



The Chronicle

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Nothing but Leaves

Philip C. Bennett

Leaf: *A flattened structure of a plant, typically green and blade-like, that is attached to a stem directly or via a stalk.*

Generally, leaves are inedible and if eaten, do not have much nutritional value.

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”
(St. John 15:16)

Jesus, in speaking to His disciples who comprised the early Church emphasised that He had called them for a purpose. The purpose was to bring forth fruit, not leaves.

Fruit: *The sweet and fleshy product of a tree or other plant that contains seed and can be eaten as food.*

We cannot bear fruit of ourselves unless we abide in/on the vine. Jesus said: *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.*

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” (St. John 15:1-2)

The fact that Jesus emphasised that He was the true vine suggests that there are other false or counterfeit vines. If we are fruitful, God will purge us so that we can bring forth more fruit. The pruning process is not a pleasant one. It often includes the cutting away of that which is no longer fruitful, but yet a part of the plant. If a tree or plant could talk when being pruned, I am sure it would ask the gardener to leave it as it is, but the gardener or husbandman knows what is best for the plant.

God chose the nation of Israel to show forth His praises and to bring forth fruit, but they failed. They became consumed with being the chosen but there was no fruit to show. If we are not careful, we too can become prideful in being a member of the Church, yet bearing no fruit: *“Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.*

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."
(St. Matthew 3:5-10)

Notice, the multitude came confessing their sins before they were baptized. The Pharisees and Sadducees just came, but there was no repentance. The Pharisees exhibited all the characteristics of bearing fruit but all they had were leaves. As Paul described some, *"having a form of godliness but denying the powers thereof."* (2 Timothy 3:5)

Form: *Appearance, to show without substance.*

"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." (St. Matthew 23:1-3)

The Scribes and the Pharisees said all the right things but there was no power behind their living. **They talked a good talk but did not walk what they talked.** Jesus looked beyond their outward façade and saw them for the hypocrites they were: *"But woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*

for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." (St. Matthew 23:13)

They would not go in but became a hindrance to those who would enter. This can also happen with the Church. When members are not fully committed, they can become a hindrance to others: *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."* (St. Matthew 23:14)

In another place, Jesus said their prayers and their works were done to be seen of men and much of their prayers were just repetition. We cannot fool God with long prayers as He sees our hearts. Neither will good works alone get us to heaven: *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."*
(St. Matthew 23:15)

Some members, when they become discontented can poison others with their words - causing them to become suspicious of others and mould them to become like themselves: *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess."*

Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."
(St. Matthew 23:23-28)

The Scribes and Pharisees did everything to the letter. To the undiscerning eye, they would appear to be a flourishing, fruitful tree but all they had were leaves. Their outward appearance looked fine but inside, their hearts were not right. **Appearances can be deceptive.**

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." (2 Corinthians 10:12)

Jesus, during His sermon on the mount made it clear what was expected of the child of God: *"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."*
(St. Matthew 5:20)

In the Bible, we have an account where Jesus had spent some time in Bethany, the town of Lazarus, Mary and Martha and was returning to Jerusalem: *"Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.*

And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!"
(St. Matthew 21:18-20)

Jesus came to the tree looking for fruit, but all he found was leaves. Jesus would have known that it was the season for it to bear fruit and the tree must have given the appearance that it contained fruit. Jesus found nothing but leaves. As the tree was barren, it was cursed by Jesus and withered away.

We do not want to just have leaves and the appearance of being fruitful. We need to bear fruit. God has not called us to come and warm the benches, week after week. **God is expecting us to bring forth fruit:** *"He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."* (St. Luke 13:6-9)

After three barren years with no fruit to show, the dresser was going to try one more time with this barren tree. He was going to expend extra effort on the fig tree in an attempt to make it fruitful. He was going to give the tree one more year. Brethren, let this not be our **"one more year."** 📖



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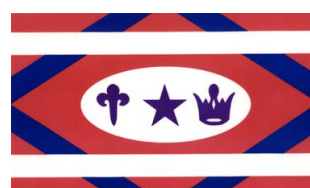
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From the Overseer's Desk

I must give thanks to Almighty God for His keeping care and divine protection towards us, His children. Despite the devastation that we have witnessed due to the pandemic, God has kept us.

"Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." (Psalm 91:9-11)

Although many of our events have had to be postponed, we thank God that through the use of social media, we have been able to conduct our normal Sunday and midweek services, along with other events including: District Meeting, Annual General Meeting (AGM), Business and Committee meetings, etc.

At the time of writing, the local churches at Handsworth and Long Lane have been able to resume services since July when the restrictions were lifted. They have had good attendance, including visitors who had not attended for some time before the pandemic. Hopefully, in the coming weeks our other churches will also be able to gather in their normal places of worship.

This year we were not able to conduct our National Convention, but thank God we were able to have a modified National Ministers' Convention - similar to the recent *"Times of Refreshing"* organised by General Headquarters. (The Media department at General Headquarters has asked me to pass on their appreciation for the contributions made by our musicians and singers. This helped in making it a success).

Let us continue to trust our God who is in complete control and to pray one for another. Although we are still not able to do all we previously could, let us ask God to give us wisdom and ingenuity like the steward mentioned in St. Luke 16:1-8 whom his lord commended for his actions:

"And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

(St. Luke 16:8)

Upcoming Events:

National Family Camp - Monday 15th to Thursday 18th February 2021

National Administration

2020-2021

National Overseer:	Philip C. Bennett
Pastor - Druids Heath:	Angela Clarke
Pastor - Handsworth:	Beverley Anderson
Pastor - London:	George Wilson
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National Choir Directors:	Claudine Brown and Angela Clarke
Assistant Editor of <i>The Chronicle</i>:	Karen Richards
National Camp Directors:	Rikki Prince and George Wilson
National Men's Retreat Co-ordinator:	Justin Clarke
National Reporter:	Beverley Wilson

Sunday School Department



The Church of God

SUNDAY SCHOOL BOOST

Jennifer Thompson - National Sunday School Co-ordinator

The general Sunday School theme for the assembly year 2020-2021 is:

'Gather'

(Deuteronomy 4:10)

Our Text Book is the Bible
Our Teacher is the Holy Ghost

Greetings Sunday School scholars. We have been given a new General Sunday School theme for 2020-21 – "GATHER".

I pray as we explore and share the theme together, we will be blessed by the Holy Ghost.

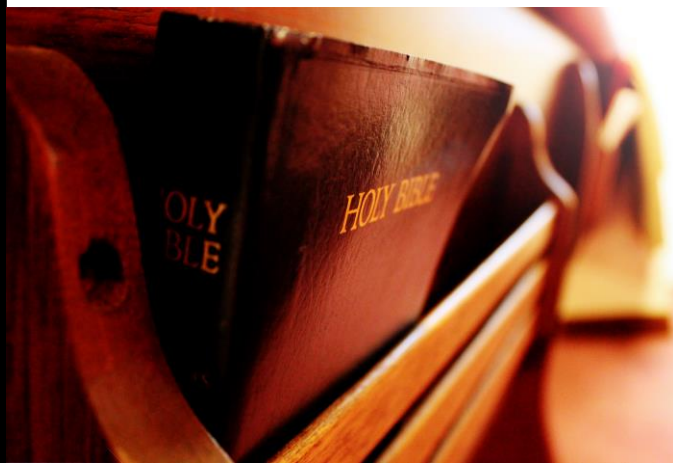
Psalm 91:4:

"...his truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

Only the Word of God can be our shield and buckler. We need the shield ☉ of the Word to protect our minds and guard our hearts from the attacks of the enemy - especially in times like these. PRAISE GOD.

Ephesians 6:17:

"...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:"





WMB BOOST

**Beverley Anderson - National Women's
Missionary Band Co-ordinator**

The general Women's Missionary Band theme for the
assembly year 2020-2021 is:

'Sonlight'

Once we encounter the 'Sonlight', we become disciples of Jesus. St. Matthew 16:26: **"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"** Keep this thought.

First, what is it to be a disciple of Christ, (the 'Sonlight')? It is to follow Him. A true disciple will follow Christ in duty, and then follow Him to glory. Self-denial is fundamental, essential and is submission to Christ: **"...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."** (St. Matthew 16:24)

Denial is 'the straight gate' and 'the narrow way' we so boastfully talk about. Denial is absolute. Self-denial is what we make for Christ, His Church and for their good only.

The cross is 'everything' that will befall us. As Christians, we must take up our God given crosses - even if they are heavy. We must deny ourselves and strive for the things of God, not the things of this world. Where are we at in our salvation? What are we striving for?

If we lose our souls, it is our own fault. No one will be to blame but us. We lose them because we neglect self-denial. Our souls are of greater importance than all the wealth, honour, **achievements** and **pleasures** of this present world. What gives us **pleasure** in this world?

A few years ago, I went to the funeral of a man who was at the pinnacle of success. He had recently married, was a successful graduate, had a good job, a beautiful home, but here he was. At the height of all his gains of this world, his profit or loss where his soul was concerned was now to be measured and reckoned.

I do not know where he was spiritually. I know he did encounter the 'Sonlight', but as for the cross and self-denial, I was unsure. My thoughts were, his achievements would have taken much denial, but was there any denial where God was concerned? What was the profit? Who had benefitted - the world or his soul? Whatever the answers, that day had arrived and all that mattered was his soul. The gains of this world cannot make up for losing one's soul.

What will the comparison be with our profit and loss? We need to deny ourselves and take up our crosses. We will all be paid for the work/denial we have made/done. The question is what are we doing for the Lord in His vineyard? Only we can answer this.

As disciples in His workforce, Christ does not expect excuses from us for not carrying out our duties. We are expected to work and make denials in His house: **"... I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts:..."** (Hebrews 8:10) When His laws are in our hearts and minds, we can deny ourselves. If we cannot, then we should ask God to put His laws into our minds and write it in our hearts. God bless.

Special Note:

The Chronicle is an official publication of The Church of God (England) with Philip C. Bennett National Overseer and Editor. Articles intended for publication in the next issue of *The Chronicle* should be received **before 28th February 2021**. These submissions will be for the January-March 2021 issue. Please send to: Karen Richards, 12 Cherhill Covert, Druids Heath, Birmingham, B14 5YB. Email: kazgirl_uk@yahoo.com

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