**Presentation Transcript**

**Keeping Up With the Times**

**By Bill Jacobs**

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Our title today is *Keeping Up With the Times*.

Let’s start with this question: Is the church supposed to keep up with the times? Well, here’s a good place to answer that question. It’s in Jude :3. Jude said:

**Jude :3 –** *Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*

Oh! The implication here is that the faith – that is, the body of beliefs that Jesus brought us and which was practiced by the apostles, who knew and were taught by Jesus – never needed updating. So, how could that be? Doesn’t everything need updating? Well, let’s look in Mark 13:31. This is an anomalous situation. Jesus said:

**Mark 13:31 –** *Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*

So, Jesus was not a normal person. While He was a man, He was also God, and He was speaking to us for the Father. The things that He said will *never* need updating. That are eternally true and correct. And they’re correct for all time. Consequently, all we have to do to be up to date, when it comes to the faith – that is, our beliefs and our practice – is to follow the example laid down for us in the New Testament church by Jesus, by the ones He taught – the apostles – and by the church that was taught by them. No way to improve on it. To try to change the faith and practice, in hope of making it better, is a fool’s errand.

But what about everything else related to the church? Should we all wear robes like they did, or ride donkeys to church? Of course not. So, let’s talk about why that’s true and what’s going on with this.

How do we think about social and technological issues, so that we can stay on the straight and narrow path, and still function effectively as God’s instruments to call others? Can we think ahead? Are we allowed to do that? Well, look with me at something they did in the New Testament church. It’s an example of what we need to keep up with. Let’s look in Acts 4:32. It says:

**Acts 4:32 –** *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.*

So, are we supposed to do this – live like we’re in a commune? Does that conflict with the idea that, in God’s earthly kingdom, the prophets tell us every person is going to sit under his own fig tree? Let’s look at the context of this verse. What was going on? Why were they doing that – pooling all their resources?

We see that Peter and John were before the Jewish Council because they’d healed a man, and because they were teaching the resurrection of Jesus. So, we can pick that up in chapter 4, verse 8.

**V-8-12 –** *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders –* He’s quoting an Old Testament scripture here that they were familiar with – *which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

So, that’s that pretty brave, pretty straight-forward, pretty unvarnished truth. And after he said that, the Council – the same people who had urged the Romans to crucify Jesus – conferred privately, and they realized they were between a rock and hard place. If they let Peter and John keep preaching, many would follow them, and that would diminish their own power. Yet, the miracles the apostles did they discounted as proof of the authority of God that had been conferred on them. So, they could not do that either for fear of the people. So, the only that mattered to them was control. No, the fact of whether this was true or not was just dismissed out of hand. No thought was given to facing the truth – what all those miracles meant. And the passage says that these Council members threatened them some more and then begrudgingly let them go.

When Peter got back with John to the group, they prayed. In Peter’s prayer, he rehearsed what had happened historically, and then he made this statement in verse 29:

**V-29-32 –** *And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.*

A few verses down, it says that

**V-36-37 –** *Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement)…sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

So, why was this happening? Well, they were under strong persecution. It was dangerous to be a Christian. Jesus had just been killed. Others had been threatened. Some had been imprisoned. Paul was on the loose at that time – or starting to be. When you’re blacklisted, it’s hard to find work, perhaps. So, because of that distress they were under – because of that persecution – they banded together, pooled their resources, prayed, sang, fellowshipped, gathered close, shared what they had. This only made sense.

I was reading what would happen if we lost water, electrical power and heating for three months in any community across our country. Well, everything would stop on a dime. You’d soon run out of gas. And there’d be no place to keep things cold, so food would spoil. Police would have a hard time getting around to protect everybody. The thought was that people would need to band together in neighborhoods to share and barter what they had. People in like situations do better when they function as one. And that’s what the Church of God was doing under that stressful situation.

So, under normal times, everybody could take care of themselves, and that’s what they did. Later, we see that Paul got a job as a tentmaker while he was on one of his trips, so that he wouldn’t have to be taken care of by members of a commune, because it wasn’t a commune. Everybody had their own job and their own house and lived much like we do today. So, we can see that the *all thing in common* situation was just that. It was a situation.

So, to counter social and political cultures – dangers to the faith – it’s okay to do that. That’s part of the faith. We can see that all the people back then still believed the same thing they’d always believed because they flexed in matters of survival physically, socially and spiritually. Now, we’re going to come back to that later. But, looking ahead, let’s look Matthew 5:11. It says:

**Matthew 5:11-12 –** *Blessed are you –* Jesus says this – *blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* “You’re in good company,” He tells us.

So, we have lived in a Christian nation for several hundred years, but that is no longer the case. Research shows that the majority of people in this country do not believe in God – and not just the Christian God, but any kind of god. They’re atheists. They believe that, once they die, that’s it for them. And they’re on their own, so to speak. This is important, because the nation runs on the inclinations of the majority. We can all vote, but even if we still live in a Christian nation, think about the pilgrims. They lived in a Christian nation, too, but they were persecuted so much, they left. All through the history of Europe, Christians persecuted minority Christian groups.

So, the point of all that is this: Persecution, down through the ages, has *always* been a part of Christian life. We haven’t experienced it in the United States because our experience has been a historical anomaly. It has taken the devil quite a while to break down what God, by the founding fathers, created in this country – freedom to worship God.

So, what would that persecution look like here? Well, it’s already started with social media discrimination on some of our doctrinal issues – like abortion, or like marriage, and like gender identity. In the Bible, a man is supposed to be a man, and a woman is supposed to be a woman. That’s the plan of God. That’s not what’s going on right now in our country for some people. I read some time ago that the US government, supported by the President of the United States, was considering – not the current president, by the way – was considering removing the tax exemption on donations to churches. Another example is the popularity of abortion to consider – and how many people are pro that? That’s contrary to God.

So, what are the areas of change that we might need to think about as people become less and less interested in becoming Christians – and voting that way. I’m not saying we need to do anything different yet. I’m not an alarmist. I don’t see too many people that think that God is coming tomorrow. That’s just not what’s happening at all. The signs aren’t there yet. But I *am* saying, whenever it becomes necessary to make changes in the way we live our lives, so that we can continue to worship God, we should not be caught by surprise with no idea of what to do to maintain our faith – with no plan. So, we’re just talking here today – not making a plan for action yet, but thinking about it. I consider this message to be my effort to raise awareness of what could happen in the future.

I had a young woman – client – not too long ago, who was Christian and conservative. She was out of college and working for a large company. She told me that she had to be clever to navigate all the woke agenda put out by her company – you know, courses in political correctness, gender, and racism, and all of that. She felt that all of that was anti-biblical. And I could agree that most of it is. I remember that, at the end of her explanation to me, she sighed in frustration and despair. She didn’t know what to do. It’s already here – not as bad as it can get, but it’s starting up.

The woke agenda seems to be about elimination racism and poverty and gender bias and other genuine evils in our society, but we can tell by the way they’re going about it that it’s not God’s way. God’s way of dealing with these social issues is to make it the responsibility of *every* person to treat others as they would be treated. For it to work, it has to be free choice, rather than social or financial bullying. That ball has been dropped by the churches. However, that leaves an opening for great wrongs to be done in our nation. The woke approach to this issue is to punish and bully everyone into surrendering their will to their agenda, as applied by big education and big business, big government and big media, to the point that the true believers become the oppressors – insensitive, prejudiced, and consequently guilty of the very wrongs they profess to eschew.

So, this very approach was used in Russia, starting about 1923. It’s *not* new! But with the Russian revolt – that Communist revolt was supported by large numbers of young people who saw the evils of the current czarist regime – they were dissatisfied and upset by it, because of the evils in it. But because the Communist approach was also not God-based, it ended up being one of the most horrific, evil, murderous governments that has ever existed – way worse than czarist Russia.

Today, political correctness is one tool that they use. Education is another. They push the woke agenda through the universities and the media. But it’s much more insidious than that. I heard of a man, whose daughter graduated from – I don’t remember which school. I think it might have been Harvard – but he asked her if she could name the first three presidents of the United States. She knew that George Washington was first, but could not remember the other two. When asked, all she knew about George Washington was that he was the first president and that he was a slave owner. Can you imagine that? Educated at one of the best universities in our country! And she didn’t even know that George Washington was offered kingship in this country and he refused it because he because he believed in freedom.

You know, even from my part, I’ve encountered college-educated people who had never heard of Karl Marx. Can you believe that? Now, here’s my disclaimer. I’m not a conservative or a liberal. I’m not a Republican or a Democrat. I’m a Christian. And while I hold US citizenship, I am, to quote the apostle Paul, a citizen of another country, which is the Kingdom of God. And that government does not set conservatism against liberalism. It sets good against evil wherever, and in whatever, forms it takes. We’re not talking about human politics here. We’re talking about what is right from God and what is evil from the devil. Both of those are clearly defined in the Bible. And the ability to discern the difference is called spiritual maturity by the apostle Paul in Hebrews 5. God does not have any agendas that include a mix of good and evil. I heard that there are lots of senators and congressmen who are willing to do a little evil for a greater good. God doesn’t operate that way. He’s *all* good, as we say.

So, it’s possible to go to the Internet, see huge resistance from the conservative elements against the woke agenda – and even a lot of the liberals – you can think about Bill Maher, who is a comedian and now has a talk show – he’s against the woke stuff, even though he’s a traditional liberal. It seems like there’s a strong backlash to the woke agenda, if you read, or look at, or listen to the conservative pundits on the Internet. However, the woke crowd has the young people already, through education – public education and college education. They have financial control through the government and government surveillance, increasingly. And they have the media that lies to us from both sides and poisons our minds. And they have big business that oppresses employees with false doctrine and persecutes them – sometimes even fires them for not following that agenda. They have political correctness that makes it hard to function socially, except in an ever decreasingly smaller circle.

I mention all this to point out that, if there is no rock-solid resistance to the direction we’re being led, it will become much harder to be a Christian, harder to hold jobs, harder to get educated, harder to own property and harder to fellowship. It seems to me, personally, that we’ve already lost that battle – not that the signs are all out there, but it seems to me it’s headed that direction and there’s a lot of power behind it that’s not immediately apparent. But, even if I’m wrong about this, it’s still good to know what’s going on and be ready for it – if it is to descend further upon us.

Now, there’s one more area I want to mention before talking about what Christians can do. And that is technology. Technology is a two-edged sword. For years, I have been helping members of our church over the Internet with personal issues. And most Sabbaths, Elaine and I watch the Church of God congregation in Cincinnati – in their Sabbath services – listen to their sermons. Common Faith Network also sponsors a doctrinal study program called Common Faith Academy. It’s Web-based. It’s available to anybody. It’s a tremendous benefit. We have held online Passover service for people who are isolated and can’t meet with others. And that’s a great benefit to people. At least, that’s what they tell me. So, this last Pentecost, I got to preach to a brand new independent Church of God congregation – attendees in the congregation itself, and other people that found out about it from other places wanted to participate. We covered four time zones. So, all these amazing efforts involve technology. Technology is helping us as a scattered population, and also to be educated about our ways, and to work together as a team – even though scattered.

So, that’s one head of the technology beast. It’s helpful. There are benefits. But there is also a second edge to that sword – another head to the beast. Web and Web-connected computer tools offer, essentially, no confidentiality, which is mostly just a nuisance right now. Large companies, like Google, Apple, Amazon, big banks, the Internet providers, like Comcast, they swap information. They sell it back and forth so they can market us. But, in doing that, they also know where we go, now we get there, what we buy, what we watch on the Web, who we talk to, what we say – text, email and phone calls – who we talk to on the phone. They also have all the pictures we take. They know what banks we use, how much money we have, the bank account numbers. They know the cars that we drive. They know our Social Security numbers, our drivers’ license numbers, our bank account numbers. Franklin Roosevelt told my parents that our Social Security numbers would never be used for anything but our Social Security. And, in his day, that was a good line to put out. But now, we all know about hackers, bank problems, the FBI, CIA, and NSA. And we have traded almost all of our confidentiality for perceived convenience. To justify that intrusion, we say we don’t care if they know. But what if we *did* care. What if we can lose our jobs because we watched an online church service? That is happening in China right now. Technologically, it’s quite possible to do that.

In China, right now, the government doesn’t even need to see your face on a camera to ID you. They can tell who you are by the way you walk. And we say, “Well, that could never happen here, Bill. You’re just…that’s so political. Why are you even talking about politics in a church presentation? Just tell us instead about how God loves us. Encourage us.” Well, the problem is not about loving us. It’s about whether we will be allowed to express love to Him.

Now, remember, I said we’re only talking about readiness. It’s not that bad yet. We don’t know when it’s going to get that bad, but we *do* know, according to the Bible, that it *will* get that bad – way worse, in fact. We know that many Christians are going to be murdered by their government. And we know that people, unless they have the approval of the government, will *not* be allowed to buy or sell, don’t we?

So, what can we do about that? Did you know that there’s a biblical plan laid down in the Bible for that? It was laid down in the first century by the apostle Paul in Hebrews 10:23. Paul says:

**Hebrews 10:23-25 –** *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for He is faithful who promised), and let us consider one another to provoke to love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

So, let’s break that down a bit. We’re supposed to *hold fast*, not just to our hope, but to *the confession* of it – putting it into words – *without wavering*, and under great duress to continue to think about it, and *consider each other*, and to *encourage* one another, even when things are really hard.

So, how would we do that, if using our phones would give us away? Well, we would have to meet in person, wouldn’t we? What if the place where we meet has camera around it? It says, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,” so how could get away with that? Well, we might have to meet in our homes, like they did in the first century. Just have company over. So, what would we do there? Well, we would encourage each other, like Paul tells us. We would talk about the difficulties we have, and how God ushers us around and through them. We would tell faith stories of those who stood up for God’s truth and way over time – past and present. We would play music. We would sing hymns. We would teach our children true history about George Washington and everyone else. We would study the Bible together. We would know that every person of God, by the Holy Spirit, contains the entire church within him or herself. And we would know that they would have to get *all* of us to stop the church. And we would also know that they will never get all of us. God’s church has *always* been small, persecuted and scattered. And yet, it still remains to this very day – and will remain forever. God promises us that.

Today, in the most repressed, surveilled, restrictive and dangerous nation in history, there is right now some Chinese people who are Christians, who keep the Sabbath. And they are doing so well that they are exporting literature to other Chinese people in our nation and many others. That is a fantastic thing to think about. They’re already where I’m talking about. They’re persecuted for being Christians. You go to prison for being a Christian in some cases in China. So, God be praised. He gets the glory. He loves His people wherever they are and He will uphold all of us in hard times.

All these difficulties, by the way, are not a trap God has laid for us. Some people think about it that way. They think, if it isn’t easy, that that’s God punishing us. That’s *not* what’s happening. He’s *not* out to get us. *Fear not!* These situations I’m talking about – that are already present in some nations and are headed our way, I believe – are situations designed to increase our faith and love for Him.

We can also meditate on this truth: The kind of social Christianity we see in the United States today, with its high volume of good talk and low volume, of good action, isn’t going to cut it when times get tough. Falling away will take place at an incredible rate. How do I know that? Well, it tells us that in the Bible. And that’s because we won’t be ready for it.

So, the kind of Christianity that *will* cut it is the kind that is made up of Christians who *believe* in all situations – easy and hard – who *know* they need God to survive and therefore draw close to Him in relationship, obedience and commitment. What is God’s counsel to us in these times? It’s in Isaiah 55:6.

**Isaiah 55:6 –** *Seek Jehovah while He may be found; call on Him while He is near.*

So, we started today with that question: Does God’s church need updating? Well, if there’s any updating that needs to take place, it’s not with our doctrines, but with our fervency, our renewal and our revival. It’s an attitudinal correction that needs to take place. And we already saw that Paul said it: *so much the more as you see the Day approaching*.

By the way, as we close, I just want to thank everybody that contributes to our work here. It’s an amazing thing that’s occurring. It has for many years. We really appreciate everybody’s support. Your donations and your prayers enable us to continue on. We’ve been doing this since 2004 – so, nineteen years. It’s hard to believe. So, thank you all very much.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.