

Be There Next Year!

Stirring Up God's Gift

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 28-Oct-00; Sermon #472

Right now our spiritual batteries should be all charged up from the afterglow of a very fine Feast of Tabernacles. I personally feel that it was the most enjoyable Feast of Tabernacles I have ever experienced in forty-one years of keeping them.

How the Feast impacts on one is pretty much in the eye of a beholder. Two people can go through the same experience, the same events, and it is possible that one judges them to be a disaster, and the other a positive and very rewarding experience. I purposely used the word "enjoyable," because whether the Feast will prove to be the most profitable depends to a very great extent upon two factors.

Today we are not basking in the environment of the Feast. We are not enjoying the fellowship of like-minded people virtually everywhere we turn. We do not have the sense of freedom, of peace, structure, and purpose that comes from observing God's festival. We have experienced a small foretaste of what the world *could*—and eventually *will*—be like when cooperation toward the same God-ordained goal is the driving force in the life of virtually everyone on earth.

It did not take us very long once we returned from the Feast to be reminded of the reality that the world is still out there. It is not hard at all for human nature to be drawn into a depression following a fairly sustained period of a high. In spite of what we just experienced, everywhere one looks there is a potentially very stressful burdensome form of conflict, not cooperation, that must be overcome, or at the very least endured.

There is conflict within us generated by the resistance of the flesh and the mind against the divine nature. There is all this conflict going on in a world generated in the economic, political, and military realms. It is the Republicans against the Democrats, the liberal against the conservative, Bush against Gore, Israel and the Arabs, dollar versus the euro, this product against that product, one team against another, the people against the school board, and government against the corporation. We live in a wearying conflict-filled world that reflects the mind of the Adversary who is against everything God stands for.

This entire package of conflict, and much more besides, works to create a resistance—a resistance toward and a distraction *from* the way that we want to go, the way that we have been taught. It is no wonder that Paul, in II Timothy 2, said that "we must endure

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

hardship as a good soldier," and why Jesus said in Matthew 24, "he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved."

Somehow we always manage to lose a few people along the way to the next Feast. Now will this Feast prove to be a springboard for further growth so that it goes a long way toward ensuring that you will not be among those that are lost on the way to the next Feast? The question right now is: "Will **you** be back next year?"

We must understand that we are not invulnerable to the same sort of attitudes and conduct that the Israelites and the apostles exhibited in times past. What kinds of trials await *you* in 2001? Do not take this lightly. We are going to begin this sermon by looking at an example drawn from the apostles.

John 20:26-31 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then said he to Thomas, Reach hither your finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither your hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God. Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name.

John 21:1-4 After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter said unto them, I go a fishing. They said unto him, We also go with you. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately: and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

It is very easy for one to look back on the Israelites in the wilderness and wonder, "How could they ever do such a thing as to turn aside after witnessing all of the plagues, seeing the Red Sea divided, hearing the voice of God at Mount Sinai, eating the manna, and drinking water that came gushing out of solid rock?"

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Perhaps even more astounding is that the apostles, despite the resounding, the wonder, and the stimulation of the resurrection, of seeing One alive who had been dead—and they knew it, and they knew that they knew, and undoubtedly had deeply-felt worshipful attitudes—a short time later headed right back to the world, right back to the same routines. Why did they do this? They did not do it in an attitude of rebellion, but once they were on their own, it was right back to the familiar ruts, the ones that they felt comfortable with.

We are not immune to the same sort of thinking and behavior, so do not take this lightly. If this could happen to the Israelites—and we know that it did—and even to the apostles, it can much more easily happen to us who have not experienced something as wondrous as a resurrection from the dead and beholding a Person who had been physical, and was now spiritual, and He could walk right through solid objects.

I think that before moving beyond this passage it is interesting to note from this very brief vignette that when they headed back to their old routines and began to become involved in them: 1) They did not readily recognize Christ, and 2) they did not have any success in what they were doing.

It is a reality that even visually spectacular emotional highs cannot be depended upon to carry one very far, because human nature is so deceptive and has such an insatiable appetite for some form of entertaining excitement, that upon reflection, it is discouraging. Also easily seen is that we can be very easily turned back into the old routines.

You are going to find that there is a rather direct connection between my Hebrews sermon that I gave on the Last Great Day and this message, because the theme of Hebrews is so pertinent to what we have been experiencing in the recent history of the church. There can be no doubt that God is our Savior, but that does not relieve us of certain responsibilities in this salvation process.

This next scripture is going to be central to the remainder of this message.

II Timothy 1:6-7 Wherefore I put you in remembrance that you stir up the gift of God which is in you by the putting on of my hands. For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

I think it good to remember that this series of books, commonly known as the Pastoral Epistles, (primarily I and II Timothy and Titus) was probably the last thing that the

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

apostle Paul wrote before he lost his head. These epistles contain information that is pertinent especially to the ministry, but it includes everybody within its teaching scope. These are the kind of things that were on Paul's mind just prior to his death, and so I think they might be the most important things maybe that Paul ever said to those who were mature in the faith, and things that we need to give a great deal of consideration to. These two verses are a major responsibility of ours to "stir up the gift of God which is in us by the laying on of hands, for God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

Whether or not we are going to grow, whether we are going to be there next year, depends to a very great extent on whether or not we follow through on the direction, on the instruction that Paul gives to us. Remember that nobody is going to force us to do what Paul admonishes us to do here, whether it be studying, praying, or otherwise striving to overcome our spiritual, moral, and ethical weaknesses. These are things *WE must do*. Nobody can do these things for us.

All of us tend to be leaners at times, depending upon somebody else to carry the ball. There is nothing wrong with this. None of us is gifted enough in all areas of life that we are always qualified to lead in every situation. But there are some things that everybody must do for himself, because it is impossible for others to do it for him.

If you are going to have a test in math, it does not do you any good at all if your buddy studies for you. That is such a simple illustration to help us understand there are some things we **must** do for ourselves. They simply cannot be done by anybody else.

You will recall the general theme of the Parable of the Virgins in Matthew 25. In the course of that parable the five foolish virgins asked the five wise ones to share their oil with them. Once one understands the symbolism of the oil, it enables us also to understand that the sharing of the oil is impossible. The *buying* of the oil through sacrifice and the expending of time, energy, and devotion to duty is something that each must do on his own. The admonition here in II Timothy 1:6-7 is similar. No one can stir up the gift that is in you, except you. Verse 7 makes it fairly clear that the *gift* is the *Holy Spirit*. I want to be sure that we thoroughly understand this.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

My study Bible has a comment on this verse. They changed the wording just a little bit

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

so that it will be more understandable to the readers. In a comment they changed that phrase—"the gift of the Holy Spirit"—to "the gift that IS the Holy Spirit." That makes it a little bit plainer.

If you look in *The Living Bible*, they translate this as: "the *gift*, the holy spirit." It makes it then very clear that Peter in Acts 2 and Paul in II Timothy are on the same page regarding what this "gift" is.

Let us go to I Timothy 4. This epistle was written to the same person as the second one. It was written to Timothy.

I Timothy 4:14-15 Neglect not the gift that is in you, which was given you by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give yourself wholly to them: that your profiting may appear to all.

This is a little bit earlier admonition to Timothy regarding an aspect of the same principle. In this case "gift" is used a bit more specifically than either Acts 2:38 or II Timothy 1:6, but this gift here in I Timothy 4:14 flows from exactly the same root.

The reason that Paul admonished Timothy regarding this gift is given earlier in the chapter. We are going to look at this just briefly. Why did Paul say, "Neglect not the gift that is in you"?

I Timothy 4:1-2 Now the Spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron.

He goes on to mention a couple specific doctrines, and then he admonishes Timothy the following:

I Timothy 4:6 If you put the brethren in remembrance of these things, you shall be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, where unto you have attained.

Verse 1 is the major reason why Paul said what he did in verse 14. Paul was warning

Timothy of defections that were going to come due to false teaching. It is interesting to compare *our* situation with this, and I think you will see that this is timely because there have been major, major defections from the church of God because of false doctrine.

Paul warned these people that this would occur. They were looking forward to it occurring, being warned that it was going to occur, and we are living through it as it is occurring. So Paul's advice to Timothy is the kind of counsel that I am giving you right now: *Neglect not the gift that is in you because this will protect you from defecting because of being seduced by false doctrine. We shall see this as we continue to go through what Paul means by neglect—what he means by "stir up the gift that is in you."*

The second reason that Paul said this is not contained within the context of I Timothy 4 as directly as the first one was, and that is that there is pretty good evidence of the Bible, other parts of Paul's writings, that Timothy was not as effectively meeting all of his responsibility as Paul thought he should have. We need to be warned because we are right smack dab in the middle of the first one. And *I* need to be warned that maybe I am not meeting my responsibilities as I should as a minister of God.

In like manner, maybe *you* are not meeting your responsibilities as you should as a part of the body of Jesus Christ. Within the framework, within the spirit of the principle, *all* of us get caught in it. The warning is given so that we might be prepared by stirring ourselves up to meet further challenges that are coming along down the road.

To this point in time in our life in the church, I would say that we—however it was done; however well or weakly it was done—are meeting the first challenge. We have rejected the false doctrine in favor of the truths that were given to us. We have not defected from the church of God. We have rejected the false ministers and the false doctrines, and so that is a "plus" that we need to be encouraged about, and to understand that we are not doing everything wrong to this point.

There are some things that we are doing right, but there is something that we have to get prepared for that is part of that second one. We know from other prophecies that the world is out there, and it is presenting challenges that we need to get prepared for because they are going to grow more intense as we go along. It is a different kind of challenge, and it is a formidable one when we look at the prophecies.

Apparently the first phrase of I Timothy 4:14 can be translated a number of different ways. One is: "Stop neglecting the gift that is in you." That translation makes the admonition much more imperative and gives one the sense that decay—degeneration—was already in progress. Remember, this is directly written to

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Timothy, and certainly gives the impression that he was deteriorating in his faithfulness to God and his faithfulness to his responsibilities.

A second alternative is: "Be sure to use the abilities God has given you." This is the one that appears in *The Living Bible*. That approach is more positive, but it still retains some sense of Timothy's growing carelessness and neglect, but it is not as hard as the other one. Apparently either one of them is correct. It just depends on which direction the translators want to take it.

The sense of neglect is further strengthened by the first phrase in I Timothy 4:13. Let us look at that one. It says in my *King James*: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Modern translators translate that: "You must continue to devote your attention." You can take that as saying that he was giving *some* devotion. On the other hand, depending upon how one looks at verse 14, that could mean that he had slipped again, and Paul means to restart the devotion to reading and so forth.

The second phrase in I Timothy 4:15, "wholly to them" ("Meditate upon these things; give yourself *wholly to them*"), can be translated: "Let **these** things be your constant care." I am putting the emphasis on the word "these" because of what is going to come a little bit later in the sermon.

That gives one the impression that Timothy was not continuously constant. Like most of us, there were times when he was really afire. There were other times that he was just coasting along. There were times, like all of us, he was allowing himself to be distracted into other things and not paying attention to his major responsibility, which is something that he should have been devoted to all the time.

It is interesting that it is in this chapter preceding verse 13 that Paul mentions "bodily exercise profits for a little while." Is it possible that Timothy had gotten off on the Greek kick of really taking care of his body in such a way that it had become an obsession with him? I do not know, but the fact that it is there is kind of interesting, that his attention had gotten possibly over into another area. But all these things put together give the impression that Timothy had been distracted from his responsibility.

Underlying all of this is a truth that is fundamental to our calling and to our relationship with God, and that is: God is faithful. Hang onto that. **God is faithful**. He is not always overlooking the development of His children in His image. This is where the faithful part comes in really strong. He is always there. He enables those He chooses to work in and through to do the responsibility He gives them. That has very interesting ramifications. God is **always** faithful. He always gives anybody that He chooses to work in and

through (that includes you and me), whatever they need to do the job.

This word "neglect" in verse 14 is exactly the same word that appears in Hebrews 2:3 where the author says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" That phrase encapsulates the Hebrews' problem and why the letter was written. Those people had gotten into an attitude of neglect because—as I surmise, and I think it is correct—they had been distracted by the problems, the stresses, the pressures of the cares of this life, living this way of life within the framework of the culture that they found themselves in.

It was not that they were being openly persecuted, but simply because of living in this world and all of the conflicts that were going on within these people. The pressures that were coming against them, taking care of their lives, and trying to live this way, were wearing them down. They had become weary in well doing.

These people, the Hebrews, as I mentioned in the sermon on the Last Great Day, were not out committing horrendous sins, but rather they were wasting away spiritually through neglect. The result was clearly stated in Hebrews 5:11-14 that they were losing their discernment of truth. Of course with it was the distinction between right and wrong. The distinction between good and evil was passing out of their minds through neglect.

They undoubtedly felt somewhat battered by the cares of life, and had become weary in well doing. So what the author did throughout the book of Hebrews was to reiterate the tremendous advantages that God had poured into their lives as a result of choosing them to be able to understand and make use of the gospel. But the author could not live their lives for them. That was something that they had to do. He could encourage. He could exhort. He could tell them truths, but they had to live it. It was only they who could do it. That is why there is so much in the book of Hebrews about faith.

The Israelites died in the wilderness because what they heard was not mixed with faith. They really did not believe it. They never put it to use, and so they died. Consider this in light of II Timothy 1:6-7. They never stirred themselves to use what they had, and nobody can do that but the individual. On the other hand, the author, whoever it was—and I personally believe it was Paul—showed in that book that it was using faith that enabled Abel to do what he did, and Noah to do what he did, and Abraham and Sarah, and Moses, and many others to do what they did, and to succeed in God's way of life.

Let us go back to II Timothy 1:6-7 again. We can see, because of I Timothy 4:13-15, that this is a second exhortation from Paul to Timothy, because the flame of Timothy's

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

gift, his charisma, was burning low. Like all of us, Timothy had his problems he had to deal with, and overcome. Other places in God's Word reveal Timothy had health problems. It was Timothy whom Paul told to "drink a little wine for your stomach's sake, and your often infirmities." Timothy was apparently kind of a sickly person.

The Bible shows that Timothy was a naturally timid person, given to fearfulness.

He was disrespected by the people in the congregation because he was a young man.

He had very strong enemies of the church in the area of the church he pastored, which was Ephesus—one of the major congregations in all of Christianity, outside of Jerusalem. But there were major enemies in Ephesus who were very determined.

There were some believers there who were being persecuted by the state.

That was a very heavy load to carry for someone so young and in such a responsible position.

But never forget that God knew, and God is faithful. God had faithfully enabled Timothy to **carry** that responsibility. Now as He had done for Timothy, He has also done exactly the same thing for us regardless of our part in the body of Jesus Christ. He does not give all the same measure of gift, but He always, faithfully, fairly, gives everybody—every single person—enough to do what God expects them to do. Not a single one of us has ever been short-changed by God in regard to His favor, in regard to His gifts. But you see, like Timothy, we too can allow our burdens to gradually overwhelm us and become neglectful of our spiritual responsibility.

We are going to turn to I Thessalonians 5. I Thessalonians is probably the first epistle Paul ever wrote. Kind of interesting. We have a first, and probably the last.

I Thessalonians 5:19 Quench not the Spirit.

This directly ties to I Timothy 5:14 and II Timothy 1:6-7. Here it tells us to "Quench not the Spirit," or "quench not the gift that is in you." *Quench* literally means "to put a fire out," but here it is being used in the sense of stifle, to suppress, to smother, or in some way hinder the progress of, or be contrary to. Neglect undoubtedly hinders the progress, and is contrary to the Spirit. The Spirit of God must be used.

It would be helpful here if we understand an application of *spirit*. You might recall that I

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

gave a series of sermons on spirit. In that series I commented that it is used quite a number of ways in the Bible. I do not remember exactly, but I think it is used eight different ways in the Bible, the most common of which are wind, breath, the power of God, attitude, and the Word of God. But all of the usages carry with them the sense of something that is invisible and/or immaterial. Sometimes it is one or the other. For instance wind and air are invisible, but they are not immaterial. In that case, though it is invisible, it is not both.

Sometimes "spirit" means something that is both invisible and immaterial. I want to use spirit in the sense of words. This is legitimate. I want to use it this way to help us better understand II Timothy 1:6-7. "Stir up the gift (the spirit) that is in you."

Turn to John 6:63. I want you to understand that I am taking this right out of the Word of God. We just used this scripture the other day in one of my previous sermons.

John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickens [or makes alive]; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

Words are the devices that we use to communicate. They are symbols of things and concepts. There is a great deal of power in words, because they motivate us to do, or to not do. Words enable us to envision. Words are the very substance of faith. They are absolutely essential to the power of thinking. But in the mind, words are immaterial **and** invisible.

In your mind there is literally nothing there but thought. It is by stirring them up—words, spirit—that envision belief, and therefore activity is created to either do or to stop doing something. Faith, according to Romans 10:17, comes by hearing God's Word. There is nothing there except thought.

Paul, in a broad sense, is admonishing us there in II Timothy to put our faith to use, to not let it lie dormant, thus smothering it by doing nothing, because "faith without works is dead."

Hebrews 5:13 For every one that uses milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

What is "milk" in this context? It is a message. It is words. It is words that are suitable for those who are very young in the faith, who are immature in the faith. It is belief that is

very weak.

Hebrews 5:14 But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

What is strong meat? It is a strong, powerful message. It is words that are arranged in a certain way that have very powerful meaning to the mind of those who are mature. Strong meat is a message. It is words. It is spirit able to be used, because those receiving it are practiced and trained by previous use of other words.

There is yet another angle to help us understand what Paul means by "stir up the gift of God which is in you," and it lies in the word translated *sound mind* in II Timothy 1:7. This is the only place in the entire Bible where this particular word appears. The *New Testament Commentary*, edited by Hendrickson and Kistemaker, says that this word is better translated "self-discipline." I think this is really interesting. "The gift of God is not the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of self-discipline."

The *New International Version* translates it as such. If you have a *New International Version* at home, look in it and you will see that this word is translated "self-discipline."

The *Lamsa Bible* translates it as "good discipline," which is essentially the same thing, because something that is sound is also good. That is what it means. It is sound. It is good. *Vines Dictionary of the Bible* and *Zodhiates* agree. Even *Strong's Concordance* does. The word means "self-discipline."

Hendrickson and Kistemaker say that the suffix that is added to the root word changes the root from a mere state or position of the mind to a mind actively involved in disciplining or controlling itself to move in a certain direction. In this case it is controlling itself to move within the parameters of the gift, or the spirit.

Let us tie some things together here. John 17:17 tells us that God's Word is truth. John 6:63 tells us that God's words are spirit. I Thessalonians 5:19 admonishes us not to quench, stifle, or smother the spirit, to not put out its fire.

When we examine the context in I Thessalonians 5, where that admonishment appears, what does it tell us not to stifle? What does it tell you not to smother? It tells you: Do not stifle rejoicing. Do not smother prayer. Do not stifle thanksgiving. Do not stifle the continual hearing of God's Word, that we should test teaching against God's Word, and

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

accept that which agrees with it, and that we should carefully avoid every form of evil. We are finding out the parameters of spirit.

Adam Clarke had an excellent comment on this verse. He said: "The spirit is represented as being quenched when any act is done, any word spoken, or temper indulged, contrary to its dictates; i.e., contrary to the word of God, because that's what the spirit is. It is the word of God." The spirit of God is love. That is what it says [II Timothy 1]. Therefore, what would be contrary to love? How about a spirit of anger, malice, or revenge? Any unkind or unholy temper is to quench the divine nature. The opposite hand of that is to **stir up** those things which are in agreement with the truth, with the word, with the Spirit of God.

The apostle John tells us to "love not the world, neither the things in the world." This "love of the world," which is something a Laodicean is infected with, is contrary to the spirit. "Love of the world" will just as effectively quench the spirit as the practice of any ordinary act of transgression. It will stifle the Spirit of God. It will smother the Spirit of God right out. So will neglect and carelessness.

Connect this to Paul's admonition again to Timothy in I Timothy 4:13-16. He tells Timothy, "Be not careless in regard to the public reading of the Scripture, to exhorting against error in doctrine and morals, exhorting and teaching," because teaching does make a difference to what one believes. For Timothy to neglect or to grow careless in following through these things would be to go contrary to his responsibilities, and thus to quench the Spirit—the gift that was within him.

All of these together are gathered together in the general admonition that is given there in II Timothy 1:6-7. To "stir up the gift that is in you" does not mean that one should live on the edge of continual emotional gun-lap excitement. It means to control ourselves, to discipline ourselves to follow through by means of faith to carry out the teaching given us by means of God's Spirit.

Without directly saying, Paul is admonishing us there in II Timothy 1:6-7 to give evidence through works that we believe what we say with our mouth that we believe.

Turn to Hebrews 3. Remember, this was written to a group of people who were fading away because of neglect. The neglect was produced by subtly giving in, slowly and gradually giving in to the cares of the world, of meeting all the conflicts of living this way in a society which was very much against this way.

Hebrews 3:12-13 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

That is exactly what was occurring, and it was occurring because they were neglecting their responsibility. They did not **will** to do it. It just happened. They did not say to themselves, "I'm going to rebel against God." They simply were fading away in their obedience to God because their faith was undergoing subtle changes little by little. The belief was fading into the background.

I am concerned about this because when God permitted Satan to blow the church apart, he did it by changing the teaching. When you change the teaching, faith changes in those that believe the change. Unbelief caused people to drop out of the church, and it is **still** occurring.

Hebrews 3:18-19 And to whom swear he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter into the land because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

There are some things that cannot be done by others. They must be done by us individually. Faith cannot be transferred from one person to another. The Spirit of God cannot be transferred from one person to another.

Hebrews 4:6 Seeing therefore it remains that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:11 Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

One of the critical elements for us here is to understand the way the Bible approaches

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

"belief and obedience" and "unbelief and disobedience." Simply put, it is this: If your Bible has a marginal reference, and you look at those words "belief" and "unbelief," you will find that the translators have interchanged the words. In other words, what they picked up from the *intent* of Paul's writing here is that, as far as God is concerned, there is no difference between *unbelief* and disobedience, *believing* and obedience. How can that be? If a person really believes, he is convicted, and he **will** obey. That is, works **will be produced** in those that believe.

On the contrary, a person may say he believes, but does not obey, and a work that is in agreement with God's Spirit is not produced. That kind of person merely has a preference, and is in reality disobedient regardless of saying what he believes.

Hebrews 10:37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

We are much closer to that now than when this was written to those people way back there in the first century.

Hebrews 10:38-39 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Those that "believe not" will not obey. That is what Hebrews 3 and 4 are teaching us. But those who believe, those who have faith, **will** obey. So this was the Hebrews' problem. They were not living by what they said they believed, and through neglect they were losing the discernment between right and wrong, good and evil.

If we want to make sure we do not fall away, we must put our faith to work. That is what Paul is saying there in II Timothy 1:6-7. He is saying that we must step out in trust, giving evidence that God indeed is in us.

Turn to Amos 5:21, where Amos is quoting God in the first person:

Amos 5:21-24 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take you away from me the noise of your songs; for I will not hear the melody of your viols. But let judgment [justice] run down as waters,

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and righteousness as a mighty stream.

Do you know what God is charging Israel with? He is saying here that Israel went to the Feast, that they enjoyed themselves immensely. They made the offerings. They sang to their hearts' content, and they fellowshiped with one another. But when they returned home, nothing changed. They went about their lives and social responsibility unchanged.

I am going to read Amos 5:21 out of *The Living Bible* where they have taken the liberty of paraphrasing and putting what they feel is the intent of what Amos wrote here. Listen to this. It is powerful.

Amos 5:21-24 (TLB) I hate your show and pretense, your hypocrisy of honoring Me with your religious feasts and solemn assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offerings and thank offerings. I will not look at your offerings of peace. Away with your hymns of praise. They are noise to My ears. I will not listen to your music no matter how lovely it is. I want to see a mighty flood of justice, a torrent of doing good.

I am not saying that our Feast was this way. I am saying that this could be directed to us *if* we do not follow Paul's advice. From the lift, the encouragement, the inspiration that we received at the Feast, we must use this as a springboard for growth, of change, of yielding to God, of giving Him evidence that indeed we have the Spirit of God, the evidence being that we **move** to use our faith and produce the works that we are being created in Christ Jesus for a torrent of good works.

If we continue to take action on what we say that we believe because we are convicted of God's truth, and because we repent where necessary because we see that we are wrong in what we have formerly practiced, that will ensure that we will be back next year, and we will be more mature than we ever were this year.

There is nothing difficult about understanding this principle in II Timothy 1 to "stir up the spirit," which is simply to follow through with what we say that we believe. If we have not been praying regularly, but believe that we should, we need to repent. We need to discipline ourselves, sacrificing time that we would ordinarily prefer to give to something less important, but nonetheless do it.

The same holds true with studying, learning to be kind, merciful, patient, hospitable,

Be There Next Year! by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

forgiving, overindulging in food or drink, wasting time reading trashy novels, wasting time watching intellectually stunting television and movies, spending valuable time perusing gossipy chat rooms on the Internet. I was amazed to find out that the Internet is filled with all kinds of trashy information. I found it incredulous to learn there are fifteen thousand web sites devoted just to sports, and around fifty thousand web sites devoted to pornography. Entertainment is America's god.

Some of us need to be more conscientious about tithing. I am thinking here of the festival tithe. You have been **very** faithful regarding the first tithe, and that is wonderful, but the festival is just as much a part of the tithing law as the first tithe.

Just to give you some sort of an idea of how things are in the church in general these days, we helped some people to get to the festival in Jefferson City. They took the money and ran. Others that we helped told us they had a certain amount set aside for the Feast. They went to the Feast, and then after arriving told us they spent the money on something else, and we had to bail them out in order protect God's name.

The main thing that I want us to derive from this sermon is that I do not want us to fall into the trap the Hebrews did through neglect of so great salvation. I want us to stir up the gift that is in us, to discipline ourselves, to diligently exercise our faith, and to repent, thus following through to carry out our responsibility.

What I have given us here is not an exotic magic bullet, but it is extremely practical, and if we do so, we surely will be there next year.