

# CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 1009  
Allen, TX 75013-0017

April 6, 2017

Dear Brethren,

There are certain times of the year, when the subject for letters, articles, sermons and Bible studies is chosen for you. As I write this letter, Passover is only one week away. And by the time you read it, the Passover will be within a few days.

Before I share my thoughts with you regarding this most important season of the year, I want to pass on some good news. This past week we signed a contract to purchase a plot of land in the southern part of the city of McKinney (a northern suburb of Dallas). We have a 90-day inspection period, during which we can void the contract if we discover any issues with the land. If there are no issues, upon closing (most likely in July) we will become the owners of the property. Then we will begin construction of an office building on the property, which will take most of the next year, with a projected move-in date of no later than June 1, 2018.

While this is a big step for the Church, we believe it will be a great savings and investment for us in the years ahead. And since we are paying cash for the property and arranging a mortgage for the building, we don't believe there will be any interruption in our plans for preaching the gospel and caring for the brethren. As you know, it is our priority—and the mission of the Church—to preach “this gospel of the kingdom ... in all the world” and “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20). And we are especially mindful of Christ's promise: “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

With Passover only a few days away, you are probably mostly done with removing the leavening from your home. In our family, we begin a couple of weeks before the Passover. The first thing my wife does is identify all leavened products and restrict them to one location, normally a box that sits in the kitchen. At this stage in the process, there are strict rules. In the days prior to the feast, leavened products can be consumed only within a few feet of the box!

Here at the office we have asked that all leavening be removed by Thursday, April 6. Each person cleans his or her office or cubicle, and then we have office volunteers clean the kitchen, hallways and other common areas. No leavened products are allowed in the office after the deadline.

All of this requires work! And in the midst of all this physical work, it is important that we pause to make sure we aren't missing what is most important—the spiritual lessons of leavening and unleavened bread.

Each year, through the physical exercise of removing leavening, we learn how difficult it is to remove sin from our lives. On numerous occasions I have been surprised by some product that I did not know contained leavening. This reminds me that I may be overlooking some sin in my life. In our family we strive to get the leavening out well in advance of the feast, but there have been

years when we failed in that goal, even throwing away small packages of leavening on our way to Passover services! Of course, we all have our stories to tell about discovering leavening in our homes *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread!

As a Church, we have been criticized for taking the Scriptures literally by removing leavening from our homes. Those who criticize point to the physical labor and accuse us of being legalistic. Of course, my purpose in writing this letter is not to convince naysayers, but to encourage you that following the Scriptures is always the right thing to do!

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, *since you truly are unleavened*. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

The phrase *since you truly are unleavened* speaks volumes in this verse. Most believe this is a reference to being spiritually unleavened and has nothing to do with physical leavening. But this is surely not the case. To assume that the Corinthian brethren would be considered by Paul to be spiritually unleavened is a huge stretch. In chapter 1 he condemns them for division. In chapter 3 he accuses them of being *carnal*, the very opposite of being spiritually unleavened. In chapter 5 he corrects them for allowing immorality in their midst, by referring to this as a type of leavening that permeated the entire congregation. In chapter 6 he corrects them for going to court against a brother. In chapter 10 he warns them about idolatry, and in chapter 11 he reprimands them for their behavior at the Passover.

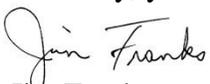
In the two verses quoted above, Paul used leavening and unleavened bread in both a physical and a spiritual way. He referred to the Corinthians as being *unleavened* because they had removed the physical leavening from their lives. And he referred to the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,” thereby making a spiritual analogy.

There is another lesson that we should not miss—that the physical act of removing leavening did not make them better Christians. In fact, it seems that the Corinthians were so focused on the physical that their spiritual lives were in shambles. Paul concludes his second letter to the Corinthians by making a simple request: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

As we approach the Passover, we should do likewise. Examine yourself—not your wife, your husband or your family, but *yourself*. Each year we should be diligent in removing the leavening and keeping it out of our lives during the seven days of the Feast. But I hope we are just as diligent to remove sin, because, without that, the physical work loses its meaning.

I hope everyone has a safe and meaningful Passover, Night to Be Much Observed and Days of Unleavened Bread. Sharron and I will be in Central America visiting the brethren in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. We return on Wednesday, April 19. This is a sobering but exciting time of the year!

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,

  
Jim Franks