covenant with God. Like Israel, they believed that if they, as a people, kept their part of the covenant, which was to walk uprightly and make His name known, they would be blessed. If, on the other hand, they lost their sense of purpose and began to live selfish and sinful lives, they would suffer God’s wrath because of their rejection of the covenant. During the voyage to New England, Winthrop warned,

Now if the Lord shall please to bear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then hath He verified this Covenant and sealed our commission . . . but if we fail to perform the terms of the Covenant, we shall perish out of the land we are crossing the sea to possess (Hyatt, *1726: The Year that Defined America*, 32).

This social sense of responsibility to God is the reason the Puritans tended to hold one another accountable. They believed that since communities and nations cannot be rewarded in the next world, they must necessarily be rewarded in this one, according to their deeds. The sin of one or a few could, therefore, bring down God’s judgment on the entire community. This is also the reason that laws were passed outlawing adultery, fornication, profanity, drunkenness, and Sabbath breaking.

**Virginia Too**

Although New England was where the writing of constitutions was profoundly developed, all the colonies were founded on similar social compacts with God. When the Jamestown settlers disembarked at Cape Henry, VA, their first act was to erect a seven-foot cross they had brought from England. They then gathered around the cross for a prayer service in which they dedicated the land of their new home to God. In his dedicatory prayer, their chaplain, Rev. Robert Hunt, declared, “From these very shores the Gospel shall go forth to not only this New World but to the entire world.”

This act was in line with the official Virginia Charter, which recognized “the Providence of Almighty God” and expressed the desire that the establishment of the colony would “tend to the glory of His Divine Majesty.” This document also expressly stated that the purpose of the colony was to propagate the “Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God.”

There are amazing similarities between the Virginia Charter, the Mayflower Compact, and other founding documents of New England. This led Perry Miller to suggest that Virginia and New England were not that different. He pointed out that both communities were children of the Reformation, “and what we consider distinctively Puritan was really the spirit of the times.”

There is thus no question that these early social compacts, or covenants, were precursors to the founding documents of the United States of America. Gary Amos and Richard Gardiner are correct to say, “The early New England constitutions were covenants. These covenants clearly foreshadowed the United States Constitution” (Hyatt, *1726: The Year that Defined America*, 33).

**God and America’s Founding Documents**

The Declaration of Independence begins with an acknowledgement that human rights come from God. It ends with the signees expressing a reliance on Divine Providence, a common expression of that era for the God of the Bible. It was commonly used by revivalist ministers, such as George Whitefield, in their sermons and writings.

It is obvious that the Founders saw the U.S. Constitution as a sacred document, and they treated it as a covenant. That is why George Washington took the oath of office with his hand on a Bible and solemnly swore to uphold and defend the Constitution, “so help me God.”

This sacred view of the Constitution was obviously inherited from those earliest immigrants who considered their covenants to be sacred oaths between their communities and God. This covenantal attitude became a part of the psyche of colonial America and was clearly present in the attitude of the Founders toward America’s founding documents. Historian, Benjamin Hart, says,

The U.S. Constitution has worked because there has been a sacred aura surrounding the document; it has been something more than a legal contract; it was a covenant, an oath before God, very much related to the covenant the Pilgrims signed. Indeed, when the President takes his oath of office, he places his hand on a Bible and swears before

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Almighty God to uphold the Constitution of the United States. He makes a sacred promise; and the same holds true for Supreme Court justices who take an oath to follow the letter of the written Constitution. The moment America’s leaders begin treating the Constitution as though it were a mere sheet of paper is the moment the American Republic—or American Covenant—ends (Hyatt, *1726: The Year that Defined America*, 133).

**Abraham Lincoln Understood America’s Covenant with God**

Abraham Lincoln understood that America had a covenant with God. That is why, in the midst of the desolation of the Civil War, he proclaimed a national, day of prayer and repentance for April 30, 1863. In this proclamation, he acknowledged God’s hand on the nation and, in so many words, explained the present calamity to be the result of national sin, *i.e.*, the breaking of the covenant. He said,

But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious Hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us (Hyatt, *The Great Prayer Awakening of 1857-58*, 37).

The populace, especially in the North, responded *in masse* to Lincoln’s call to prayer. On the appointed day, businesses and schools closed and people gathered in churches and homes throughout the land to pray and repent for personal and national sins, including the sin of slavery.

And whereas the South had been winning battle after battle and it looked as though the American union could well be dissolved, there was an almost immediate turn of the war in favor of the North after this day of prayer. God intervened and America was sustained after she renewed her covenant with God.

**Where Are We Today?**

America is at another critical juncture in her history. Powerful forces reject the notion of God having any role in the nation’s founding and they consider the Constitution to be a useless, outdated document—a mere sheet of paper—as Hart warned.

Taking the oath of office is now seen as a meaningless formality that may be carried out with the Koran, as well as the Bible, or with any religious book. America’s future has not been this uncertain since the Civil War.

The next presidential election holds great and grave consequences for America’s future. That being said, America’s ultimate future will not be determined at the White House, but at God’s House. Lincoln’s Prayer Proclamation was strategic but came after a Great Prayer Awakening that began in 1857 that was characterized by passionate prayer, day, and night, in churches, halls, homes, and public auditoriums throughout the nation.

Yes, the decision is ours. What will we do? Will we renew the American covenant? It begins with God’s people taking seriously their role in the health of a nation as expressed in II Chronicles 7:14.

*If My people who are called by My Name  
Will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face,  
And turn from their wicked ways,  
Then I will hear from heaven,  
And will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

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**Holy Days 2022**

Passover – April 16, 2022 (Observed at Sunset the Evening Before)

Unleavened Bread – April 16-22, 2022

Pentecost – June 5, 2022