



"Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in."

—Isaac Asimov

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Pentecost: A Test?

For doctrine, who is your authority? For some, it is Herbert W. Armstrong. But he warned us, "*Don't believe me*—BELIEVE YOUR BIBLE—BELIEVE GOD!"

Yes, rather than any man or church, the authority for doctrine is given in [Deuteronomy 8:3](#), and [Christ](#) repeats it in [Matthew 4:4](#): "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" [God](#) demands that we take His words seriously, so seriously that we are to live by *every* one of them—*whatever* He commands.

As a testament to our ingrained enmity against God and His law ([Romans 8:7](#)), He must hammer over and over in Deuteronomy that His people should be *careful* to observe His words ([Deuteronomy 4:5-6](#); [5:1](#), 32; 6:1-3, 25; 8:1; 11:32; 12:1; 16:12; 17:19; 26:16; 28:13; 32:46). Yes, be careful to observe what is there, but be just as careful not to add or subtract from those words. Notice [Deuteronomy 12:32](#): "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."

Even with these repeated warnings, humanity still is not careful. They discount what is clearly there and presumptuously add to or take away from those words. They veer to the left or right contrary to instruction ([Joshua 1:7](#); [Deuteronomy 28:14](#); [Proverbs 4:27](#)). To emphasize the grave danger to those who take these warnings lightly, God gives a final caution. It is so vital He ends the Bible with this indelible, vital warning:

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. ([Revelation 22:18-19](#))

Every word is so precious in its value that not even one jot or tittle is to be overlooked or taken away ([Matthew 5:18](#)). Neither should anything be added, as God often warns, threatening those who do either of these things, not just with death, but with eternal death!

God provides four stark examples to underscore the dangers of going outside His instructions even a little. Based on one flaw, God refuses Cain's offering ([Genesis 4:3-5](#)). Disregarding an explicit warning not to look back, Lot's wife becomes a pillar of salt ([Genesis 19:17](#), 26). God instantly strikes dead Aaron's two sons when they ignore a simple instruction about fire ([Leviticus 10:1-2](#)). Finally, because David did not transport the ark exactly as God specified, Uzzah pays with his life when he reaches out to steady it ([II Samuel 6:6-7](#)).

We should soberly consider these examples because they reveal how seriously God considers *all* His instructions and *any* deviations from them. Being careless with something we deem minor can be fatal. As these examples prove, even in the little things, we test God at our peril. Because everything matters, we are to live by every word God gives to us, kept pure, unadulterated by the additions and subtractions of mere men.

Are we committed to God and His words *as given*? To find out, could He have devised an annual test ([Jeremiah 17:10](#); [Psalm 11:4](#))? Have we ever

wondered why Pentecost requires counting, unlike all the other [holy days](#)? God must have an overriding purpose to make such a distinction for this one holy day. It seems He has used it to see who will live by every word, not adding to or subtracting from them.

Who passed this test in Christ's time? Not the Pharisees or Essenes, who used annual holy days—not the weekly Sabbath—as the [Sabbath](#) mentioned in [Leviticus 23:11](#), 15 to begin the count. Christ said that the Pharisees' approach made God's Word of no effect ([Matthew 15:6](#)). There is no better example of this than their Pentecost practice. Their method gave Pentecost a fixed date so that looking at a calendar removed the need to obey God's command to count.

Is it a coincidence that Pentecost, the feast representing the [firstfruits](#), has been a recurring test for those same firstfruits? Consider Herbert Armstrong. After adamantly preaching a Monday Pentecost for nearly forty years, he changed, basically turning on a dime, to observing it on a Sunday as soon as he saw that he had misunderstood the Hebrew meaning for one word, "from." He followed his own advice—an example all should note—and believed the Bible rather than himself. For him, the Bible overruled his teachings, thoughts, and traditions no matter how long or firmly held. That might have been his "now I know" moment from God (see [Genesis 22:12](#)).

At the time, some rejected the change and continued the tradition of a Monday Pentecost. Unlike Herbert Armstrong and much of the church, they failed the test. They did not believe in every word's importance, including the meaning underlying the single word, "from."

Notice a "minor" Pentecost test found in [Leviticus 23:14-15](#):

You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. And ***you*** shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the [wave offering](#): seven Sabbaths shall be completed." (Emphasis added.)

Who is the "you" in verse fourteen? Is not "you" every individual in the body who shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain? Then the "you" in verse fifteen is also everyone in the body, each required to do their own—"for yourselves"—Pentecost count every year. Making this instruction of no effect by looking at a calendar is similar to what the Pharisees did. Is this a yearly test of one's fidelity to every jot and tittle? Interestingly, there is a Jewish custom in which, during the Pentecost count, as part of their daily prayers, they take time to acknowledge what day it is in the [count to Pentecost](#).

Another Pentecost test occurs when [Passover](#) falls on a weekly Sabbath. In all other years, the count begins with the day after the Sabbath *during* the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so why change the procedure in this situation? History shows that the Sadducees, a priestly party among the Jews, counted Pentecost in this way. They did not deviate from it because *no* scripture makes an exception to this method or adds a requirement that Wavesheaf Day must fall within the seven [days of Unleavened Bread](#). Men do; scriptures do not.

Events seem to be accelerating toward a promised tribulation, "the time of Jacob's trouble" ([Jeremiah 30:7](#); see [Matthew 24:21-22](#)). As preparation for that event, to identify who is obedient in all things, is God repeating a pattern of testing (see [II Corinthians 2:9](#))? Is Pentecost a test to see who among His firstfruits will endure to the end, steadfastly living by His every pure, unadulterated word ([Matthew 24:13](#))?

Paul warns us about Satan's attempt to corrupt "the simplicity that is in Christ" ([II Corinthians 11:3](#)). Christ's example is simple: Do God's will ([John 6:38](#); see [Hebrews 10:7](#)). That will is to obey all God tells us ([Matthew 4:4](#)), including those things we might deem as "minor" ([Matthew 5:19](#)), without adding to or subtracting from those words ([Deuteronomy 12:32](#)).

Those of the called who want to obey [Leviticus 23:15](#) "to count [Pentecost] for yourselves" will follow Christ's example ([I Peter 2:21](#)) and walk as He walked ([I John 2:6](#)). They will do God's will as given, not adding to it or taking away from it, and in so doing, they will pass another Pentecost test.

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Why Count Fifty Days?](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Bible has much to say about the significance of the number fifty, such as counting 50 days to Pentecost, the measurements of the Tabernacle and Millennial Temple, as well as the 50 year Jubilee, a time of liberation and forgiveness of debts. Metaphorically, it represents counting the cost, evaluating our spiritual progress and priorities. In Psalm 90, Moses reckons the average lifespan to be 70 years. Subtracting the 20 years of youth, we have a remaining 50 years—a time to thoughtfully measure our days, redeeming and prioritizing our time properly in order to gain a godly heart of wisdom.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Presumption and Divine Justice \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Over the past few generations, orthodoxy in virtually every aspect of life has been discarded, indicating how perverse human nature is in its determination to rebel against God. Whether it is adding uncommanded holidays to Christian worship or changing the day of rest, men presume to alter God's instructions. John Ritenbaugh uses several real-life examples to illustrate human presumption, a tendency we all share - and one God takes a severe stance against.

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