

Preaching the Gospel

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Introduction	7
BOOK ONE - THE GOSPEL	
Chapter 1 - The United States and Britain in Prophecy	19
Why this Subject Is Important	19
Proving that God Exists	21
Promises Made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	24
Promises Passed on to the Sons of Joseph	26
The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah	28
"Seven Times" Punishment for Sins	30
The Dynasty of King David	31
God's 7,000 Year Plan -- Are We in the Last Days?	36
Historic Fulfillment	40
How I Researched these Truths	43
What About the New Testament?	46
Evolution versus the Creation Account in Genesis	49
Could the Days in Genesis Be Figurative and Not Literal?	60
Our Attitude and Approach Towards God's Word	63
How to Understand the Bible	67
Summary	69
Chapter 2 - What Is the True Gospel?	71
Introduction	71
The Weekly Sabbath Day	73
The Annual Holy Days and the Plan of God	85
Passover -- the Sacrifice of Christ	85
The Days of Unleavened Bread -- Repentance	88
Pentecost - the Gift of the Holy Spirit	92
The Day of Trumpets - the Second Coming of Christ	96
The Day of Atonement - the Putting Away of Satan	107
The Feast of Tabernacles - the Millennial Rule of Christ	112
The Last Great Day - the White Throne Judgment	115
Traditional Christian Holidays	119
Using Images in Worship	120
God's Purpose for Mankind	124
The Holy Spirit	132
Clean and Unclean Foods	137
The Gospel of the Kingdom of God	138
Chapter 3 - The Ezekiel Warning	149
Introduction	149

The Great Tribulation	149
The Blessings and Curses	151
The Responsibility of a Watchman	155
The Ezekiel Warning	157

BOOK TWO - THE WHY AND HOW OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Chapter 4 - Why Preach the Gospel?

A Lesson from the Holocaust:

Does Suffering, without Truth, Lead to Repentance?	167
Introduction	167
The Effect of the Holocaust	169
My Comments and Conclusion	179
The Two Witnesses and God's Fairness	182
The Church	185
Why the Gospel Must Still Be Preached to the World	187
Famine of the Word	190
Finishing the Work	191
Final Summary	193

Chapter 5 - Should the Church Feed the Flock Only? 195

Introduction	195
A Brief History of the Scattering of the Church	198
Finding the Solution	201
Following the Chain of Events Backward	203
Finding the Root Cause of Laodiceanism -- False Doctrine?	207
Was Preaching the Gospel to the Public a Cause of Laodiceanism?	208
What About Tares?	210
Comparing Ourselves Among Ourselves	211
When and How to Judge	212
The Cause of the Church's Scattered Condition, and the Solution	219
Focusing on the Bible	221
How Could Trained and Experienced Ministers Be Deceived?	224
Will the Whole Church of God Reunite?	227
Will Focusing Exclusively on Feeding the Flock Heal the Church?	229
Is the Church Commissioned to Preach the Gospel to the World?	236
Government in the Church	247
Summary	257

Chapter 6 - Obtaining God's Help -- Practicing What We Preach. 259

Introduction	259
Practicing What We Preach	260
Significance of the Elijah Question	261
Changing Doctrine	266
A Lesson from the Autobiography	267
The Source of Our Beliefs	274
Faith	281
The Message to the Sardis Church	286

The Inconsistencies of Saying We Can't Change Herbert W. Armstrong's	
Doctrines	287
Does the Bible Teach Us to Follow Tradition?	293
God Speaks Through the Bible	296
Should Each Member Promote His Own Opinion?	299
Did Mr. Armstrong Point to Himself as the Authority for Belief?	302
Were Mr. Armstrong's Teachings Infallibly Correct at his Death?	304
The Eighteen Truths	305
A Possible Problem in the Church	310
Following the Bible -- Pattern of Government	313
Proving the Truth	316
Can We Make an Idol out of a Man or Church?	318
A Summary -- the Nineteenth Truth	322
Why Voting in the Church of God ALWAYS Leads to Division.	331
Conclusion	341
 Chapter 7 - Suggestions and Strategies	 343
Increasing the Audience and Effectiveness of TV Broadcasts	343
Card Holder Program	345
Suggestion for Preaching to the Jews	346
Church Government	347
How Is the Church Organized?	355
Final Push	357
Making Our Ways Pleasing to God - Overcoming Sin	
How to Obtain More of God's Help in Breaking Bad Habits	362
Conclusion	373
 Chapter 8 - Government in the Church of God	 375
Introduction	375
The Heart of the Issue.	376
Two Principles of Bible Study	378
Moses	380
Exodus 18 - Leaders in Israel under Moses	381
The Difference Between Voting and Polling	382
Joshua	383
Samuel	384
Israel Asks for a King	385
David	387
Solomon	390
Rehoboam, Jeroboam, and Jehu	391
Elijah and Elisha	393
John the Baptist	394
Jesus Christ	394
The Twelve Apostles	395
Usefulness of the King James Version	396
Peter	397
The Replacement of Judas	400
The Appointment of Deacons	402

Paul	403
Resolving a Controversy - Acts 15	405
"If Two of You Agree..."	407
Instruction Concerning Appointments in the New Testament .	408
Organization of the Church and Limitations on the Authority of the Ministry	409
Arguments and Answers	417
Other Problems with Using Balloting to Govern the Church of God	426
Clarify Your Thinking!	428
Root of the Church's Problem - Lack of Faith	431
 Chapter 9 - Repentance	 435
We Need to Repent	435
Repentance and Faith	435
Building Faith One Verse at a Time	439
Dealing with Doubts	442
Why Is Faith Important to God?	443
Laodicea and Philadelphia	447
The Ministry's Responsibility	448
Why Many Ministers Are Afraid to Teach Faith in the Bible .	450
Fasting, Faith, and Doctrine	455
We Need to Be More Zealous for the Things of God	456
 Footnotes	 461
 Websites of Interest	 467

BOOK INTRODUCTION

I have been a member of the Worldwide Church of God while Herbert W. Armstrong was alive, and I have been reading and studying his literature since the late sixties. Since the death of Mr. Armstrong, those who have continued to believe the things he has taught, whether they have proven those things for themselves, as he did, or whether they simply agreed with and accepted Mr. Armstrong's teaching without proof, have been divided and scattered into a multitude of church organizations, and some stay home. There are now many churches that call themselves "Church of God" that trace their roots back to Worldwide and to Herbert W. Armstrong. In the sense that many of these churches can be collectively called "the Church of God", I consider myself to be a member of the Church of God, but I do not profess membership in any denomination in competition with any other. When I was baptized, I remember that the pastor said I was not being baptized into any denomination or sect, but into the body of Christ, or words to that effect. I consider myself a member of that spiritual body which follows the teachings of the Bible, as Mr. Armstrong did, and which has benefited from his teachings.

I do not mean to imply that all churches that call themselves "Church of God" and follow Mr. Armstrong's teachings to one degree or another are equal in faithfulness and in effectiveness in serving God, nor do I imply that it makes no difference which one a member attends and supports. We each have a responsibility to support those whom God is working through and who are doing the most effective job of serving God, and every member of the whole Church of God has a responsibility to exercise his or her best judgment in determining this based on the Bible and based on available facts about the churches. We should also seek appropriate opportunities when possible to attend with a faithful Church of God fellowship as well as to support the ordained ministry with our tithes and offerings.

This book is about the true gospel, what it is, why there is an urgent need to preach it to the world as a witness, and how to do it effectively. It offers proof that the Bible is the word of God and can be trusted as the primary source of belief in all doctrine.

Two major themes run throughout this book. One is that the Bible is God's word and that the principle of faith requires that we believe the Bible more than any other source for our beliefs about religious doctrine. This means that we must believe the Bible more than any minister, more than tradition, and more than our own opinions and preferences if we want to know the truth. Another theme is that there is an urgent need to preach the true gospel to the world as a witness and a warning to our nations about God's punishments to come if we do not turn from our national sins. The true gospel includes a message of repentance, and the two themes of believing the Bible and preaching a message of repentance to the world compliment each other, because in preaching the gospel to the world, the Church must also point the world to the Bible.

The true gospel has been widely taught from the Bible by Herbert W. Armstrong from about 1934 until his death in 1986. It is his teachings that enabled me to prove the truth from the Bible. He often said on radio, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible." I took him at his word on this. I used his teachings as a source of ideas, but I only accepted major teachings I could prove from the Bible. In this, I followed his example, because he also based his beliefs and teachings on what he could prove from the Bible.

This book is intended for two audiences, those who are familiar with Herbert W. Armstrong's teachings and are in general agreement with them, and those who do not know about his teachings but are willing to learn new truth from the Bible.

Mr. Armstrong founded the Radio Church of God, which was later renamed Worldwide Church of God.

I have never been ordained as a minister, or a deacon, or had any official standing in any of the Churches of God. I have no special training as a writer or teacher. I am a computer software developer by profession.

I began writing this book in bits and pieces over the years, not starting with the intent of publishing it as a book. Some of it I wrote to help me think out and clarify my thoughts and to remember and reinforce particular points of doctrine for myself, and some of it I collected as research material I thought might be helpful for ministers at headquarters of one or several Churches of God. Before thinking of publishing it myself, I had the intent of submitting parts or all of it to the leaders of one or more Church of God organizations. I thought it could be used by them as a possible source of ideas for articles or sermons. I knew my writing was not professional, so I did not submit the material as articles for publication, but I thought the professional writers in the Church could perhaps use some of the material, especially the historical material I gathered about the Holocaust (chapter 4). The church leadership could evaluate the material, and if my ideas were wrong they had the authority to separate the wheat from the chaff and to correct me, and if any of the material was useful they had the writers with the technical skills to use the ideas and rewrite the material professionally and produce quality articles suitable for publication.

Originally, I never thought I would publish it myself. Although I strongly believe the things I have written are correct according to the Bible and also in agreement with the fundamental things Mr. Armstrong taught the Church, and that the principles in this book are strongly needed by the Church of God at this time, I had been taught by the Church for years that only ordained ministers had the authority to teach others in the Church. I understood hierarchical government and the need to all speak the same thing. There is a lot of confusion in the scattered churches with many people, ministers and lay members alike, promoting their own personal opinions, especially on the Internet. I have tried to respect and obey ministerial authority, and the last thing I wanted to do is to be rebellious or to add to the overall confusion. I have recognized that my opinions could be wrong because I am fallible, and I thought that by submitting material to leading ministers only, they could "screen out" and correct me on anything in which I am in error about, and yet rewrite and use anything of real value.

Over time, I have made several efforts to communicate with leaders of churches about much of the material in this book, but with few exceptions I have received little if any feedback. As of the time I am first publishing this (March 2006), the VERY little feedback I have received has been positive only, such as "it contains a number of very good points". But the leading Churches of God I have submitted material to have not used any of the material, nor corrected me on anything, nor indicated if they planned on using it or not using it and why, nor given me any feedback of substance, and in several cases refused, despite my inquiries, to even acknowledge receiving my submissions. Whenever I submitted something, I first sent a letter asking the church leader if he wanted the material. When the reply came back, "Yes, please send it", I did so. Thus, I never submitted anything except what was requested. Yet it has not been used. Yet I feel this material can be very useful for helping the Church to be effective in preaching the gospel to the world, which is what I want to support. Perhaps some ideas I have submitted actually have been used in small ways as ideas for articles (I am not able to receive all of the publications of churches I have sent material to), but I am not aware of any significant use.

As much as I want to support the preaching of the gospel, I know I must do it lawfully according to God's way, not my own way. There are two ditches I wanted to avoid. One ditch is to presumptuously appoint myself as a teacher and rebelliously teach things in contradiction to what God's appointed and ordained ministers are teaching, thereby bringing guilt upon myself and adding confusion to the Church. I have always been aware of this ditch, but I began to be aware of another ditch. We also have a responsibility to put to use the "talents" or "pounds" God has entrusted us with. God has harsh words for the lazy and unprofitable servant who, motivated by fear, hid his master's money in the ground. I began to worry that if indeed the things I felt moved to write, and have written, are right and useful, I need to act responsibly to do what I can, lawfully, to see to it that these things are preserved and put to the best possible use.

Maybe I am kidding myself. I see on the Internet and in printed publications all kinds of ideas and "doctrines" from people who are convinced they are right and everyone else is wrong, and in some cases it is easy for me to see that their ideas and opinions are ridiculous. Yet they don't seem to be ridiculous to the writers and promoters of these opinions. It seems that everyone sees what is wrong about the opinions of others, but no one can see their own error.

But I am just as human, just as fallible, just as subject to error and blindness to my own error as everyone else. Maybe my ideas are wrong and I just can't see it.

But this is one reason why I have tried to submit my material first to several ordained ministers, leaders, of a few of the major Church of God organizations. They not only should have the ability, but they have the AUTHORITY, as appointed by God, to correct me where I may be wrong. I honestly would appreciate words of correction about the things I believe and write. But I have been unable to obtain any. In spite of the fact that I have submitted most of the material in chapters 4 through 7 to one or more church leaders for evaluation and feedback between May 2000 and October 2005, I have received no critical feedback. No one has been willing to show me where I am wrong, yet to my knowledge no one has wanted to use any of this material or the ideas

and principles contained in it. Yet if I am right, the principles in this book may be vitally needed by the Church of God as never before. And I find no Church of God that is effectively teaching all of these things today. I do not say that no Church is teaching any of these things, just that if any Church of God is teaching all of them, I haven't found it yet.

One of Mr. Armstrong's books which I have read so many times it is falling apart is his autobiography. In it, I noticed that before he was ordained as a minister he was already teaching others. I remembered that in the Bible, it is not just the apostles who taught, but others as well. When the Church was scattered, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, but the brethren were scattered and preached the gospel everywhere (Acts 8:1-4). Although no doubt many of the seventy that Jesus directly commissioned to preach were among those scattered who preached, this passage does not restrict the preaching to those seventy. Verse 4 simply says "those who were scattered". I remembered the occasion, during Jesus' three-and-a-half year ministry, that His disciples told Him that one who was not "with them" was doing works such as healing or casting out demons in Christ's name, and they forbade him. Jesus told his disciples, "Do not forbid him" (Luke 9:49-50, Mark 9:38-40).

Acts 18:24-28 records an incident regarding Apollos. This is the first time Apollos is mentioned. He boldly spoke accurately the things of the Lord, but he only knew about the baptism of John. But he preached in the synagogue. Then Aquila and Priscilla explained the way of God more accurately, so his knowledge was limited before that time. Then he publicly preached that Jesus was the Christ. It is obvious that he was not specifically authorized by the Church or he would have known more than the baptism of John and Aquila and Priscilla would not have had to explain the way of God to him more accurately. Yet he had started to preach and continued to preach in public. There is not one word of rebuke towards him, rather the whole tone of the passage is that he was doing a good work. In fact, I do not know of a single passage in the New Testament rebuking members who teach others or indicating that it is unlawful, provided they teach the truth.

I remembered the warnings from God in the Old Testament against those who presumed to speak in God's name, but God didn't send them. This is what ministers often quote. Yet, did this refer to people who taught God's truth, quoting Moses or the prophets, but they were not appointed to the job? Or did it apply to false prophets who claimed to be prophets receiving revelation directly from God, like the four hundred prophets who advised the king of Israel to go up against Ramoth Gilead in the days of Jehoshaphat, but were lying or deceived themselves (2 Chronicles 18:5-22)? There is an indication that it is the latter, not the former, because in a condemnation of false prophets, God says, if the prophets had taught the people God's words they would have turned them from the error of their ways (Jeremiah 23:19). In other words, it is not those who teach the people God's words that are rebuked but those who promote false teaching based what they think are revelations directly from God. God was not rebuking them just for "running" when He didn't send them. He rebuked them also for failing to teach God's words.

As far as I know, unless and until someone corrects me from Scripture, there is nothing in what I have written that is contrary to the Bible or to any fundamental principle taught by Mr. Armstrong. For the most part, the teachings in this book are in support of the efforts of the major Church groups that are trying to carry on the work Mr. Armstrong started of preaching the gospel to the world as a witness and the Ezekiel warning to Israel. I am trying to offer reasons to support the view that the gospel and the Ezekiel warning still need to be preached to as many among the general public as possible, and I offer suggestions on how that can be done more effectively. I also believe what I have written is in general agreement with the doctrinal positions of the Worldwide Church of God when Mr. Armstrong was alive, and with several major fellowships of the Church of God today.

I have tried to give the relevant scriptures, history, and other reasons to support the positions I take so that the reader can judge for himself or herself the merits of what I say. Since I am "nobody", I feel there is no risk anyone will believe what I say because I say it. I give all my reasons for what I believe, and what I have written can stand or fall on its own merits. Any reader who believes what God says in the Bible can check up on what I am saying and separate truth from error. That is the way it should be.

For my own case, I do not claim I understand the Bible better than trained ministers in the Church of God, or even better than most members. There are many subjects I do not understand well, and many things that seem easy for others to understand seem difficult for me. I do not claim to "know more than the Church". I am also well aware of many personal faults and shortcomings I have, which I am striving to overcome, and I am also aware that I no doubt have faults I am yet too blind to see. But in regard to the particular topics I address in this book, I may have a little better understanding than some others, not because I am better or more gifted in an overall sense (I am not), but because I have spent time on these particular subjects, and because of my own studies, background, experiences, and personal history in the Church of God in relationship to these topics.

From my study of the Bible, the warnings against those who do not use their opportunities to try to serve others seem stronger than the warnings against those who try to serve in a capacity to which they have not been officially appointed. I want to support the preaching of the gospel and the Ezekiel warning as much as I can. This book is a way of doing that.

If I were a member or a regular attendee of a Church of God that was willing to evaluate my material with an open mind, correct me where I am wrong, and seriously consider using anything of value that I have written, or be willing to tell me why they cannot use it, I don't think I would have reached a point of publishing it myself. I would continue to try to channel any contributions I had to offer through the established authority of the Church. This is what I have tried to do, but there has been no meaningful response.

The first half of this book (chapters one through three) is written for those who are not familiar with the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong and wish to learn more about the truth of God from the Bible, or those who are not sure about the Bible but have an open mind and are willing to learn whether or not the Bible was inspired by God. The second

half is written primarily for those with a Church of God background who are familiar with and in general agreement with the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong, or those who have read the first half of the book and want to learn more about recent events in the Church of God and the why and how of preaching the gospel.

If one asks, "By what authority do you try to teach or warn others?", since I am not an apostle, evangelist, or ordained minister, my answer is Matthew 22:39 "*...You shall love your neighbor as yourself*", and Matthew 7:12 "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets", and Proverbs 24:11 "Deliver *those who* are drawn towards death, and hold back *those* stumbling to the slaughter." I want to do everything I can to help and support giving a warning to the public about the tribulation to come while there is still time to repent, before it is too late to escape. To do this, I want to share with others what I think I have learned that can help. I think of myself as someone who is like a person in an apartment building who smells smoke at 3:00 in the morning when everyone else is asleep. I find out that the building is on fire, not because I am smarter, but because I was lucky enough to happen to be awake at the time. So I call the fire department, and get out of the building. But before I leave, shouldn't I knock on the doors of the other apartments to let people know what I know? Do I need special authority or appointment to try to help give someone a better chance to escape the fire by sharing with them what I have found out?

There is also the verse in Jude which says "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). This is addressed to the members, not just the ministry (Jude 1). Jude says we should "contend" for the faith. I do not know everything that may be included in that term "contend", but it seems to indicate more than just quietly obeying the faith and never openly taking a stand for the basic principles of what one believes in the face of challenges to our faith in God and Christ. I think it indicates that there is a time to openly take a stand for fundamental principles.

In pointing out that Mr. Armstrong preached before he was ordained and that there is no general instruction in the New Testament against lay members teaching without ordination, I am not trying to encourage lay members to quit the Church of God fellowship they are part of to start a separate work. There are pitfalls with that, and I talk more about that near the end of chapter five.

The main subject of this book is the what, why, and how of preaching to the public the gospel and the Ezekiel warning message of God's punishments to come.

WHAT is the true gospel? In chapters 1, 2, and 3 I explain some basic doctrines of the Church of God in brief summary form, and this is needed as a background for the chapters to follow for anyone not familiar with Herbert W. Armstrong's teachings. These chapters help to review and establish WHAT the true gospel is. I also STRONGLY recommend the following books written by Mr. Armstrong, which explain

these things, and much more, far better and more thoroughly than the brief summary I have written:

- 1) *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*
- 2) *Mystery of the Ages*
- 3) *The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong.*

WHY should the gospel be preached to the public at this time? Chapters 4 and 5 explain WHY the gospel and the Ezekiel warning is needed and should be preached to the world, especially to Israel, at this time. My hope is that the information in these chapters can help to motivate church members to support the preaching of the gospel and the Ezekiel warning to the public.

HOW can the gospel be preached more effectively? Chapters 6 and 7 suggest ways of preaching the gospel and HOW to preach it more effectively.

My hope for this book is that ministers, speakers, and writers in the Church of God may yet find ideas in it for sermons, sermonettes, and articles. It is also my hope that members of the Church who may be confused about the need for preaching the gospel to the world or may be confused about which part of the Church of God to support, may find information and ideas from this book that can help them to make decisions, while using the Bible as a primary guide. Bible study and prayer must always come first in seeking God's guidance in making decisions. Finally, it may be that a few individuals who do not have a Church of God background may find this book and through it become aware of the teachings of the Church of God and Herbert W. Armstrong. I hope that this book can serve as an introduction, and the interested reader can follow up with the above named books and with research on the Internet.

I also hope to receive, via email, constructive criticism, feedback, suggestions, and where I am wrong according to the Bible, according to other facts I relate, or according to logic, correction.

In the Bible, the phrase "preaching the gospel" can, in its broadest sense, refer both to teaching the baptized members of the Church of God as well as preaching to the outside public. Paul for example refers to preaching to his congregations as preaching the gospel (Romans 1:15). In the context of recent church history, among members of the Church of God, the commonly understood usage of the term "preaching the gospel" has been in reference to preaching to the public, not the Church. This book is primarily about preaching the gospel to the public. Where I speak of preaching the gospel, I have tried to clarify this by adding "to the public" or "to the world" or "to Israel". However, in any place where I refer only to preaching the gospel without qualification, I am talking about preaching to those outside the Church of God. The term I use for teaching the membership is the term we have customarily used, "feeding the flock."

Bible prophecy indicates that the United States, Canada, and Great Britain will soon go through the most intense and greatest time of trouble, suffering, and death that the world has ever seen or will see. No one knows exact dates, but I think a good estimate is that this time of trouble will begin during the lifetimes of most people alive today, maybe in the next ten to twenty-five years, maybe sooner. I believe the Bible indicates that once

it begins it will last two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half years. By the time it is over, about nine out of ten people or more will be dead, and most of the ten percent or less left alive will have gone through suffering most of us cannot imagine. This death and suffering will come as punishment for our national and individual sins, but there is a way that some may be spared. That is why there is a need for a warning.

Much credit for whatever I have learned belongs to others who have taught me, and this includes ministers, speakers, and writers in several Church of God organizations. Primarily, I owe Mr. Armstrong and the ministry under his authority a great deal for teaching me about the Bible and the truths of God that I have learned. I have tried to confirm and prove all major doctrines from the Bible and to believe the Bible more than any man or church, but I could not have learned the major truths of the Bible without the help of Mr. Armstrong and other ministers to guide me. Since the death of Mr. Armstrong, I have tried to continue to learn from the faithful ministry, and I have learned things from several Church of God fellowships. In particular, I have learned some things from John Ritenbaugh of Church of the Great God, primarily through their website, that I have not learned from any other fellowship and probably would not have learned on my own, particularly about Laodiceanism and God's judgment being a cause of the scattering of the Church. I explain several causes for the scattering of the Church in chapter 5.

There are many things I learned from many people and sources over the years, and in many cases with the things I have learned I cannot now remember whom in particular I have learned them from, so I cannot acknowledge the source of everything I have learned except in the general way that I have. I certainly do not claim that most of the ideas and concepts in this book are original, and even in the cases of ideas that I express that I have found nowhere else, there is a high likelihood that others before me have also expressed similar ideas in one form or another, and I am not aware of it.

I have also tried to build on what I have learned from others.

This version of the book is published April 2012. I have added a new chapter, chapter 9, on the need for repentance in the Church of God. I would like to thank everyone who has emailed me to give me feedback, criticism, or encouragement.

I intend to continue to revise this book over time to improve it and to address new issues as they come up. The latest version can be found on the website for this book at <http://www.ptgbook.org>.

Bible quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New King James Version of the Bible. Quotes from the King James Version are indicated with the initials KJV or the words "King James Version". In the Bible quotes, I have retained the italics as they are in the text of whatever version I am quoting. I have also preserved the "all caps" rendering of God's name where it appears that way in the original text. I refer the reader to the Preface to the New King James Version or to whatever version I am quoting for an explanation of the meaning of text in italics and putting God's name in all caps. I have also retained the capitalization of words as they are in the text I am quoting, even

when the capitalization is for words that are the first word of a line in a poetic passage but not the first word in a sentence.

In this book I quote other sources. Regarding quotes of other sources, in accordance with Section 107 of Chapter 1 of Title 17 of US Copyright law, this material is distributed without charge or other commercial interest for the purpose of comment, teaching, and scholarship and research. The statute explicitly declares that such FAIR USE "is not an infringement of copyright".

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Comments are welcome. I can be reached by email at author@ptgbook.org.

I also have a blog at <http://ptgbook.blogspot.com> where I discuss Church of God matters and the doctrinal topics covered in this book, and the blog is open for reader comments.

BOOK ONE

THE GOSPEL

CHAPTER 1 - THE UNITED STATES AND BRITAIN IN PROPHECY

Why this Subject Is Important

This book is about preaching the true gospel to the world and the Ezekiel warning to Israel. Originally, I had planned to cover what the true gospel is in chapter one, then explain where the United States and Britain are prophetically identified in chapter two, with the Ezekiel warning explained in chapter three. But I changed my mind and decided it was necessary to cover the U.S. and Britain in prophecy before explaining the true gospel.

When changes in doctrine were being made in Worldwide after the death of Mr. Armstrong, one of the things that was taught was that the identity of the United States and British Commonwealth nations in prophecy had no importance for the true gospel or for salvation.

I disagree.

There is some truth in saying that knowing the identity of modern nations and what prophecy says about them is not vital to our salvation, but in a sense, it can be. It is not the knowledge of the identities of nations and prophecies themselves that is vital. But in this case, these prophecies prove that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. That IS important for salvation!

Everything we can know about salvation comes from the Bible. The Bible is God speaking. In order to accurately learn about salvation and what God requires of us, we must know and believe what God says in the Bible.

Prophecies about modern nations have been recorded in the Bible thousands of years before they were to be fulfilled, and the history of events in the last several hundred years show the fulfillment of those prophecies. By studying those prophecies in the Bible, and then studying their historic fulfillment, one can prove that a God who was able to control world events and predict the future must have inspired the Bible. This is the proof that God is really the author of the Bible, not just men guessing about what might happen in the future.

Why is this important for understanding the true gospel and salvation?

Men have many different ideas about religion. There are many religions of the world with radically different ideas between them about the nature of God, salvation, the

nature of man, life after death, and how men should live. Even among the churches and religions that call themselves Christian, there is wide disagreement over many issues pertaining to the gospel and salvation. Different religious leaders say different things about these issues.

But God Himself knows what the truth is about salvation, the gospel, His nature, and how He wants men to live. Men may have different ideas and men make mistakes, but God KNOWS these things. By proving that God speaks through the Bible and then going to the Bible for the answers, one can know what God has to say about all of these religious issues that men have different opinions about. And if certain men or religious leaders or churches really do know the truth, one can go to the Bible to confirm and prove whether or not what these men teach is the truth.

The Bible teaches that faith is a requirement for salvation. A big part of faith is willingness to believe what God says and act on that belief by trusting God and doing what He says. Our example of this is Abraham. Romans 4:3 says, "For what does the Scripture say? '*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*' " And in James 2:23, "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, '*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*' And he was called the friend of God." And finally, Genesis 15:4-6, "And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.' Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

In order to believe God, we have to know what God says. That is why the Bible is important. The Bible is God speaking to us. If we can prove that the Bible is really inspired by God, we can look to the Bible as authority for what we believe and do.

God gives us free moral agency. He does not force anyone to believe and obey Him. We can make a choice to either believe God or to disbelieve Him, but before we can make that choice we have to know what He says. That is why the Bible is important and why it is important that we prove if it really is inspired by God.

This chapter is really about proving that the Bible is the Word of God.

This chapter will explain prophecies that have been fulfilled.

This chapter will cover certain prophecies that were to be fulfilled in our time and how those prophecies have been fulfilled in history. These prophecies primarily concern the English speaking people in the United States and the British Commonwealth nations. I will also cover some additional prophecy that has been fulfilled that helps to prove that the Bible was inspired by God.

However, there are a number of prophecies concerning modern nations that are yet to be fulfilled. I will not cover those here, but I will cover prophecies for the future in chapter 3 on the Ezekiel warning.

I feel it is best to get a strong background in proving that the Bible is God's word before learning, from the Bible, the true gospel and the other truths of God. If we are going to let the Bible explain the gospel, we must first know that the Bible has authority. Otherwise, we would be less likely to believe what the Bible says about the gospel, salvation, or any other important subject.

This chapter will also serve as an introduction to the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong on the identity of modern English speaking nations in biblical prophecy.

This chapter is only a summary of the information available on this subject. For a more thorough and detailed explanation, I strongly recommend Herbert W. Armstrong's book, *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy* and Chapter 5 of his book, *Mystery of the Ages*.

Proving that God Exists

I was a teenager when I first began reading the Plain Truth magazine, which was published by Herbert W. Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong and other writers of the literature published by the Worldwide Church of God challenged me in their writings to prove the things I believed. Although I had never done so before, and was not even sure it was possible, I now wanted to PROVE whether or not God exists. I wasn't trying to be biased in proving it. I was ready to accept the truth whatever it was, whether the truth was that God exists or didn't exist. Either way, I just wanted to know. I didn't want to guess or assume anything anymore.

I requested and received a booklet, *"Does God Exist?"*. Science has always been an interest of mine, and I have read a number of science books on various subjects for pleasure, especially books about physics. I read the booklet and considered the points that it made, and I thought about the things I knew about science.

One of the points the booklet made is that creation requires a creator. I knew that many scientists believe in evolution. They use the concepts of random mutation, natural selection, and survival of the fittest to promote their theory that all life came into existence, in all its variety, merely through the operation of physical law.

But I also knew enough about physics to know that there is a lot more design in creation than we see in living creatures. Even apart from life, which scientists say evolved, the universe itself, with all its laws, its energy, and its matter, shows design that requires a designer. Even dead matter shows design. Choices had to be made on how the universe would be and what the laws that govern and define it would be. That requires a Creator God to make those choices in designing the universe.

Physicists can create experiments to probe the nature of matter, energy, time, and space, and the laws that control these entities, and they can devise mathematical formulas and equations and devise models to explain HOW the universe works, but they cannot explain WHY the universe is as it is.

They can learn that there are about 100 different kinds of atoms. They can learn that each atom consists of a collection of protons, electrons, and except for simple hydrogen, neutrons. They can learn that protons and electrons carry electric charge, and that there are normally the same number of each in an atom, but that neutrons carry no electric charge. They can learn that the mass of an atom is almost entirely in the protons and neutrons, and these particles are in the nucleus of the atom with the electrons organized in outer shells around the nucleus. They can develop theories to explain the results of their experiments, even theories that protons and neutrons are made up of "quarks". But WHY are there protons, neutrons, and electrons? Why are the laws that control those particles the way they are? Scientists don't invent those laws. They merely discover them.

Scientists have discovered four forces that control matter and energy in the universe: the strong force, the electromagnetic force, the weak force, and gravity. The strong force is the strongest of the four and it holds the nucleus of an atom together, but though it is the strongest, it is very short range. Gravity and the electromagnetic forces are long-range forces. Any physicist can tell you many things about each of these forces, but he cannot tell you why they exist. Why four forces? Why not three? Why not two? Who decided there would be four forces and what their characteristics would be?

We live in a universe of four dimensions, one dimension of time and three dimensions of space. Scientists may speculate that there are more dimensions that exist in ways we are not normally aware of, but there are four we know about from everyday life. But why are there three dimensions of space? It doesn't have to be that way. Mathematicians can calculate results for a universe with only two space dimensions or a universe with four space dimensions, and each kind of universe could be just as logically consistent as the real universe we live in. Yet the universe has three space dimensions. Why? Who decided that there would be three space dimensions we experience in everyday life, and not two or four?

This universe, with its elegant complexity, shows design, and it shows that design decisions have been made, decisions about the forces that would exist, about the number and characteristics of the dimensions those forces would act in, about the nature of matter and energy and the kinds of fundamental particles that would exist, even about the characteristics of time itself. Someone had to make those design decisions. Someone had to decide how many fundamental forces there would be, how many different kinds of fundamental particles there would be, how many dimensions there would be. There isn't just one possible kind of universe. Someone had to decide that the universe would be the way it is and not some other way.

For me, the design of the universe requires a creator to determine what that design would be, and is a proof that God exists.

There is something else that I regard as a proof that I am more than just a collection of highly organized chemicals and therefore my existence cannot be explained by evolution, and that there must be a creator that created the human race. No theory of evolution, no explanation of science can explain human consciousness.

What is human consciousness? There may be a lot of confusion about the term among some science writers. I often am provoked into buying a science magazine when I see on the cover that there is an article about human consciousness. I am very curious and intrigued about what the writers have to say about it. But I am always disappointed because it turns out that they are not talking about consciousness at all. They are talking about intelligence, or focused attention, or something like that. They will describe experiments in which a radioactive element is ingested by a subject, and that element is in the bloodstream, and they can measure the radioactivity as the blood flows through the brain with their scanning machines. They can produce pictures of which areas of the brain are most active because the blood flow increases to those areas. So they will have the subject look at pictures, or listen to some sound, or have the subject work on a problem, and they can see what parts of the brain "light up". Then they say, "See, that is where consciousness is, we can measure it." But all they are doing is learning a little more about how the physical brain works. They aren't really addressing the issue of consciousness head-on.

Regardless of how my brain works, human consciousness is the subjective sense of "me", my "awareness" inside my physical brain and body that actually experiences the thoughts and emotions I may have or feel. It is the difference between being awake and being asleep without dreams. It is something no machine, no computer, no matter how intelligent a future computer might be, can have. It is something that cannot be explained at all by any collection of atoms or molecules no matter how complexly organized they may be. Even if you could build a robot or an android that looked completely human, but was really a mechanical device, and even if you gave it a computer brain and such powerful software that it could speak and behave intelligently and could so perfectly mimic human emotions and behavior that no person could tell it from a real human without cutting it open, such a machine would never have true consciousness. Consciousness is a mystery science cannot explain. And it seems science magazine writers cannot even talk about the problem intelligently, though magazine publishers love to put the subject on the cover.

From what I know about biology and the theory of evolution, I believe it is impossible for the variety of life we see to have come about through the operation of natural forces only. But whether or not that is true, it is obvious to me that the design of the physical universe itself requires a designer, a Creator God who decided what the laws of the universe would be. And the consciousness of my mind is something that cannot be explained by physical laws alone, and the existence of my mind therefore requires a Creator God who made me.

For me, this was sufficient proof that God exists.

The design and existence of this vast universe as well as the human mind is proof of the existence of God, and shows us not only that God exists, but demonstrates His immense

wisdom and power, vast beyond human comprehension. There are billions of galaxies, and our own galaxy contains billions of stars, each star comparable to our sun, which itself dwarfs the earth in its size. And on the other side of the scale, God has created atoms, too small to see even with ordinary microscopes, and has made atoms from electrons, protons, and neutrons, which are far smaller even than atoms. How great is both the mind and the power of the God who designed all this and brought it into existence from nothing!

But the next step for me was to prove whether or not the Bible is God's word. Did God inspire the Bible or is it merely a collection of writings of men? And if the Bible is not inspired by God, is there any other sacred text or book that is inspired by God? Also, how could I approach proving whether the Bible is God speaking or not?

In the Bible are a number of prophecies in which God says what will happen in the future. No man can predict the future hundreds or thousands of years in advance. If prophecies in the Bible have come true in history in a way that cannot be explained to a reasonable person as coincidence, that would be proof for me that the Bible is inspired by God and carries authority.

I read a book Mr. Armstrong wrote, *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*. This book shows how prophecies made thousands of years ago have been fulfilled in history.

I wanted to prove whether or not Bible prophecies have come true, and to do that I needed to be objective and impartial. Although I studied and used Mr. Armstrong's books and articles, I did not trust them or rely on them. I knew that any writer could selectively pick out those things that tended to support his point of view and to omit anything that would tend to prove he was wrong. So though I used Mr. Armstrong's writings as a source for ideas, I did my own independent research into the Bible and history. I read the Bible from cover to cover, making notes on everything that pertained to the subject, and I studied history from a number of sources. In order to check up on the things Mr. Armstrong wrote in the above named book, I read Winston Churchill's four volume set of books on the history of the English speaking people, and I checked other historical books and articles as well.

The rest of this chapter explains what I found in my efforts to prove whether or not the Bible is the word of God, and what I found in particular about prophecies and their fulfillment concerning the United States and the British people.

Promises Made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

Genesis 12:1-4 says, "Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a

blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran." Notice that God promises Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham (Genesis 17:5), to make him into a great nation.

In Genesis 17:3-6, God changes Abram's name to Abraham, and promises him that He will make him a father of many nations: "Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.' " Genesis 17:15-16 indicates that the many nations that would be descended from Abraham would be through Sarah, Abraham's wife: "Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a *mother of* nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.' "

Later, Abraham had a son by Sarah and he named him Isaac (Genesis 21:1-3). In Genesis 22:15-17, God promises to bless Abraham and to multiply his descendents exceedingly, and further promises that his descendents would possess the gate of their enemies. A "gate" can refer to a land passage or sea gate that is a place where traffic must pass through to get from one place to another.

Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the firstborn, but he sold his birthright to Jacob (Genesis 25:19-26, 29-34). When the time came near when Isaac would die, he blessed Jacob with this blessing in Genesis 27:27-29: "And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said: 'Surely, the smell of my son *is* like the smell of a field Which the LORD has blessed. Therefore may God give you Of the dew of heaven, Of the fatness of the earth, And plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, And let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed *be* everyone who curses you, And blessed *be* those who bless you!' " Read all of Genesis 27:1-40 to get the full story of how Jacob obtained the blessing.

Later, Isaac again blesses Jacob with this blessing: "May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples; And give you the blessing of Abraham, To you and your descendants with you, That you may inherit the land In which you are a stranger, Which God gave to Abraham" (Genesis 28:3-4). Notice two things: 1) the promises and blessings God made to Abraham were being passed on to Jacob, and 2) Jacob's descendents were to become an ASSEMBLY of peoples, that is, more than one people or nation. This blessing of national prosperity is repeated and confirmed by God in Genesis 28:13-15.

In Genesis 32:28 Jacob's name is changed to "Israel".

Genesis 35:9-12: "Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, 'Your name *is* Jacob; your name shall not

be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.' So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: 'I *am* God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.' " Notice that Jacob's descendants were to become a nation AND a company of nations.

So Jacob, who became Israel, was promised to become a single nation and a company or group of nations.

Jacob had twelve sons including Joseph (Genesis 35:22-26).

Promises Passed on to the Sons of Joseph

Joseph had two sons in Egypt, Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 41:50-52).

When Jacob was sick and near death, he blessed the sons of Joseph before he died: "Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, 'Indeed your father *is* sick'; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And Jacob was told, 'Look, your son Joseph is coming to you'; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. Then Jacob said to Joseph: 'God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, "Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you *as* an everlasting possession." And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, *are* mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when *there was* but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).' Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, 'Who *are* these?' Joseph said to his father, 'They *are* my sons, whom God has given me in this *place*.' And he said, 'Please bring them to me, and I will bless them.' Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, *so that* he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, 'I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!' So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought *them* near him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid *it* on Ephraim's head, who *was* the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh *was* the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said: 'God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;

And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.' Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, 'Not so, my father, for this *one is* the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.' But his father refused and said, 'I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.' So he blessed them that day, saying, 'By you Israel will bless, saying, "May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!" ' And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh" (Genesis 48:1-20).

Notice three things from the above passage:

- 1) Jacob gave his name to the sons of Joseph in a special way, saying "let my name be named on them". From this point on in the Bible, the names "Jacob" or "Israel" can refer, not only to all of Jacob's sons, but depending on the context may refer primarily to Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph.
- 2) Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, "let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth".
- 3) Jacob said that Manasseh would become a great nation, but that Ephraim would become a MULTITUDE of nations. This exactly fits with what God promised Jacob in Genesis 35:11, that the descendents of Jacob would become a nation and a company of nations. Here we see that this prophecy applies specifically to the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, not to all the sons of Jacob.

Later, Jacob blesses each of his twelve sons before he dies, and in doing so he prophecies about the destiny of the descendents of each of them in the "last days". Genesis 49:1: "And Jacob called his sons and said, 'Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days.' "

We will see later in this chapter when the "last days" are and how we can know if this term applies to the days we are living in today.

In Genesis 49:2-21, and verse 27 Jacob pronounces a blessing and prophecies about each of his sons including Joseph. Here is what he says about Joseph: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a well; His branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, Shot *at him* and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, And the arms of his hands were made strong By the hands of the Mighty *God* of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), By the God of your father who will help you, And by the Almighty who will bless you *With* blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, Up to the

utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers" (Genesis 49:22-26).

It is obvious that the greatest blessings of national power and prosperity would come to Joseph, and to his sons Ephraim and Manasseh, who would become a great nation (Manasseh) and a great company or multitude of nations (Ephraim).

The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

After the death of Jacob, his descendents grew into a multitude in the land of Goshen in Egypt (Genesis 47:27, Exodus 1:1-7).

In due time, God brought Israel out of Egypt into the promised land, the land of Canaan (Exodus 3:7-20, 13:18, Joshua 1:1-2, 3:9, 4:1-11, 11:23). The descendants of each of the sons of Jacob became a tribe in Israel, and each tribe had its separate territory in the nation of Israel (Numbers 26:52-56, 33:50-54). The particular lands each tribe received are described in Joshua chapters 13 through 19. Ephraim and Manasseh were among the tribes that were settled in the northern part of Israel, and the tribe of Judah was settled in the south.

After God brought Israel out of Egypt, but before He brought them into the promised land, God had made a covenant with Israel. God promised to protect and bless Israel, and Israel was required to obey all of God's commandments (Exodus 19:3-9, 20:1-23, 24:1-8). God also pronounced blessings for obedience but curses for disobedience. See Deuteronomy chapter 28. Israel was specifically warned that they would be conquered by their enemies and taken captive and removed from the land of Canaan if they failed to keep their part of the covenant by obeying God's commandments (Deuteronomy 28:15, 47-52, 58-66, Leviticus 26:3-45).

After the days of King Solomon, Israel was divided into two kingdoms (1 Kings 11:9-13, 29-40, 43, 12:1-24). The southern Kingdom of Judah consisted of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and the Levites, plus those individuals from any of the other tribes that chose to migrate to Judah. The northern Kingdom of Israel consisted of the other tribes including the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (1 Kings 12:21, 31, 2 Chronicles 11:13). Each kingdom had a series of kings. After the division into two kingdoms, the term "Israel" often referred to the northern Kingdom of Israel only, not Judah.

Those in the Kingdom of Judah became known as "Jews". In the King James Version of the Bible, they are specifically called Jews in 2 Kings 16:6-8 at a time when Israel was at war against the Jews: "At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath: and the Syrians came to Elath, and dwelt there unto this day. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I *am* thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. And Ahaz took the silver

and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent *it for* a present to the king of Assyria" (King James Version). So here was a situation in which Syria and Israel were allied against the Jews, and the Jews formed an alliance with Assyria to get help against Israel and Syria. This makes it clear that the term "Jews" is NOT a synonym for "Israel".

The term "Jew" only refers to the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and part of Levi, and to a few individuals from other tribes who joined with the Kingdom of Judah. But the vast majority of Israelites from the other ten tribes of Israel, including Ephraim and Manasseh, were never called "Jews" and are not Jews today. They are Israelites but they are not Jews.

This is important because many Bible prophecies that foretell what will happen to Israel are not referring the Jews at all.

You can read the history of these two kingdoms for yourself in the books of 1 Kings, 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles. For the various kings of these two kingdoms, God indicates whether or not each did what was right in God's sight. The kings of Judah were all descended from King David, and some were faithful to do what was right in God's sight, and some were not. In the Kingdom of Israel, none were descended from David, and there were a number of different dynasties, but none of the kings mentioned did what was right in God's sight.

In time, because of Israel's persistent unfaithfulness, God caused Assyria to conquer the Kingdom of Israel and take them into captivity (2 Kings 17:5-23). Notice 2 Kings 17:5-6: "Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes." This occurred around 720 B.C.

But the Jews did NOT go into captivity at this time, though they went into a separate captivity more than a hundred years later. And the Israelites who did go into captivity at this time included the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who were prophesied to become a great nation and a great company or group of nations in the last days.

Babylon waged war against Judah and conquered Judah and Jerusalem, with Jerusalem falling around 586 B.C., and the people of Judah, the Jews, were taken into Babylonian captivity more than a hundred years after Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria. See 2 Kings chapters 24 and 25, and 2 Chronicles 36:5-21. Not only was the captivity of Israel and the captivity of Judah separated by more than a century, but the two groups were taken to different places. Israel was initially taken by Assyria to areas near the Habor river and in the cities of the Medes, areas to the northwest and northeast of Babylon, while the majority of the Jews were apparently taken by the Babylonians to Babylon and areas very close to Babylon.

Later, around the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, some of the Jews taken in the Babylonian captivity returned to the land of Judah and Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-5). Those that returned then and those that returned later became the ancestors of the Jews in Judea during the

time of Jesus and the New Testament Church. The Jews that returned plus those Jews who remained in Babylon or went to other areas in the world became the ancestors of Jews today. But the other tribes of Israel, the 10 tribes, taken in captivity by Assyria to areas north of Babylon 130 years before the captivity of Judah, never returned to Palestine and were never known as Jews. They became lost to history, with some calling them "the lost ten tribes".

Yet among these lost ten tribes are the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, which were destined to become a great nation and a company of nations in the last days.

The prophesied blessings of national prosperity and greatness in the last days do NOT apply to the Jews.

"Seven Times" Punishment for Sins

God prophesied that the descendents of Joseph would become a great nation and a company of nations, but that never occurred before those tribes went into captivity at the hands of the Assyrians as a punishment from God for their sins. Yet the prophecy must be fulfilled sometime after the captivity if God's word is true. This means that at some time God's punishment upon Israel would come to an end long enough for this prophecy to be fulfilled.

In Leviticus 26:1-45, God pronounces blessings for Israel for obedience and curses for disobedience. Notice Leviticus 26:18: "And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins." And Leviticus 26:23-24: "And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins." There are several places in this chapter of Leviticus where God uses the phrase "seven times". This can refer to seven times greater intensity of punishment. But there is another possible application. A prophetic "time" in fulfillment is a prophetic year with each day of the year representing an actual year in fulfillment.

A prophetic year is 360 days. An example of the number of days in a year in the Bible is given in the account of the flood in Noah's day: "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened" (Genesis 7:11). The flood started on the seventeenth day of the second month. After 150 days, it ended on the seventeenth day of the seventh month: "And the waters receded continually from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters decreased. Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat" (Genesis 8:3-4). From the seventeenth day of the second month to the seventeenth day of the seventh month is exactly 5 months. It was also 150 days. One hundred and fifty days divided by five months is exactly 30 days per month.

There is also a year-for-a-day principle in the Bible. A prophetic day can represent a year in fulfillment. In the book of Numbers is the account of how Israel refused to enter the promised land because they did not trust God to protect them and help them against the inhabitants of Canaan. It took the spies from Israel forty days to spy out the land of Canaan. The full account is in Numbers chapters 13 and 14. Notice Numbers 13:25: "And they returned from spying out the land after forty days." After they returned, they gave a bad report of the land to the people because they didn't trust God to help them to take the land from the inhabitants. Then the people rebelled against God and Moses and wanted to return to Egypt. As a result, God pronounced judgment on them: "But *as for* you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, *namely* forty years, and you shall know My rejection" (Numbers 14:32-34).

Notice that there was a year of actual punishment for each day they spied out the land. This is just one example of the year-for-a-day principle in the Bible, but there are others.

All this is explained in more detail in Mr. Armstrong's book, *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*.

Applying the year-for-a-day principle to God's statement that He would punish Israel "seven times" for their sins gives us a period of time of 2,520 years of punishment. Israel went into captivity around 720 B.C. 2,520 years after that would be around 1800 A.D. So if the "seven times" punishment means seven prophetic times of duration, then the punishment of the 10 tribes would end around 1800 A.D., and the prophesied blessing to come upon the sons of Joseph, that Ephraim would become a great company of nations and Manasseh would become a great nation, could begin to be fulfilled starting around that time.

The Dynasty of King David

We have seen how the twelve tribes of Israel became divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The Israelites in the kingdom of Israel, including the two tribes prophesied to become a great nation and company of nations, went into captivity first and became lost to history. The southern kingdom of Judah, the Jews, went into captivity about 130 years later, and they are the ancestors of Jews today.

But why did this division among the tribes of Israel occur?

The reason for the division has to do with a special promise and prophecy that David's sons would continue on the throne of David even if they proved unfaithful to God. God

made an unconditional promise that David's dynasty would continue unbroken "forever".

For a long time after Israel entered the promised land, and after Joshua, who was faithful to God, died, there was no king in Israel (Judges 21:25). Then in the days of Samuel the prophet, the people asked Samuel for a king (1 Samuel 8:4-5). Samuel took their request to God, and God appointed Saul to be king over Israel (1 Samuel 9:15-20, 27, 10:1-13, 17-25, 11:14-15). But after Saul became king, he proved unfaithful to God, so God rejected him and sent Samuel to anoint one of the sons of Jesse king to eventually replace Saul on the throne (1 Samuel 16:1). That son of Jesse was David (1 Samuel 16:11-13). After David was anointed by Samuel, several years went by before David actually replaced Saul as king over all Israel. During this time, God allowed David to go through many experiences to test and train his character, and David proved loyal to God. You can read of these experiences in chapters 16 through 31 of 1 Samuel and chapters 1 through 4 of 2 Samuel. But eventually David became king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:1-5).

David wanted to build a house for God's name, and he inquired of the prophet Nathan. God told Nathan to tell David that he was not to build a house for God's name, but that his son would do it. This is related in 2 Samuel 7:1-17. Notice God's message through Nathan to David in verses 12 through 16 of 2 Samuel chapter 7: " 'When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.' According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David."

God promised David that his throne would be established forever. He said that even if David's son sinned, God would not take His mercy from him as He took it from Saul. How did God take His mercy from Saul?

Saul did not die immediately when God rejected him. 1 Samuel 13 describes an incident that occurred after Saul had reigned two years. He offered a burnt offering, which only the priests had the authority to do. As a result, Samuel told him that his kingdom would not continue. "And Samuel said to Saul, 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you' " (1 Samuel 13:13-14). Later, Saul disobeyed God again in the matter of the Amalekites (see chapter 15 of 2 Samuel). It was after this that God had Samuel anoint David as king to replace Saul.

But Saul was not removed from office right away. David was only a youth (1 Samuel 16:11). He was considered too young even to go to war (1 Samuel 17:12-15, 33).

According to Numbers 1:2-3, those 20 years old and older were able to go to war. So David was probably no older than 20 and perhaps several years younger. God did not finally replace Saul with David until David was thirty (2 Samuel 5:4-5).

How did God remove his mercy from Saul? His dynasty ended. Saul wanted his son Jonathan to follow him on the throne (1 Samuel 20:30-31). But Jonathan was killed in battle when Saul died (1 Samuel 31:1-6). Another son of Saul, Ishbosheth, ruled Israel other than Judah for a time (2 Samuel 2:8-11), but he too died (2 Samuel 4:5-7).

But God would not do this with David's dynasty, even if his son sinned. This is exactly what God is promising David when he says "My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you" and "your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever".

This is further illustrated by the history of the events that took place after this. Solomon was David's son who became king of Israel after David, and Solomon was the one who built God's temple. And Solomon did sin. "Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as *did* his father David" (1 Kings 11:6).

As a result of Solomon's sin, God determined to take the kingdom away from Solomon's son. But God had already promised David that He would not take His mercy from David's son as He took His mercy from Saul, and God promised David that his house and his throne would be established forever. So in order to keep his promise to David, God had to allow David's dynasty to rule over part of Israel so that it could continue unbroken, even though most of Israel was taken away from Solomon's son.

We can read of this in 1 Kings 11:9-13: "So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded. Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.' "

Psalms 89 describes God's commitment to maintaining David's dynasty forever. Notice verses 3-4: "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations.' " Also, verses 30-37: "If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments, If they break My statutes And do not keep My commandments, Then I will punish their transgression with the rod, And their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, And his

throne as the sun before Me; It shall be established forever like the moon, Even *like* the faithful witness in the sky."

Jeremiah chapter 33 adds a detail that David's throne will continue to rule over the children of Israel: " 'For thus says the LORD: "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually." ' And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD: "If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me." ' Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, 'Have you not considered what these people have spoken, saying, "The two families which the LORD has chosen, He has also cast them off"? Thus they have despised My people, as if they should no more be a nation before them. 'Thus says the LORD: "If My covenant *is* not with day and night, *and if* I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, *so* that I will not take *any* of his descendants *to be* rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them" ' " (Jeremiah 33:17-26).

The whole split between the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah and their separate histories occurred precisely because of God's commitment to continue David's dynasty forever, even when David's sons were unfaithful. It was a way God could show his displeasure with Solomon's sin and punish David's line, but still allow the line to continue ruling over part of Israel.

The rest of 1 Kings, and also 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles describes the succession of kings in both Israel and Judah. None of Israel's kings did right in the sight of the Lord, but some of Judah's kings, the line of David, did. But though there was no long lasting dynasty in Israel, and though many kings of the line of David in Judah were unfaithful to God, David's dynasty continued unbroken in Judah, up to the captivity of Judah around 586 B.C. when they were conquered by the Babylonians.

What happened to David's dynasty after that?

It would appear that David's dynasty ended. Apparently the writer of Psalm 89 was discouraged because it seemed on the surface that God did not keep his promise that David's throne would continue forever. You can read Psalm 89:38-45.

However, there is a way that David's dynasty could have survived and continued out of sight of the biblical account. There are hints of this in the Bible, but details are not given directly.

At the time Judah was conquered and Jerusalem taken by the Babylonians, King Zedekiah, of David's line, was sitting on the throne of Judah. He was captured, his sons

were killed, and his eyes were put out: "But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him. Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon" (2 Kings 25:5-7). Then the Babylonians appointed a governor, not a king and not of the line of David, over some poor Jews that they left in the land. But then that governor was killed by Ishmael the son of Nethaniah plus ten men, and after this the Jews who were left wanted to flee to Egypt because they were afraid of the king of Babylon (2 Kings 25:22-26).

But among those who were left in the land were the king's daughters (Jeremiah 41:10). After the governor was murdered, this group wanted to flee to Egypt. But Jeremiah was with them, and inquired of the Lord, and God told them through Jeremiah to not flee to Egypt but to remain in the land and be subject to the king of Babylon. Nevertheless, they did not obey. You can read the full account in the book of Jeremiah, chapters 40 through 44. But the significant thing here is that the Bible mentions the king's daughters, and that Jeremiah was with them.

In the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, he describes how God commissioned him as a prophet to the nations. "Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant' " (Jeremiah 1:9-10). Note that God said that Jeremiah was to build and to plant, and this was said in the context of being over nations and kingdoms. What was Jeremiah to plant?

In Ezekiel chapter 17 God gives a parable and interprets its meaning, rebuking Zedekiah for rebelling against the king of Babylon and sending ambassadors to Egypt (2 Kings 24:17-20, 2 Chronicles 36:11-13), breaking the oath he made with the king of Babylon. This whole chapter is in the context of Zedekiah, the last king mentioned in the line of David. Now notice Ezekiel 17:22-24: "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'I will take also *one* of the highest branches of the high cedar and set *it* out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant *it* on a high and prominent mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done *it*.' "

God says he will take a young twig, "a tender one", from a high cedar and will plant it on a prominent mountain. What does this represent? If you read the whole chapter, you will see that God has previously used the symbol of a young twig from a cedar to represent the offspring of David's dynasty. Compare Ezekiel 17:2-6 with verses 12-14. Verses 2-6 of Ezekiel chapter 17 says, "Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "A great eagle with large wings and long pinions, Full of feathers of various colors, Came to Lebanon And took from the cedar the highest branch. He cropped off its topmost young twig And carried

it to a land of trade; He set it in a city of merchants. Then he took some of the seed of the land And planted it in a fertile field; He placed *it* by abundant waters *And* set it like a willow tree. And it grew and became a spreading vine of low stature; Its branches turned toward him, But its roots were under it. So it became a vine, Brought forth branches, And put forth shoots." ' ' " Later God interprets this in verses 12-14: "Say now to the rebellious house: 'Do you not know what these *things mean*?' Tell *them*, 'Indeed the king of Babylon went to Jerusalem and took its king and princes, and led them with him to Babylon. And he took the king's offspring, made a covenant with him, and put him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land, that the kingdom might be brought low and not lift itself up, *but* that by keeping his covenant it might stand.' " It is obvious that the first eagle is the king of Babylon, and the young twig is the king's offspring which the king of Babylon made king over Judah.

Then a few verses later, God uses the symbolism of a young twig when He says he will plant it on a high mountain. A mountain is often a symbol for a nation. Would God change the symbolism of the young twig? Isn't it logical that the young twig God said He would plant would also represent the king's offspring?

Jeremiah was commissioned by God to build and to plant. God said He would take a young twig, a tender one, and plant it. After the imprisonment of Zedekiah and the death of his sons, Jeremiah was with the Jews left in the land of Judah and the Bible specifically mentions that the king's daughters were there. And though most of the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, except for a few left in the land of Judah, Israel had already left that area 130 years before and had been lost to history.

Considering the emphasis God has placed on his promise to David that his house and his throne would continue forever, doesn't it seem reasonable that God would use Jeremiah to plant that dynasty somewhere in Israel with one of the king's daughters?

Mr. Armstrong covers this subject in more detail his book, *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*. He believed he found historical evidence that David's dynasty was eventually transferred to the British Isles and that it continues in the British royal family today.

God's 7,000 Year Plan -- Are We in the Last Days?

Joseph's descendents are prophesied to be greatly blessed with power and prosperity in the "last days" (Genesis 49:1, 22-26). Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were prophesied to become a company of nations and a great nation respectively (Genesis 49:17-19).

The next question is, when are the "last days"? Are we in the last days now?

Mr. Armstrong taught that God had a 7,000 year plan for accomplishing His purpose with mankind. God instituted the seven day week at the time of creation, with the first six days for work and the seventh day a day of rest and spiritual renewal (Genesis 1:1-31, 2:1-3). God renewed the face of the earth and made it fit for man and then created man by doing the work of creation for six days. Then God created the Sabbath day by resting on the seventh day.

God commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath day in Exodus 20:8-11: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

The Sabbath day is intended to be a day of delight, of resting from our ordinary work and using the time, not to pursue our own pleasures and entertainment, but to spend time drawing closer to God. "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, *From* doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking *your own* words, Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 58:13-14).

The seven day week pictures God's plan for mankind. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:8: "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ will return to the earth to set up His Kingdom: "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven' " (Acts 1:6-11).

Revelation 20:4 says, "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

This 1,000 year reign of Christ with the saints is referred to in the Church's teachings as the millennium. It begins when Christ returns to bring peace and prosperity to the earth,

and it is a period of time described in many prophecies in the Old Testament as a time of great happiness for all mankind. I will explain this in more detail in the next chapter when I cover the subject of what is the true gospel. But the point here is that the weekly Sabbath is a picture of what the one thousand year millennium will be like. It will be a time of rest, a time of spiritual renewal, and a time of joy, happiness, peace, and prosperity.

But the first six thousand years of man's existence has been a time of conflict, war, and suffering.

God's purpose is to allow mankind to live its own way, cut off from God, where each person can do whatever he wants including breaking all of God's commandments, so that mankind can learn the lesson that man's ways, apart from God, lead only to suffering and destruction. After this, Christ will return and mankind will learn to live God's way according to God's commandments, and man will learn that God's ways lead to peace and happiness.

According to Bible chronology and secular history, we are near the end of about 6,000 years since the creation of Adam. There is sufficient information in the Old Testament about the ages of men from Adam on and how old each was when they had a son, to calculate a chronology from the creation of Adam to the events in the history of Israel that can be matched up with events in secular history that are dated. Different people have come up with slightly different chronologies, and because fractions of years are not recorded, it is probably impossible to get an exact figure on how many years have passed since Adam, but most chronologies agree that from the time of Adam to the birth of Christ is about 4,000 years, and secular history records the number of years since Christ. James Ussher, whose dates are recorded in many editions of the King James Version of the Bible, records Adam's creation as occurring 4,004 B.C.

If the teaching about the 7,000 year plan of God is correct, we are indeed near the end of this age and the return of Christ, and our time can be described as the "last days".

Is this too thin? We have Peter's statement that a day is like a thousand years to God and a thousand years like a day. But the context of this statement is being patient in regards to waiting for God for the things God has promised, not specifically a description of God's plan. We have the fact that according to the Bible, by the time of Christ's birth, it was about 4,000 years since the creation of Adam, and we have secular history to show us that it has been about 2,000 years since the birth of Christ. But could this be just a coincidence that this is the time we are living in? The Bible clearly teaches that Christ will reign on the earth, with the saints, for 1,000 years. But does that prove, just on the basis of Peter's statement and the weekly cycle with the Sabbath day of rest as the last day of a seven day week, that Christ will return at the end of 6,000 years since Adam? Is this evidence too weak to prove the point?

I might not think it is too weak, but some might. But actually, there is another piece of corroborating evidence that I think cinches it. Anyone can say that all these things are coincidence, but this next thing proves for me that we are in the "last days" and near the end of a six thousand year period before the one thousand year millennial rule of Christ.

Chapter 12 of the book of Daniel describes end time events at the end of this age just prior to the return of Christ and the resurrection of the saints. This chapter is at the end of a long and detailed prophecy given in chapter 11. Describing conditions at the end of this age, Daniel is told, "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Daniel 12:4). Note that a characteristic of the end time is that knowledge will increase and men will run to and fro. This fits EXACTLY with the characteristics of this time we are in today.

Today we are in a knowledge explosion. Knowledge of and use of science and technology has made this modern time so different in the way people live their lives as to be virtually unimaginable to people living centuries ago. Almost all modern devices and conveniences such as radio, television, automobiles, jet planes, rockets, computers, telephones and cell phones, even electricity and the electric light have come into existence in just the last two hundred years. We have gone past the industrial age, atomic age, and space age into the "information" age. And all this coincides with a revolution in transportation enabled by the advances in knowledge. Men travel "to and fro" across many miles in just a few hours in their automobiles, and can travel across continents and even across the earth in a few hours by air. Today we have weapons of mass destruction, including atomic and hydrogen bombs, poison gas, and germ warfare agents that didn't exist even 100 years ago. A little more than a hundred years ago, scientists did not even know for sure if atoms existed! Today, they not only understand the structure of atoms, but have advanced theories on the internal structure of some of the components of atoms such as protons and neutrons. And the advances in knowledge in science, technology, medicine, and many other fields continue at an ever-increasing pace.

This explosion in knowledge and in transportation has revolutionized the world and made our time utterly different from any previous time in history. And while man's fund of knowledge may have been increasing slowly throughout most of man's history, this knowledge explosion we are experiencing today has only just happened at an extremely rapid pace in the last two hundred years, and especially in the last one hundred years.

In Matthew 24:21-22, Christ says, describing end time events before His return, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." He is describing a time of trouble so great, that unless God cut short the time, no flesh would survive. In our time now, for the first time in man's history, the weapons exist that are able to destroy man from the face of the earth. That was never true in centuries past. You cannot exterminate all flesh on earth with swords and arrows. But you can with nuclear bombs, poison gas, and germ warfare. And none of these things existed as practical weapons of war more than about one hundred years ago.

I do not believe that it is just a coincidence that this explosion in knowledge comes just at the end of 6,000 according to Bible chronology. I believe this indicates that we are indeed in the "last days".

Therefore, according the prophesied blessings that Jacob pronounced on Joseph, that his descendents would be exceedingly prosperous and strong in the last days, and that his two sons would be a nation and a company of nations, we should expect to find the fulfillment of that prophecy today. Though the lost ten tribes of Israel, including the sons of Joseph, were lost to history after their conquest by Assyria, someplace today Ephraim and Manasseh should be a company of nations and a great nation respectively.

Historic Fulfillment

Let's put this together.

To summarize, the Bible prophesies that the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, would become exceedingly prosperous and powerful, and would become a company of nations and a great single nation. This was prophesied to be their condition in the last days, and Bible chronology as well as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel that knowledge would increase and men would run to and fro indicate that we are in the last days now. Further, God promises that a line of kings going back to King David would continue to exist and be ruling over at least a part of Israel. There is a strong indication that the prophecies concerning the sons of Joseph would begin to be fulfilled after the "seven times" or 2,520 years were completed around 1800 A.D.

Can we find such a picture of any nations or groupings of nations in history since 1800?

The British Empire and the United States grew vastly in power and wealth beginning around 1800. The United States perfectly fits the description of a great nation that Manasseh would become. The British Empire reached the height of its power around 1900 A.D., and became the British Commonwealth of nations which included Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, and its history fits the description of Ephraim who was to become a great company or multitude of nations. Britain and the United States have controlled most of the important sea gates including the Panama canal, the Suez canal, the straits of Gibraltar, and many others (see Genesis 22:17). At the height of its power, the British Empire was the greatest empire the world has ever seen in terms of population, land area, and wealth. And Great Britain is one of the few major nations that still has a monarchy with a royal line going back to ancient times.

For confirmation of the historical facts of the tremendous growth of the United States and the British Empire, I recommend Winston Churchill's four volume work, *History of the English Speaking People*.

How could Ephraim end up in the British Isles and Manasseh in North America? God says in Amos 9:9: "For surely I will command, And will sift the house of Israel among all nations, As *grain* is sifted in a sieve; Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground." God knows who the descendents of Israel are, every individual, and God has

the power to work out circumstances to bring to Britain those who are descended from Ephraim and to the United States those who are descended from Manasseh, even if they migrate through many different lands and nations first. This does not mean every individual in Britain and America is a descendent of Joseph, and much intermarriage with non-Israelites probably has occurred, nevertheless, the historical fulfillment of prophecy indicates that there are enough people descended from each tribe in those nations for God to be able to bless those descendants by blessing those nations, and thus fulfill the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and fulfill the prophecies of the Bible.

I am only covering the high points in this chapter. Mr. Armstrong in his book *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy* covers these things in more detail and adds additional evidence that I am not covering here.

Is all this coincidence?

When I first read Mr. Armstrong's book on this subject, I looked up all the scriptures and I checked up on the facts in history. But I did not accept these things lightly. I did not take Mr. Armstrong's word for any of this. In order to make sure that Mr. Armstrong was not just picking out particular scriptures that supported his viewpoint and excluding others that would contradict his view, I read the whole Bible looking for any scriptures that had any bearing on the subject. I read Winston Churchill's *History of the English Speaking People*, as well as other books or articles on history.

But the facts of history do indeed support Bible prophecy concerning Israel.

But again, could all this be coincidence? I had to ask myself that question. I had to try to estimate the odds of these things happening just by chance. Because if this is not a coincidence, then it shows that the Bible is not just a collection of writings of men, but it is truly inspired by a God who is able to know the future in advance.

Skeptics can argue about whether certain prophecies were really written when the Bible says they were written. They may argue that the text could have been changed between 585 B.C. for example and the time of Christ. But the text could not be changed SINCE the first century Christian Church was established because from that point on both Jews and Christians kept and maintained copies of the Old Testament scriptures, and there could be no collaboration between those two groups to change the text. So the prophecies of the Old Testament are at least 1900 years old even if one wants to argue that certain texts may have been altered before the first century.

What are the odds that all these things could have been fulfilled by chance?

Where else in history, in any time in the last two thousand years, can you find a great nation and a company of nations, related to each other like brothers, coming into their greatness at about the same time, and enjoying the vast power and wealth as described by God in the prophecies concerning Israel and Joseph? I know of no other occasion in history. But if such an occasion did occur by chance, what is the chance that it would happen after the end of 2,520 years in 1800 but before the end of the 6,000 years

allotted to mankind before Christ returns? Now consider the odds that of the few monarchies with a royal line going back to ancient times left on the earth today, one would be sitting on the throne of the leading nation of the only prosperous company of nations in our time.

Now figure the odds that the prophecy in Daniel that knowledge would increase and men would run to and fro would come to pass in our time just before the end of the 6,000 year period.

Some have wondered about the genetic mixing of the various tribes of Israel with non-Israelites and have suggested that this invalidates the proof of the identity of modern Israel. No doubt there has been intermarriage and mixing with non-Israelite nations over the centuries, and that can blur genetic differences between the tribes of Israel and other nations as well as increase the differences between the tribes of Israel. In fact, such intermarriage and mixing began even with the birth of Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph had an Egyptian wife (Genesis 41:45), so the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh started out genetically half-Egyptian. Judah took a Canaanite wife (Genesis 38:2). Each of the original twelve sons of Jacob could have taken wives of various nationalities, which would tend to make the twelve tribes genetically different from each other and also similar to other nations. Also, God said that Israel would be sifted through the nations (Amos 9:9), so it is likely that intermarriage and mixing with other nations would occur after the captivity and exile of Israel.

But this does not invalidate prophecy. This isn't about genetics, racial characteristics, or separation of the races. This has to do only with the ancestry of Israel and the prophecies God made about those who are descendents of Jacob. Those alive today who have Jacob as an ancestor are the children of Israel regardless of who else they have for ancestors. And God, who created this vast universe with billions of galaxies and can number the hairs on our heads is well able to know who the descendents of Jacob are and to guide their migration. Those who have Ephraim or Manasseh as an ancestor are those who have fulfilled the prophecies concerning the specific blessings to come upon those two tribes at the end of the age. This is about fulfilled prophecy and prophecy to be fulfilled in the future, not racial characteristics.

I know that this will not convince anyone who prefers to believe that the Bible is not inspired by the Creator God. When I set out to prove these things one way or another, I tried to approach it with an open mind. I tried to be impartial, and to be impartial I chose to be skeptical of the things Mr. Armstrong wrote. I chose to not trust him or take his word for anything, but to get ideas from what he wrote and then check up on everything for myself independently. I didn't just try to find facts to support what he wrote -- I also tried to find facts to refute what he wrote. Also, I wasn't trying to prove it to anybody else, I was only trying to prove it for myself because I wanted to know. I cannot really prove it to you. If you want proof, you will have to check up and prove it for yourself, if you have the desire to know the truth one way or another. But I am sharing with you some of the main points of what I found in studying the Bible and comparing prophecies with history.

For me, the close correspondence between the history of the English speaking peoples and the history of mankind in the last few hundred years, with the prophecies in the Bible concerning the last days as I found in Mr. Armstrong's book and my own independent research, plus the unlikelihood of these things happening by coincidence, was convincing proof for me that a God who is able to foretell or control the future was the One to inspire these prophecies.

In biblical prophecy, Manasseh represents the United States. Ephraim is Britain and the other English speaking members or former members of the British Commonwealth of Nations, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Modern Jews today are descended primarily from Judah, Benjamin, and much of Levi. Although I have not verified this independently, Mr. Armstrong in his book has identified several nations in northwestern Europe such as France, Sweden, Denmark, Ireland, Finland, Belgium, and Holland as being descended from the other tribes of Israel. Prophecies referring to Israel or Jacob in the Bible can sometimes refer to all twelve tribes, or to the ten tribes other than the Jews, or to the tribes of Joseph only, depending on the context and the particular application. But prophecies naming Jacob or Israel will always include the United States and British descended nations.

In the remaining chapters of this book, when I refer to "Israel", I am primarily referring to the English speaking nations such as the United States, Britain, and Canada, and also the Jews.

How I Researched these Truths

I first learned about the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong on this subject from his book, *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*. I probably approached the teachings of Mr. Armstrong differently than most members of Worldwide did when they first came into contact with him. I think a lot of members accepted whatever he said if it sounded good. In other words, if it seemed to make sense, if they could verify a few supporting scriptures given in the literature, if it appealed to them emotionally, they accepted it.

Mr. Armstrong's teachings made sense to me, they appealed to me emotionally, but I did not accept them. I figured, if I wanted the real truth, I could not trust my gut feeling, my instincts, my emotion. If I just accepted something because I think it sounds good, how was I different from millions of other people of all kinds of religions who believe what they want to believe without proof?

So basically, I forced myself to be skeptical. I did my own research beyond what Mr. Armstrong said. I was determined not to accept any major belief without proof, and not to trust Mr. Armstrong about anything.

In the book about the United States and Britain, I did not accept or use all of Mr. Armstrong's arguments. Some I did not use because I didn't have the time or resources to do a good job of verifying them, and some I did not use because I did not feel they were strong enough by themselves, though they may be supporting evidence in combination with other things. For example, Mr. Armstrong devotes some space in his book to ancient Irish annals about ancestors of the British royal line to show that daughters of the line of David went to Ireland. Due to limitations in my time and my skill as a researcher, I did not feel I could have verified this independently in a reasonable period of time, so I didn't base any of my conclusions on it. I stuck to points of evidence that I felt confident I could do a good job of checking and verifying independently. Mr. Armstrong used a number of other points of evidence to show that the English speaking people are descended from Joseph that I have not mentioned in this chapter. In many cases, these points are not themselves conclusive proof, but taken together add weight to what I feel I have already proved, and I encourage the reader to study Mr. Armstrong's book for these points.

I mention these things to show that I did not just lightly accept what Mr. Armstrong taught without doing independent thinking and my own research apart from what he wrote. As I mentioned, I forced myself to take a skeptical approach, and I tried to consider and find ways that Mr. Armstrong could be wrong. I also read some literature that tries to refute the positions Mr. Armstrong took.

Nevertheless, when I took certain scriptures at face value and just accepted what seemed to me to be their natural meaning, there were some things I couldn't ignore or refute. For example, Scripture does indeed say that the descendents of Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, would have unusually prosperous destinies, that Manasseh would become a great nation and that Ephraim would become a great grouping of nations. And God does promise that David's line of kings would continue unbroken ruling over part of Israel. The points Mr. Armstrong makes do not seem unreasonable. There is, for example, ample precedence in the Bible for interpreting "times" as years of 360 days each, with a year for each day in fulfillment. The Anglo-Israel promoters didn't invent this idea.

I've read some criticisms that try to refute Mr. Armstrong's explanation for these scriptures. They suggest alternative interpretations. They do not hold up logically. Some raise interesting points about minor matters, but do not affect the overall conclusion. Others seem to miss the point entirely. I have not come across any point of scripture or history or logic that effectively refutes Mr. Armstrong's conclusion.

I looked at history. To get a good background and some statistics on the rise of the United States and Britain, I read Winston Churchill's four-volume history of the English speaking people, as well as other sources.

When I looked at history, I found that indeed a great nation and a great company of nations came to power about 2,520 years after the original captivity of the house of Israel, that these two powers seemed to be related like brother nations, and that the chief nation of the company of nations was one of the few major nations in the world to still have a reigning royal line that can be traced back to antiquity.

Now all this might be a coincidence. But I had to consider how unlikely a coincidence this would be.

In all of human history, there has never been an empire like Britain's. They are the only power ever to possess, with the United States, the majority of the strategic sea passages of the world. At the peak, the combined wealth and power of the English speaking people was enormous compared with the rest of the world. All this, by itself, proves nothing.

But consider this. This fabulously prosperous people do comprise a great nation and a great grouping of nations. All this wealth and power did come rather suddenly starting around 1800, as statistics prove. There are few, if any, kings or queens sitting on thrones whose royal ancestry can be traced to antiquity, and only two among the major nations of the world that I know of, Britain and Japan. Of the three main races of mankind, the Japanese are of a completely different race than ancient Israel. That means there is only one major nation with an ancient monarchy in the same racial group as Israel. And that one nation is the same nation that is head of this group of nations just described.

I tried to think about other alternatives. What about the Arabs? Can they be considered a group of brother-nations? Weren't they a powerful empire at one time? But even at their peak they never achieved the fabulous wealth prophesied for Joseph. And where can you find a hereditary line of kings going back unbroken to ancient times among the Arabs? Also, they didn't come into their power 2520 years after Israel went into captivity. Nothing fits.

Could it be a case of looking at what has occurred in history, and twisting scriptures to make it seem that the Bible predicted it? I considered that. But I read the whole Bible cover-to-cover looking for evidence against what Mr. Armstrong wrote. The prophecies concerning blessings to come upon the children of Joseph and the promise to David that he will never lack a man to sit on a throne of Israel are genuine. There is enough emphasis on these things and enough repetition in the Bible, that it must be something important to God.

I had to consider the odds.

What was the probability that any nation, empire, or people would ever in human history fit the profile that the Bible seemed to predict? One chance in ten? One chance in one hundred?

With the combined characteristics of fabulous wealth and power, a single nation and a group of nations, a royal throne traceable to ancient times, and the wealth and power coming at a particular time after about 2500 years, it is extremely unlikely that any people or empire would have all of these traits.

Add to this, the many minor points and supporting arguments presented in Mr. Armstrong's book, each by itself inconclusive, but in total adding support to his main conclusion.

At this point, I became convinced that the evidence pointing to the United States being descended primarily from Manasseh and the British Commonwealth being primarily descended from Ephraim was overwhelming, and that the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning these nations in the last two hundred years would be so unlikely a coincidence apart from the inspiration, knowledge, and intervention of God, that the fulfillment of these prophecies proves that they were inspired by a God who is able to know and determine the course of future events before they occur.

What About the New Testament?

Once I proved that the Old Testament was inspired by God, I had to also prove whether or not the New Testament was also inspired by God.

There are many prophecies referring to Christ in the Old Testament that are perfectly fulfilled in the accounts in the New Testament. But I could not regard this as proof because I figured that if the New Testament was not true, the New Testament authors could have written their books to be consistent with what they found in the Old Testament. It was clear that the Old Testament predicted a Messiah, but I wanted some kind of proof or evidence that from Old Testament scriptures and from history that Jesus Christ was indeed that Messiah before I could accept the New Testament as the word of God.

In the book of Daniel is a prophecy of WHEN the Messiah would appear. This prophecy is known as the seventy weeks prophecy. You can read all of Daniel chapter 9 to get the full story. Daniel 9:25 says, "Know therefore and understand, *That* from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, *There shall be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times." The seven weeks and sixty-two weeks total to sixty-nine weeks. This is another example of the day for a year principle. Sixty-nine weeks times seven days per week are equal to 483 days. Applying the day for a year principle gives us 483 years. So this verse seems to indicate that from the giving of the command to rebuild Jerusalem until the appearing of the Messiah would be 483 years.

When was the command given to rebuild Jerusalem?

Although the Bible scholars and commentaries generally agree that each day represents a year, they have different opinions about when the command to rebuild Jerusalem was given. Some believe this was fulfilled in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes with the decree described in Ezra 7:11-28 around 457 B.C. Others believe that this was not fulfilled until the decree made later in the 20th year of Artaxerxes about 13 years

later around 444 or 445 B.C. as described in Nehemiah 2:4-8. The decree described in the book of Ezra came first, so if this decree included a command to rebuild Jerusalem, then this would be the fulfillment, and the 483 year period would start around 457 B.C.

Some believe that the decree given to Ezra could not fulfill the requirements of the prophecy because it does not specifically mention rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, but rather focuses on beautifying the temple and worshipping God at the temple with sacrifices. However, I think this decree is so broad and all-encompassing in its scope, it virtually requires a rebuilding of the city to have its full effect. Although it is lengthy, I will quote all of it: "Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect *peace*, and so forth. I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which *is* in your hand; and *whereas you are* to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling *is* in Jerusalem; and *whereas* all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, *are to be* freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem— now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God. Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay *for it* from the king's treasury. And I, *even I*, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who *are in the region* beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently, up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit. Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom *on* any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God. And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people *who are in the region* beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know *them*. Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether *it be* death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment" (Ezra 7:12-26).

Note the broad scope of this decree and the wide latitude and authority Ezra was given. There is a lot more involved here than just giving Ezra expense money for the temple and for sacrifices. Ezra is commanded to set up a system for teaching God's law to the people and a judicial system to judge the people and enforce God's law. Notice verses 25 and 26: "And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people *who are in the region* beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know *them*. Whoever will not

observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether *it be* death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment." Was Ezra expected to accomplish all this and maintain temple worship in the midst of a pile of ruins?

Finally, notice verse 18: "And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God." Was it the will of God that the Jews use some of this expense money to rebuild the city so that the temple of God was not sitting in the midst of ruins? Would that be something that would "seem good" to Ezra and his brethren? If so, it is included in the decree.

Also, although in the 20th year of Artaxerxes Nehemiah received permission to go to Jerusalem specifically for the purpose of helping to rebuild Jerusalem and its wall, which was not complete at that time, I do not see any mention of a decree that is broad-based like the one that was given to Ezra by Artaxerxes which we just read. Rather, it seems that Nehemiah only asked for and received letters from Artaxerxes to the governors of the area to allow Nehemiah free passage to Judah and to provide him with timber. Artaxerxes did not command Nehemiah or anyone at that time to rebuild Jerusalem and its wall. He only gave him permission to go to Jerusalem to help rebuild it and he authorized the supplying of timber to him.

So it seems to me that prophecy in Daniel that a command would go forth to rebuild Jerusalem was fulfilled around 457 B.C. Then 483 years later would bring us to around 27 A.D., the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus Christ (in calculating, note that there is no 0 year -- the year 1 A.D. immediately follows the year 1 B.C.).

When I was studying this prophecy to try to prove if the New Testament was God's word, I had already proved to my satisfaction that the Old Testament was inspired by a God who was able to foretell the future. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that predict that a Messiah will come. This particular prophecy indicates WHEN He will come. And it points directly to the New Testament account of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ is not the prophesied Messiah, who is? The prophecy in Daniel predicts the coming of the Messiah. If it is not Jesus Christ, who is it? Even if I am off a few years in my calculations, the prophecy nevertheless points to the general time period of the beginning of Christianity, and no other Messiah has appeared anywhere near that time. There are no other candidates. Either Jesus Christ is the Messiah, or the prophecy in Daniel has failed. And it was the same God who inspired Daniel as inspired Moses and other writers when they predicted the rise of the sons of Joseph to become the greatest nation and commonwealth of nations in our time that the world has ever seen.

Also, if the New Testament is not true, if the miracles of Jesus Christ are a fraud, I have difficulty understanding why His followers would promote such a lie and then prove their sincerity by sacrificing their lives to die for something they know is a lie! For a man or a group of men to be able to invent such a fraud, then promote it so successfully, and yet leave no record or evidence in history that it was a fraud, seems implausible to me.

In addition, by the time I had gone this far in my studies, I had been able to see a harmony and a consistency in the entire Bible, Old Testament and New Testament together, that seems extremely unlikely if the Bible is just a collection of books written by different authors who were not inspired by one God.

Evolution versus the Creation Account in Genesis

In this section, I want to talk about the issue of evolution, intelligent design, and the creation account in Genesis.

Many people who believe in evolution try to refute the creation account in Genesis by saying that science proves that the earth is more than 6,000 years old. But this argument is based on a misunderstanding of Genesis. The Bible does not say that the earth is 6,000 years old. And I am not saying that the account in Genesis is using metaphor. The Genesis account is literal, but it does not indicate at all when the earth itself was created.

Let's start with Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This is a simple statement that God created the earth and the entire universe. It does not say when He did it or how.

Now at this point in the narrative, the earth exists. Verse 1 just said God created the earth. Now look at the next verse, Genesis 1:2: "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Verse two is describing the condition of the earth at this point in the narrative. It is covered with darkness and with water. But it exists. God had already created it in verse one.

How long did the earth exist in the condition described in verse two? How long was the earth covered with water and in darkness? A day? A week? A year? A million years? The Bible DOES NOT SAY.

Is there a period of time between verse 1 and verse 2? In other words, could the condition of the earth described in verse 2 NOT be the way God originally created it? Could God have created the earth, not covered with water, but with land areas and in light not darkness, even with life on it, in verse 1? And could something have happened later in time to cause the condition described in verse 2 with the earth covered in water and in darkness? Genesis itself DOES NOT SAY. However, there is an indication elsewhere in the Bible that shows that God did not originally create the earth "without form and void", that this must have been a condition that came upon the earth later, after God created the earth as stated in verse 1, but before verse 2.

Isaiah 45:18 says, "For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: 'I *am* the LORD, and *there is* no other.' "

Where this verse says that God did not create the earth in vain, the words "in vain" are translated from the same Hebrew word in the original text that is translated "without form" in Genesis 1:2. You can check this out with a Strong's Exhaustive Concordance which lists every word in the Bible and every place it is used, and also gives the Hebrew and Greek words that each English word is translated from. So in effect, Isaiah 45:18 is saying that God did not create the earth without form and void. So the earth would not have been in this condition originally, without form and void, with water and darkness covering the earth. This condition of waste came later.

What could cause the earth to become "without form and void", completely covered in water, and in darkness? This pictures the result of destruction and chaos, and can come about as a result of sin and rebellion against God and His ways. For example, this is why the flood came upon the earth in the days of Noah. Notice the reasons for the flood: "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them' " (Genesis 6:5-7). "And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth' " (Genesis 6:13). "And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which *is* the breath of life; everything that *is* on the earth shall die" (Genesis 6:17). Then the flood came and covered the whole earth (Genesis 7:17-20).

The sins of mankind, especially violence, were the cause of the flood in the days of Noah. What could be a cause for the surface of the earth to be destroyed by water before man was even created?

When Adam was created, Satan, described as the serpent, was already on the earth. We first read of him in Genesis 3:1, yet he is not included in the description starting in Genesis 1:2 through all of chapter 2. Satan existed before Adam was created and before the six days of creation described in Genesis 1:2-31.

Before man existed, when the earth was first created, angels existed and were joyous at the creation of the earth (Job 38:4-7). Lucifer was not created evil by God. He was originally perfect in his ways until he sinned (Ezekiel 28:14-15). He was also on this earth, and he rebelled against God, desiring to rise above the heights of the clouds (Isaiah 14:12-14). There are indications that he led one third of God's angels into rebellion with him and they became demons (Revelation 12:3-4), suggesting that Lucifer and about a third of the angels inhabited this earth before man.

If this is the case, the sin and rebellion of Satan and his demons on the earth could have been the cause of the destruction of the surface of the earth that we see in Genesis 1:2,

"The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters", just as the sins of mankind resulted in the destruction of the earth in Noah's day. But if this is the case, and I believe it is, then as far as the Bible is concerned there could have been a period of time AFTER the earth was created and BEFORE the destruction described in the second verse of Genesis that lasted hundreds of millions of years, and the earth could have been filled with life at that time.

The Bible does not say anything about the plant and animal life forms that existed before Genesis 1:2 and how long ago they existed, but science does. Fossils have been found that appear to be millions of years old, and there have been found fossils of many species, such as the dinosaurs, that never existed in the days of Noah when he brought all the animals into the ark.

The account of the six days of creation contained in the first chapter of Genesis does not describe the original creation of the earth, but a re-creation, a refreshing, a renewal of the surface of the earth and of the positions of the other bodies in the solar system in preparation for the creation of Adam and Eve.

Some will say that radiocarbon dating establishes dates for humans and their artifacts that cannot be reconciled with Bible chronology. But radiocarbon dating is based on an assumption that the intensity of cosmic rays that bombard the atmosphere of the earth from space has always been constant, and this assumption is unproven. If the intensity of cosmic rays reaching the earth was different in the past, dates established by radiocarbon dating by scientists today would be inaccurate. Also, fossils of creatures that are similar in their skeletal structure to humans today could be fossils of animals, similar to humans, but not human, just as the great apes today are similar in body structure to humans but are not human.

Therefore, fossil evidence does not prove that the creation account in Genesis is wrong.

But though there is no contradiction between physical evidence and the creation account in Genesis, I believe there are very serious problems with the theory of evolution itself.

I will state right here that although I have done some reading on the subject of the theory of evolution, I am not an expert on it. But what I have learned suggests serious problems with the theory, and I invite the interested reader to do his or her own research on the subject with these problems in mind.

One of the main problems with evolution is that the theory does not explain how complex organ systems and biological mechanisms can gradually come into existence through a process of random mutation and natural selection, when MANY changes would have to occur together in the genetic blueprint before any of them would confer any advantage to survival and the propagation of the species. This is called "irreducible complexity".

Herbert W. Armstrong published a number of articles and booklets that take a detailed look at certain particular species and their characteristics and ask, "How could these characteristics have evolved gradually?"

One example is the woodpecker. While most birds eat seeds or insects that are found out in the open, the woodpecker eats insects found inside of the trunks or branches of trees. This bird gets these insects out of the tree by drilling a hole into the wood with its beak, then getting the insects that are inside with its tongue. This requires a combination of highly sophisticated organs and instincts, all working together, which other birds do not have, in order for any of them to have a benefit.

In order to find the insects, such as ants, that have tunneled into the tree, the woodpecker uses its hearing to find them as they are moving around or digging tunnels. This requires a specially developed sense of hearing. In order to drill into the wood, the woodpecker has specialized feet and tail feathers that enable the bird to maintain a strong and favorable grip and position on the tree, as well as an especially hard beak that other birds do not have. The beak has to be hard enough to drill a hole into the tree. Once the bird has drilled a hole to reach the tunnel containing the insects, it inserts a long, sticky tongue into the tunnel, and the insects stick to the woodpecker's tongue. Other birds do not have tongues of this type. The woodpecker has especially strong neck muscles for delivering blows strong enough to penetrate the tree, and to do so repeatedly in rapid succession without fatigue. Finally and most importantly, the bird must have the right instincts to use all these specialized organs together to actually obtain its food this way, and other birds do not have these instincts. It would do a bird no good to have an especially hard beak, special claws and tail feathers for maintaining a strong position for drilling on the trunk, extra strong neck muscles, specialized hearing that can locate the insects in the tree, and a specialized long, sticky tongue, if it did not have the instincts to use these organs together to find and catch insects inside the trunk of a tree.

How could all these characteristics have evolved gradually if most of them have no particular advantage unless all are present, fully developed, at the same time? Generally, there is a biological cost, in energy, growth time, and nutritional requirements, to any organ or system, and highly developed and sophisticated organs tend to diminish if they are not useful to a species. A bird would not tend to have extra strong neck muscles if those muscles are not being used to drill into a tree. Even if random genetic mutations produced a bird with stronger-than-average neck muscles (one mutation would not likely be enough for such a muscle system, it would likely require many genetic changes, because it takes a whole group of muscles working together along with neck bones that can take the stress), unless that extra strength is used, not only does the group of mutations provide no survival advantage, but it actually will hurt the bird's chances for survival, since more food would be required to grow and maintain muscles that are larger and stronger than necessary.

So in order for ANY of these special characteristics of a woodpecker to be developed and continue, each one has to be an advantage, not a disadvantage, to the bird's survival and reproduction. Yet for these characteristics to be an advantage, all have to be present at the same time. How can this happen gradually? A bird would have to have

thousands, maybe tens or hundreds of thousands of genetic mutations, or more, in order for all these characteristics to appear fully developed, or else the bird would not be able to obtain its food this way. The odds against this ever happening even in hundreds of millions of years are astronomical.

Another example published by the Church when Mr. Armstrong was alive involves the archer fish. This is a fish that obtains insect food by squirting a jet of water from its mouth above the surface of the water to knock an insect off a low-lying branch or twig of a tree that is over the water. The fish eats the insect after it is shot down and falls into the water. To do this successfully requires not only the ability to squirt water out of its mouth at high speed, but extremely complex and highly developed instincts to see the insect above water, aim the stream of water accurately, and allow for the distortion due to the bending of light as it passes from air to water at the surface.

From what I have read, I think scientists have acknowledged that the development of complex systems that require many genetic changes all at once before any of them confer a survival advantage is a problem with the current theory, and they have started to say that evolution must happen in sudden spurts, not gradually. But I have read of no explanation as to HOW this could occur.

I believe there is another flaw in the theory of evolution that has been identified more recently, and it comes from information theory. Biologists realize that the genes of a species are a genetic code, similar in many ways to computer code. The genes are a coded blueprint that determines the characteristics of the species, just as computer code determines the characteristics of a piece of computer software. But the amount and complexity of information coded in the genes of even a relatively simple species are so vast that, even if it were possible for species to evolve, even billions of years would not be sufficient to produce the quantity of code and the information in it. In other words, even if evolution were possible, and based on the impossibility of complex systems developing suddenly I believe evolution is not possible, but even if it were, there has not been enough time on the earth, even after hundreds of millions of years, for evolution to have produced the species that exist today.

In a sense, evolution is not a complete theory. It states that random genetic changes that give a species an advantage can be preserved and spread through natural selection, and it states that this can result in new species, even all species that exist, but it does not provide an explanation of how this can occur that actually works. Scientists and teachers who promote the theory of evolution like to say that just because they do not know all the details of how it occurred does not mean that the theory is wrong. But this is misleading. The reason they do not know the details is not that there are many possible ways it could have occurred and they just don't know which one actually happened. The reason they do not know the details is that they know of NO possible way it could have occurred.

Why do scientists and teachers believe evolution in the absence of any real workable explanation as to how it could have occurred? I think that for scientists and educators, evolution is a faith. It is like a religion for them. They believe it because they want to believe it. In this respect, they are like millions of people who believe their religious

ideas because they want to. Just as millions of people who practice their traditional religious beliefs and customs find that belief in God and in an afterlife comforts them, so those that believe in evolution find comfort in the idea that there is no God who has the authority to tell them how to live their lives and they will never be held accountable by a higher power for what they do in this physical life.

Most people have a built-in bias against God telling them what to do. Some people deal with this by choosing religions that express their own inclinations and opinions, and some deal with this by denying the existence of God altogether. The theory of evolution, as a faith, despite its logical flaws, enables those who believe in it to believe that there is no God who intervenes in human affairs and has the authority to tell men how to live.

Here is a test that can show that the theory of evolution is a kind of faith for those who believe it. The next time a scientist, advocate of evolution, biology teacher, or college professor challenges you on evolution and wants to know why you don't believe it, try asking, "Can you prove evolution according to the rules of formal logic?" Many colleges offer courses in formal logic. Formal logic is logic based on deductive reasoning. This is the same kind of reasoning used to produce proofs in geometry. It is illustrated by the example, "All dogs bark. Sandy is a dog. Therefore, Sandy barks." Used properly it can be very accurate, but it has a limitation. It can only reason from assumed premises. In the above example, it is assumed that all dogs bark. Then, based on this assumption, if Sandy is a dog, you can prove that Sandy barks. But if the premise is wrong, your conclusion can be wrong.

The false premise in evolution that the scientific community assumes is that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes.

People often think of science as a field of knowledge, a category of information, a subject matter. This is often how the term "science" is used. Courses in school for example are divided into categories such as science, mathematics, history, etc. and books in libraries and bookstores are grouped in similar ways. But science is more than a category or field of knowledge. It is a way of looking at the world and a way of trying to discover knowledge.

Science is a culture, a community, a process for trying to discover new knowledge, and a way of thinking. The foundation of this community and way of thinking is the scientific method. The scientific method is the only method for investigating questions of science that the scientific community will accept. It is the basis for discussion of scientific issues. Reasoning outside of the scientific method is not allowed in a scientist's work. And a basic premise of the scientific method as practiced by the scientific community is that no supernatural explanation for any physical evidence is even to be considered. In other words, the possibility that there is a God who might intervene in any physical process is excluded in scientific thinking. The scientific method therefore rules out even considering the possibility that God created life on the earth, even before any physical evidence is examined. And the scientific method is the only method of investigation a scientist may use in his work.

Science requires that scientific theories be empirically testable and be based on multiple observation, often in the form of controlled, repeatable experiments. This alone excludes consideration of supernatural causes for physical evidence. The intervention of God is not subject to repeatable experiment. God chooses when and how to intervene in physical processes, and such choices are not predictable in their details.

The scientific method works fine in the laboratory and in investigating everyday processes because God allows the universe to follow the natural laws He has created and does not ordinarily interfere with natural law. He does not make His presence known by constantly intervening in the physical operation of the universe. God wants man to be able to work with matter and energy and to be able to control his environment to a degree, and physical processes need to be predictable for men to understand and work with them. Also, it is not God's will to reveal Himself to mankind at this time in such a way that men cannot deny His existence. At this time, God is giving mankind a free choice about this, and so He stays in the background right now. But that does not mean that God did not create the universe, or life itself. This assumption, that God never intervenes in physical processes, does not work well in explaining how things came into existence in the first place, or the past history of how everything came to be the way it is. When scientists use the scientific method in the laboratory, they are using it properly, but when they try to use it to explain the origins of life, they are using for a purpose to which it is ill suited, and it fails miserably.

According to the scientific method, there is no God who intervenes in physical processes, and the scientific method is the only way of thinking most scientists and educators will acknowledge as a way of investigating the origin of species. So their thinking about evolution is distorted and biased from the beginning.

This is why the scientific community cannot accept or even objectively consider creation by God as an explanation for life on earth.

Some opponents of evolution use the term "intelligent design" to refer to the concept that life shows design by an intelligent being. This is sometimes promoted as a scientific theory without stating who the intelligent designer is. But scientists know that the term "intelligent design" refers to design and creation by an intelligent God. And in the minds of most scientists, to even consider such a possibility as an explanation for physical evidence would be a violation of the scientific method.

Therefore scientists within the scope of their scientific work and teaching CANNOT accept creation by God or intelligent design. They have no choice but to try to fit all physical evidence into the evolutionary framework if they are to work within the limits of the scientific method. They are required to be biased against creation even before they look at the evidence, and they have no choice but to explain the evidence in evolutionary terms. If a scientist thought he found evidence of creation, he could not even succeed in publishing it in mainstream scientific journals. Although a minority of scientists may personally believe in a creator God who controls and intervenes in the universe, those scientists must keep those personal views out of their scientific work and teaching. And the scientific community as a whole rejects the idea of a creator

God. And this rejection is based on the community's faith in the scientific method, not on logical proof.

In science, the scientific method is the lens through which all physical evidence is evaluated. The scientific method is the basis for all reasoning that scientists are expected to employ in their work as scientists. Reasoning outside of the scientific method is not allowed. This approach, when applied to the origin of things, denies even the possibility of a creator God before any evidence is even examined. One who adopts this method in exploring the origins of things has no choice but to search only for physical explanations for any evidence he finds. The scientific community is made up of hundreds of thousands of scientists who spend their whole lives evaluating physical evidence and proposing explanations from this point of view. Millions of man-years have been expended to explain fossils, radio carbon dating, DNA, etc. from an evolutionary point of view.

Scientists and science teachers may challenge those who believe in creation to explain some point of physical evidence, such as radiocarbon measurements, fossils, or evidence regarding the rate of genetic mutations, and say to a believer in creation, perhaps a young student, "How can you explain this apart from evolution?" Then the student or believer in creation is expected to come up with an alternative explanation in the next couple of seconds or the teacher may say, "See, there is no explanation apart from evolution, therefore this proves that evolution is true." But that is not logical. If a student does not think of an alternative explanation, that is not proof that there is no explanation. To be fair, not only should the student have an equal number of years to explain the evidence according to intelligent design, the same number of years scientists have had to explain it according to the theory of evolution, but the student would need access to the original physical evidence itself as well as the equipment and training needed to examine the evidence, not just published reports of the evidence after it has been selected and interpreted by those who accept and practice the evolutionary faith.

The point is, the whole field of study of the physical evidence in life and in the earth is dominated by a community of scientists who are biased right from the beginning of their education and training against belief in a creator God who can intervene in natural processes, and therefore their conclusions and explanations are untrustworthy. To use an analogy, if this were a court case, if a prospective jury member had such a degree of bias one way or another, he could rightly be dismissed from being on the jury.

Scientists and educators cannot prove evolution according to formal logic without setting as a premise that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes, and this premise is false. Nevertheless, they accept this premise without proof. For them, though they will not call it a faith, it is a faith and it is like a religion to them.

And in the educational system and scientific community, the majority who practice this faith are in a position of power and influence that enables them to put enormous pressure to conform upon those who do not want to accept this faith.

There is another problem with evolution, and that is the way it is taught in the schools. Though it is called a theory, it is not taught just as a possibility of how life and all the

species might have come into existence. It is taught as fact, as the way life actually came to be. One of the principles that the scientific community claims to follow is that for a theory to qualify as scientific, it should be considered provisional or tentative, admitting that it might not be correct rather than asserting certainty. Yet that is not how evolution is taught. Evolution is presented in the classroom and textbooks as a certainty. No room is allowed for doubt about whether evolution actually occurred or not. Yet evolution is unproved and unprovable. What is happening is that the scientific and educational communities are trying to impose their faith in evolution upon their students. And in many cases they are succeeding.

Evolution cannot be proved by science. The scientific method itself rules out such proof.

Evolutionists point to physical evidence to try to show that evolution is possible, and they believe that evolution is actually the process by which all the species came into existence. But trying to prove that evolution as a process is possible and may have occurred, and trying to prove that evolution actually happened are two different things. A scientist could show that evolution is possible and may have occurred if he could demonstrate that evolution is consistent with all known evidence. But to prove that it actually did happen he would have to go a step further. He would have to prove that no other explanation is consistent with all the evidence. He would have to show that evolution is the only way life could have come into existence and is the only explanation that fits the evidence. So how could he do that?

The alternative to evolution is creation by God. To prove that evolution must have happened a scientist would have to prove that the evidence cannot be explained by creation by God.

Evolutionists can become quite vehement in their defense of their faith in evolution, and many of them become offended or angry if you call evolution a faith and unproven. But they are being emotional, not logical. The only way you can know something is true is to prove it, and the only way you can prove something by the physical evidence is to show that your explanation covers all the facts (which evolution does not) and that no other explanation can explain all the facts (which evolution never attempts to prove).

To rule out creation or intelligent design, an evolutionist would have to show that no creationist explanation is consistent with the evidence. If he cannot do that, then he would have to be content merely to acknowledge that evolution is one possible explanation for life, but not the only one. But if he takes that route, he is in conflict with how evolution is actually taught in schools. It is not taught as a possible way life may have come into existence, it is taught as the only way, the one way, the way it definitely happened.

If a scientist wants to prove that evolution definitely happened by showing that no creationist explanation is consistent with the evidence, how would he go about doing that? He has a bigger job than just showing that the physical evidence suggests an earth older than 6,000 years. For one thing, not all creationists believe that the earth is only 6,000 years old; some people, like myself, believe the earth is several billions or at least

hundreds of millions of years old, and that life existed on the earth millions of years ago as indicated in the fossil record, but that God nevertheless designed and created life. Even among those who think the earth is only 6,000 years old, many of these people have explanations for the physical evidence consistent with a 6,000 year old earth. A scientist may not agree with these explanations, but can he prove them wrong logically?

How can a scientist prove that intelligent design never occurred? How can he prove that no logical self-consistent creationist explanation for the evidence is possible? To put it another way, how can he prove that every creationist explanation is inconsistent with the evidence? Many or most of those who believe in creation believe in a God who can do anything, create anything out of nothing, change anything, and perform any miracle. How could a scientist prove that such a God did not design and create life and the different species of life outside the normal workings of physical law in a way that is consistent with the physical evidence?

Since such a God is capable of creating any kind of life, at any time and in any way He chooses, there is no question of whether an all powerful God is able to create life the way it appears in the fossil record and in life forms today. The question becomes, why would God choose to create life the way that He did? And that becomes a theological question, which science cannot deal with. Not knowing God's reasons for every choice He makes does not prove that God did not create life.

How could a scientist, following the scientific method, even approach such a problem? The scientific method does not allow for supernatural explanations of evidence. So even if it were possible to prove that the evidence cannot be explained by creation, a scientist could not do it in the course of his work. To do this, he would have to consider, evaluate, and then rule out supernatural explanations for the origin of life. He would have to get involved in theology in order to try to rule out any explanation that God created life in a way consistent with the evidence. He can try to do this as a private individual, but it can't be part of his work, his writing, his publishing, and his teaching as a scientist because the scientific method rules out consideration of supernatural explanations for evidence.

You cannot objectively prove something by only looking at one side of an issue. The question is, did God create life or did life evolve through natural processes? If you are really after truth, you have to look at both sides of a question objectively and without bias. But scientists, in their work as scientists, cannot do that with evolution and creation. The scientific method forbids it, as does peer pressure of the scientific community. The scientific method as it is applied forbids the consideration of supernatural explanations for evidence. So the scientific method cannot examine both sides of the issue, which is necessary for proof.

So the scientific method itself prevents science from trying to prove evolution rationally.

And if a scientist as an individual really examined both sides of the issue carefully and without bias, I believe he would conclude that the evidence is consistent only with creation and not with evolution, and he could prove for himself that evolution never

occurred. But he would have great difficulty if he tried teaching that in the course of his work, and would risk rejection by the scientific and educational communities.

You can't know from scientific experiments and observations what God may have done in the past. You can't use scientific experiments to prove that God did not create life. The best a scientist can do is to try to show that evolution is possible, but he can't prove it actually happened. And I personally do not believe that evolution is even possible.

Many people who look at this issue with an open mind are troubled by the idea that God created life because the fossil evidence appears to them to indicate that the different life forms appeared gradually on the earth over hundreds of millions of years, with the simplest life forms appearing first and the more complex life forms appearing later. Also, there are fossils of life forms such as the dinosaurs that have become extinct. They cannot imagine why an all-powerful creator God would choose to create the various life forms in this order and over such a long period of time, or why God would create some life forms only to allow them to become extinct later.

I do not know all the events that may have taken place on the earth before the account of the six days in Genesis. The Bible does not give details. I also do not know if scientists accurately know the ages of various fossils they find. Scientists may or may not be mistaken in estimating the ages of the fossils that appear to be tens or even hundreds of millions of years old. But suppose scientists are right about the ages of the fossils of dinosaurs and various other ancient species. Suppose scientists are right that the fossils of simpler life-forms are older than the more complex life forms. Does that prove that evolution is the process by which all the species came to be? Absolutely not.

Because the Bible does not tell us how and when God created different species before the earth was covered with water and God renewed the face of the earth in six days, we cannot know exactly how, when, and why God created the life-forms that resulted in fossils of dinosaurs and other animals. He may have had particular reasons for creating the simpler life forms first and the more complex life forms later, and reasons for allowing the dinosaurs and many other life forms to become extinct, reasons we cannot know since God does not reveal them in the Bible. But because we do not know what those reasons are does not mean that God did not have reasons. We could speculate about God's reasons, and our speculations might be right or wrong. But our lack of knowledge about reasons God might have for creating life in the order in which it appears in the fossil record does not prove that God did not create life. And if you can't prove that God did not create life, you cannot prove that evolution occurred.

No scientist in his work or his private writings has ever proven that God did not create life. And if God did create life, then evolution is false.

The premise contained in the scientific method as it is practiced that there is no God who intervenes in physical processes is itself unproved and unprovable. Yet it is the basis for all scientific investigation into the origin of life. This is why evolution is a faith.

Those who believe in evolution have made a choice to believe something they cannot prove from physical evidence, whether they realize it or not. Evolution has never been proved. It is a faith held by those who choose to believe it.

The theory of evolution is false. God did create life. The vast variety of life on earth demonstrates God's awesome creative powers and His greatness. Mankind should give thanks to God for His creation, but rather than give God thanks for what He has done, man has found ways to deny God's works and His existence, and the theory of evolution is an idea man has invented to avoid giving God the honor and glory due to Him. Nevertheless, God created life, and this life is testimony to His tremendous wisdom and power.

Could the Days in Genesis Be Figurative and Not Literal?

Some people claim that they believe that the Genesis account is true, but that the six days are only figurative days, not literal days, and could represent indefinite periods of time. Could this be true?

I think this is only true if God uses figurative language to deceive people, and I do not think this is the case.

God does use figurative language in the Bible. So how can we know if a particular scripture is meant by God to be taken literally or figuratively? This issue does not just affect our understanding of Genesis but it affects our understanding of many doctrinal matters. In regards to many doctrines, the question of whether a given passage in the Bible is to be taken literally or figuratively often is controversial among differing groups and churches. We do not seem to have this problem with other books. Nor do we usually have difficulty knowing if a person we are talking with is speaking figuratively or literally. Yet when God speaks to us through the pages of the Bible, men do not agree on what God means.

Why is it that we do not have the same confusion about figurative speaking with other books or in our daily conversation with each other? We expect that when people speak to us figuratively, it will be obvious. We take them literally unless they use a figure of speech familiar to us, and we expect others to take what we say literally unless it is obvious that we are speaking figuratively. If there is doubt, we clarify. We do not speak in a manner we know will be misunderstood, unless our intent is to deceive or to hide our meaning.

Suppose that you have a job that you hate, and one morning you get up to go to work, see that it is a beautiful day, and decide to call in sick so you can go to an afternoon baseball game. You call in and ask for the boss. The secretary says, "He's not in today, but he will call in later this morning to get his messages." "Tell him I won't be in today

because I am sick", you say. That afternoon you go to the baseball game. The seat next to you is empty. Then someone takes the seat. It is your boss.

In the ensuing conversation, your boss says, "I can understand that you may need a day off once in a while, but you left a message for me that you were sick, and I cannot stand being lied to." You say, "I wasn't really lying. I was speaking figuratively, not literally. When I said I was sick, I meant I was sick of coming to work every day. It was a metaphor. What I said was not true literally, but it was true figuratively" (don't try this at home).

That story might sound ridiculous, but here is something that I know actually happened to someone. A man I know was once evicted from an apartment because he was unemployed and couldn't pay the rent. Later on when he was considering getting another apartment, he was worried that he would not be accepted because he would be required to list on the application the last place he lived where he was evicted. A woman he knew wanted to help him and told him, "No problem. Just say you rented from me for the last several years and I'll give you a good reference." He said, "That would be a lie." She said, "It's not really a lie. When they ask for references, what they are really asking is, 'are you a good tenant who won't make noise and tear up the place?' "

One of the most common lies I ever hear is, "That's not really a lie."

If our intent is to communicate and tell the truth to someone, and we say something figuratively, if we sense any doubt in the other person, we clarify, "I'm speaking figuratively", or, "I don't mean that literally." We don't deliberately allow others to misunderstand us. We don't use figures of speech to deceive unless we are intentionally lying.

I think it is a valid point that a reader or listener will know when someone is speaking figuratively, either because a well-known figure of speech is used or because it wouldn't make any sense literally, and that if the speaker or writer thinks his audience might accidentally take the metaphor literally, he will clarify the matter or not use the figure of speech. For example, after God brought Israel out of Egyptian slavery and through the Red Sea, He said to them, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself" (Exodus 19:4). No one would have misunderstood. Israel knew that God was speaking figuratively because they saw how they were rescued and they remembered walking out of Egypt. They knew they did not literally ride on the wings of eagles. God could use this figure of speech because He knew that the Israelites would never accidentally take Him literally. It was obvious to all concerned that "eagles' wings" was a metaphor.

Yet today, many try to interpret figuratively verses that use no figure of speech, make sense literally, is consistent with the rest of the Bible when taken literally, and would have been universally understood to be literal at the time they were written and given to God's people, and are understood literally by many Christians today.

In Genesis 1:1-31, God describes the creation or renewing of the surface of the earth in six days. Were these literal, twenty-four hour days, or figurative days? Is the entire first chapter of Genesis a metaphor to teach us only that God is creator?

Though the structure of these verses may or may not be poetic, the descriptions of the six days are not made using well-known Hebrew figures of speech. There are no figures of speech like the English phrase "a frog in my throat". The language here used is literal. It makes sense literally. A literal understanding of these verses is not inconsistent with anything else in the Bible. There is no reason the ancient Israelites or the early Church would not have taken this literally as an accurate description of how God did His work of creation.

God does not teach fables. I have heard some say God used the account of renewing the face of the earth in six days because the ancient Israelites did not have scientific knowledge and could not understand a process that might have taken millions of years. But this doesn't make sense. Even though ancient people did not have the scientific knowledge we have today, God did not have to resort to fables to explain that He is the creator. If the six days of creation never literally occurred, and if the real process of creation took billions of years, God could simply have explained the creation in general terms, stating that He made the land, sea, plant and animal life in general terms without giving specific time periods.

In the history of mankind, only relatively recently have scientists had the information to even try to challenge the Genesis account. Ancient Israel would have understood these verses literally, and so would the early Church. Even today, many Christians take God at His word and understand these verses literally, choosing to believe God rather than scientists, even to the point of enduring ridicule for their beliefs. Why would God make untrue statements that would mislead the very people that look to God and His word as a source of truth?

And if God did this with the Genesis account, how could we trust anything God told us in the rest of the Bible? Everything would be in doubt because anything might be a figure of speech.

I think the reason many people say that the six days of creation are figurative is that they either don't really believe that the Bible is the word of God or they aren't willing to believe what God says. And rather than reject the Bible, they prefer to call "metaphor" anything in the Bible that they do not agree with literally.

Of course, there are many figurative passages in Scripture that are not controversial. The Bible makes it clear that symbols are being used and often explains what those symbols mean. There are many examples. Jesus Christ is called "the Lamb of God." Nations in prophecy are often symbolized as "beasts". Everyone understands that these statements are figurative.

But that's the point. A figure of speech is understood as such. We may not always agree on what a symbol means, but at least God makes clear that we should not take such a statement literally. God knows how to communicate. He doesn't use figures of

speech that would be misunderstood as being literal. God doesn't play tricks with us, He won't make statements that many Christians who trust Him will take literally, then tell us in the Kingdom, "I'm sorry you misunderstood, I was only speaking figuratively."

The rule of thumb is this. If God is speaking figuratively, He will make that much clear by the language or context or by something else in the Bible. A figurative statement will not make sense literally when you take the whole Bible into account. Something in the immediate context or elsewhere in the Bible will show that the statement cannot be taken literally. People should not be deceived by taking something literally which God meant figuratively. If God uses a symbol or metaphor, there may be times when we do not know what it represents. I do not understand all of the symbols, beasts, etc. used in prophetic visions for example. But we know they are symbols.

When God uses literal language to make statements that would be taken literally in their natural sense by ancient Israel or by many Christians today, and there is nothing elsewhere in the Bible that shows that the language cannot be literal, we should not interpret those statements figuratively.

God commands us to live by His Word (Matthew 4:3-4). We are to look to God for the answers to our questions about doctrinal matters, and God requires that we believe Him. How can we do this if we always have doubts that anything God says to us may only be a metaphor? If that is the case, every man will interpret the Bible to mean what he thinks it should mean.

The Bible says that God cannot lie (Titus 1:1-3, Hebrews 6:18). I believe it is part of God's nature that He always speaks the truth, and truthfulness is part of the character God wants us to have. I do not believe God would deceive men by using metaphors that we might take literally even when taking the whole Bible into account. When God uses a figure of speech, He makes it clear to those He is addressing that it is a figure of speech, and not literal. This is true even in those cases where we may not immediately understand the meaning of the figure of speech. We still know it is not literal.

In the creation account in Genesis, no well-known figure of speech is used to describe the six days of creation. It makes sense literally and would make sense literally to ancient Israel and to the first century Church. There is nothing else in the Bible to indicate that the six days are figurative. The account of creation in Genesis is literal, not figurative.

Our Attitude and Approach Towards God's Word

Many in the world today have an attitude of scorn and ridicule towards the Bible. Many of these people are atheists or agnostics. They are often well educated in the things of this world, and they may be very successful materially, even highly respected. Some are writers, some are journalists, and some are TV personalities. Many are teachers and

professors in colleges and universities. They may sometimes have an interest in religious subjects, even the Bible itself, but their whole approach towards the Bible is the very opposite of respect. This may not be apparent when they start a conversation or discussion about the Bible - they may start out very polite - but it becomes obvious later that they think of the Bible as something to be laughed at or looked down upon, and they tend to look down on those who believe and respect the Bible. They love to try to build contradictions where there are none by the way they interpret different scriptures. They love to judge the Bible, interpret passages unfavorably, and criticize and contradict what the Bible teaches. They love to try to find fault with the Bible or argue about it, but they will not learn from it or obey it. Arguing about the Bible is a form of entertainment for them.

I once saw a news story on TV about serious drought in some southern states of the United States and how some people in those states were praying for rain and trusting in God to answer their prayers. When the story ended, the anchorman was on the screen, and his expression was that of a man who was struggling to restrain his laughter.

I have proved to my satisfaction that the Bible is inspired by a God who is able to know the future in advance. What does the Bible itself say about being the Word of God, and what does it say about the attitude we should have towards God's Word?

"To whom will you liken Me, and make *Me* equal And compare Me, that we should be alike? They lavish gold out of the bag, And weigh silver on the scales; They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god; They prostrate themselves, yes, they worship. They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it And set it in its place, and it stands; From its place it shall not move. Though *one* cries out to it, yet it cannot answer Nor save him out of his trouble. Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure' " (Isaiah 46:5-10).

" 'Present your case,' says the LORD. 'Bring forth your strong *reasons*,' says the King of Jacob. 'Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; Let them show the former things, what they *were*, That we may consider them, And know the latter end of them; Or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, That we may know that you *are* gods; Yes, do good or do evil, That we may be dismayed and see *it* together. Indeed you *are* nothing, And your work *is* nothing; *He who* chooses you *is* an abomination' " (Isaiah 41:21-24).

" 'To whom then will you liken Me, Or *to whom* shall I be equal?' says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these *things*, Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By the greatness of His might And the strength of His power; Not one is missing' " (Isaiah 40:25-26).

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

"Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven *is* My throne, And earth *is* My footstool. Where *is* the house that you will build Me? And where *is* the place of My rest? For all those *things* My hand has made, And all those *things* exist,' Says the LORD. 'But on this *one* will I look: On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word' " (Isaiah 66:1-2).

"All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

"Every word of God *is* pure; He *is* a shield to those who put their trust in Him" (Proverbs 30:5).

"So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.' But He answered and said, 'It is written, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*" ' " (Matthew 4:1-4). Also see Luke 4:1-4 for the parallel version of the same event. Also notice that for every temptation that Satan used to tempt Jesus, Jesus countered the temptation by quoting Old Testament scripture.

Note, the Bible says, God cannot lie. "Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (Titus 1:1-2, see also Hebrews 6:18).

The Bible also says, Scripture cannot be broken. "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "*I said, 'You are gods*"?' If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"? ' " (John 10:34-36). Along this line, if you read the gospel accounts, you will find many places where the Bible says that such-and-such thing happened in the life of Jesus so that Old Testament scriptures would be fulfilled. Examples I have found are, Matthew 1:22-23, 2:14, 2:23, 4:13-16, 8:16-17, 12:16-21, 13:34-35, 21:4-5, 26:55-56, 27:35, John 12:37-41, 15:24-25, John 17:12, 19:23-24.

God requires that we believe His word. Abraham believed what God promised him, and God counted that belief in God's promises as righteousness. "But Abram said, 'Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?' Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house *is* my heir!' And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own

body shall be your heir.' Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:2-6). This is confirmed by Paul. Note what Paul says about this in Romans. "What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? '*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*' " (Romans 4:1-3). Also, "And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore '*it was accounted to him for righteousness*.' Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:19-25). And James wrote, "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, '*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness*.' And he was called the friend of God" (James 2:22-23).

"But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Refusal to believe God's promises and word is a reason God rejected the generation of Israel that came out of Egypt and would not let them enter the promised land. "For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:16-19). Also, Paul wrote in Romans, "You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (Romans 11:19-23).

It is clear from the above quotes that the Bible claims to be the word of God, that is, God speaking, and that it claims to be infallible, and teaches that God cannot lie. The Bible also teaches that it is vitally important to God that His people believe what He says. It is clear to me from fulfilled prophecy that the Bible is indeed the word of God, and that God requires me to approach it in an attitude of belief and respect.

I might add, that in seeking to prove whether the Bible is God's word or not, I also checked the literature of various other major religions in the world besides Judaism and Christianity. For each book or piece of literature I found that is regarded as sacred

literature by some other religion, I read through it to look for any claims to being the word of God and to look for prophecy that could be verified against history. I found no other book besides the Bible that claimed to be the word of the creator God and that made predictions of events to take place between the time the prophecies were written and today, prophecies that could be checked against history. If there is any such book besides the Bible, I never found it.

After I had proved that the Bible is God's word, I had to make a decision whether to believe what God says. I simply made a decision to believe God, to believe the Bible, wherever that belief would lead me. I chose to believe that God is trustworthy and that He never lies, that He is perfectly righteous and truthful just as He says that He is in the Bible, and I made a commitment to myself and to God that for the rest of my life I would believe God and strive to base my decisions on that belief in God's truthfulness and trustworthiness. This decision to believe what God says is a free choice, but I could not have made this choice until after I proved that the Bible is God speaking. I believe that this choice to believe what God says is an important element of the faith that God requires of us.

How to Understand the Bible

There are many points on how to study the Bible. I will mention a few that I have found to be valuable.

The first and most important point is to approach the Bible with an attitude of respect and a willingness to believe what God says. I think it is clear from the quotes I just covered that God looks with favor upon those who "tremble" at His word. This indicates we need to have a high degree of respect, based on knowledge that it is the God who created the universe and all humanity that speaks to us through the Bible, and that God, as creator, has authority over our lives.

It is also important to understand that God helps those who believe and obey Him to understand the Bible, but that He does not help those who disbelieve or treat lightly the things that He says. God says, "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*" (Psalm 111:10). If we want to understand the Bible, it is vital that we have an attitude that is willing to believe and obey what God says. Understanding does not come all at once, but it comes over time as we study the Bible and strive to obey God. As we believe and obey we can go to God in prayer and ask Him to help us understand the Bible more.

Some people are concerned when they find what appears to them to be contradictions in the Bible. I have found from experience that these apparent contradictions generally disappear with further study. In some cases, there may be a mistranslation involved. In other cases, two scriptures that may give different accounts may be complementing each other by describing different aspects of the same event or principle, not

contradicting each other. I do not claim to know the answer to every apparent contradiction just as I do not claim to fully understand everything in the Bible, but I have found that the more I learn about the Bible the more I have found that apparent contradictions disappear upon further study.

God cannot contradict Himself, for to do so would make God a false witness in one place or another. God cannot lie (Titus 1:1-2, Hebrews 6:18). You either choose to believe this or you don't. This is also an important principle of Bible study, to know that God cannot contradict Himself. Sometimes you have to look at the context of what is being said to get the real meaning, and sometimes you have to let scriptures that are clear and easy to understand interpret those scriptures that are less clear.

Some scriptures are clear and easy to understand and some are not clear. We should let clear scriptures interpret unclear scriptures. I have already covered the subject of figurative language in the Bible. If it is obvious from the Bible that figurative language is being used, we should look to the Bible to give us the meaning of the symbols or metaphors being used, and not try to read our own meaning into it.

When studying a particular doctrine or topic, we need to get ALL the scriptures on that particular subject. One way to do this is to use an exhaustive concordance such as Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, which lists the words used in the Bible and every place they appear in the Bible. There are many Bible software packages that will help you find where certain words are used in the Bible. So for example, if you wanted to find out what the Bible teaches about the Sabbath, you could look up the word "Sabbath" in an exhaustive concordance and find every place in the Bible where that word is mentioned, and you could study those scriptures to find out what the Bible teaches about the Sabbath. There have been times when I wanted to find every verse that applied to a broad topic that could not be condensed in a few words, and I read the entire Bible cover-to-cover to make sure I found everything the Bible said about the subject. For example, when I was trying to prove if the Bible was God's word, I wanted to find EVERY prophecy in the Bible that might be verified in history, so I read the entire Bible looking for such prophecies.

When studying a particular passage we need to consider the context of statements made in the Bible. This is especially true for scriptures that are unclear or difficult to understand. We need to read what comes before and what comes after the particular passage we are looking at. Words in any language can have multiple meanings depending on how they are used. The local context is very important for getting the intended meaning and a correct translation from the original language.

Finally, all these principles need to be used together in resolving doctrinal issues. We need to approach the Bible in an attitude of respect and belief, be willing to obey God and to live by every word of God, read all the scriptures that relate to the subject we are studying, look at the local context of each scripture, especially those that are difficult to understand, let clear scriptures interpret unclear scriptures, and let the Bible interpret its own symbols rather than reading our own opinions into them.

Some people may wonder which translation to use. There are many translations, but those that are literal translations are the most accurate. I think two of the best translations are the King James Version and the New King James Version. And for difficult or important scriptures, it is often a good idea to look up a scripture in more than one translation.

Summary

The design that exists in creation, not just life, but the laws of physics and the universe itself proves the existence of a master designer, a creator God who made design choices that determine the characteristics of all of creation.

Fulfilled prophecy, particularly the prophecies concerning Israel that have been fulfilled in the last 200 years, together with prophecies in Daniel concerning the timing of the coming of the Messiah and end time conditions, prove that the Bible is God's word. Bible prophecy, together with modern history, shows that the United States and the British Commonwealth nations are identified in prophecy as Israel, specifically the sons of Joseph. The Bible teaches that God commands respect for His Word and we need to have a willingness to believe and obey what God tells us in the Bible.

With the knowledge that the Bible is God speaking and has authority over what we believe and practice, and that God requires that we trust His word and believe what He says, we can approach the Bible to learn the major truths of the gospel in an attitude of godly fear and respect. We can choose to believe what God says by letting the Bible teach us what to believe about the true gospel and all of the truths of God.

In the next chapter I will explain some of the major truths that Mr. Armstrong discovered in the Bible, and this will serve as an introduction to the teachings of the Church of God. Most people believe the traditions they grew up with, and many religions and churches base their beliefs on their traditions. Mr. Armstrong was willing to set aside the traditional beliefs he was raised in and was willing to let the Bible interpret the Bible. He believed the Bible more than the teachings of traditional Christianity, and as a result, he learned many new truths that traditional Christianity does not have.

In the chapter that follows will be surprises. The Bible in many things does NOT teach what traditional Christianity teaches. I was raised Catholic. When I saw these differences, I had to make a choice of whether to believe the traditions I grew up with and the authority of the church I was a member of, or to believe what God says in the Bible. Understanding that God requires that I believe Him more than man, I made the choice to believe God, and I have never turned back on that choice.

Anyone who proves that the Bible is God's word and reads what the Bible says will be faced with that same choice and will have to decide for themselves one way or another whether to believe God or not.

CHAPTER 2 - WHAT IS THE TRUE GOSPEL?

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to support the preaching of the true gospel and the Ezekiel warning to Israel and the world. My purpose is to do this by showing WHY it is important that God's Church preach the gospel to the public and by suggesting things that ministers and members in the Church can do to be more effective in their efforts to preach to the public.

The second half of this book is primarily written for those who have a Church of God background and are generally familiar with the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong, who founded the Radio Church of God, which was later renamed Worldwide Church of God. Knowledge of Mr. Armstrong's teachings is assumed in chapters four through seven. For those readers not familiar with those teachings, I am writing this chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to show, from the Bible, what the true gospel is, and in doing so to give an overview of the doctrines taught by the Worldwide Church of God when Mr. Armstrong was alive.

I can start by stating simply that the true gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God which Christ will establish on the earth as a literal world-ruling government at His second coming, and it includes everything in the Bible that relates to that kingdom. It includes everything about Jesus Christ because He is the king of that kingdom. It includes everything about salvation, which enables us to enter that kingdom, including the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins so we may be forgiven, and including the resurrection of Christ which enables Him to continue His saving work as our high priest and head of His church. It also includes God's law of love as a way of life that will be practiced in the Kingdom of God and which we should be learning to practice now.

I will explain the details of all these things and more in the rest of this chapter.

This chapter is not intended to be a thorough explanation and complete proof of the gospel and all of Mr. Armstrong's teachings, but an introduction. I do not try to cover all of his teachings, but just what I consider to be some of the major points. I will show supporting scriptures, but I am not trying to prove these doctrines by quoting all the scriptures that pertain to these doctrines, nor do I try to explain all the details of these doctrines. For more details I refer the reader to Mr. Armstrong's writings, particularly

his book, *Mystery of the Ages*, which he wrote near the end of his life, but also many of his other books, booklets, and articles, such as *The Incredible Human Potential*, *Which Day is the Christian Sabbath?*, *The Wonderful World Tomorrow - What It Will Be Like*, *Why Were You Born?*, *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays - Which?*, *Did God Create a Devil?*, *the Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, and many other books, booklets, and articles too numerous to mention. These writings explain the teachings of Mr. Armstrong far better and more thoroughly than I do in this chapter, and this chapter is not intended as a replacement for Mr. Armstrong's writings.

Mr. Armstrong was taught traditional Christian teachings and doctrines when he was growing up. He was raised in a traditional background. Yet his teachings are very different from the teachings of traditional mainstream Christian churches. Why is that?

Although Mr. Armstrong did not have a strong religious interest as he was growing up, he took for granted that Christian churches got their teaching and beliefs from the Bible. But when he was a young man, he was challenged on the issue of the Sabbath day. He had always assumed that the Bible taught that Christians should observe Sunday as the day for rest and worshipping God in church services. He believed this because he knew that this is what mainstream Christian churches taught, and he assumed they got their beliefs from the Bible. But when someone (his wife) challenged him on this, he set out to prove, from the Bible, that Sunday was "the Lord's day". At the same time, someone (not his wife) challenged him on his belief in the existence of God and on the theory of evolution. Mr. Armstrong did not believe in evolution, so at the same time that he was researching the Sunday vs. Sabbath issue he also researched the "creation vs. evolution" issue.

Mr. Armstrong began a night and day study of both the Bible and the theory of evolution that lasted about six months. He had training and experience in business and journalism, and he had a logical, analytical mind. But most importantly, he was sincere. Although he had a definite opinion on both of the issues he was studying, he was honest enough with himself and others to approach the research with an open mind and not allow his personal opinions and preferences to influence his conclusion. He was honest enough to admit he was wrong, even when it was painful, humiliating, and embarrassing. And in the case of the Sunday vs. Sabbath issue, he proved that, contrary to the teachings of most churches, the seventh day Sabbath, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, is the real Christian Sabbath. This was not what he previously believed, nor was it what he wanted to believe. But he was willing to accept the truth and admit he was wrong. From that time on, he began to keep the Sabbath and to continue his research into the Bible. And because he was willing to believe the Bible first, over and above his own prior beliefs, his own preferences and opinions, and the beliefs of traditional Christian churches, he discovered many truths that traditional mainstream Christianity does not have.

It seems appropriate to start with the doctrine Mr. Armstrong studied first, that is, which day is the Christian Sabbath.

The Weekly Sabbath Day

Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for mankind. "And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath' " (Mark 2:27-28). The account of when the Sabbath was made is given in Genesis. After renewing the face of the earth in six days, God created the Sabbath by resting. "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:1-3).

Later, Abram was born, whose name was changed to Abraham, and God called him and promised to make him into a great nation (Genesis 12:1-4, Genesis 17:1-5). Jacob was the son of Isaac, who was the son of Abraham, and Jacob's name was changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28). In time, the children of Israel multiplied in the land of Egypt until they became a nation, and when God brought them out of Egypt to bring them into the promised land, he told them they would be a special nation and a special treasure to Him. See Exodus chapters 1, 3, 6, and 19. "And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel' " (Exodus 19:3-6).

God intended the nation of Israel to obey God's laws, and by obeying God's laws and way of life to be a positive example for all other nations on the earth. God would bless Israel for obedience, and the rest of the world would learn from Israel's example that obedience to God's laws brings happiness and prosperity. "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people' " (Deuteronomy 4:5-6). See also Deuteronomy 7:12-15, 8:11-19, 11:13-32, 26:16-19, and Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 for the blessings that would result from obedience and the curses that would result from disobedience. Especially note Deuteronomy 11:26-28: "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known."

God gave Israel his laws. The Ten Commandments are the ten main points of God's law and are recorded in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:1-22. Although the

individual commandments listed in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 are not individually numbered, Deuteronomy 4:13 and Exodus 34:28 show that the number of commandments was ten. The importance of this will be shown later.

Although the Ten Commandments are not listed in the Bible before the book of Exodus, it is evident that God's law existed before that time, because God specifically stated that Abraham obeyed God's laws. "And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Genesis 26:4-5).

Among the Ten Commandments is the commandment to rest on the Sabbath day. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11). Notice that in this command, God directly ties it in with the creation of the Sabbath day in Genesis. Notice the parallel statements:

Genesis: "Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it."

Exodus: "Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

This confirms that the Sabbath day that God commanded Israel to observe by resting is the same Sabbath day God created in Genesis immediately after He created the first man, Adam, on the sixth day. This answers the question of when God created the Sabbath. Jesus said the Sabbath was created for man. Genesis and Exodus show that God created the Sabbath when He created man. This is very consistent.

God was not so tired or exhausted by the first six days of creation that He needed to rest. But by resting on the seventh day of creation, God created the Sabbath day for mankind by setting an example for mankind to follow.

It is clear that observing the Sabbath is included in the Ten Commandments. Are the Ten Commandments still in force for Christians today? Yes they are. Notice James 2:10-11, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, '*Do not commit adultery*,' also said, '*Do not murder*.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law." This is written in the New Testament, after Jesus Christ died for our sins and was resurrected and ascended into heaven. It is written by James, one of the "pillars" of the first century Church mentioned by the apostle Paul (Galatians 2:9). James says that if someone breaks one point of God's law, he is guilty of all. What "points" of God's law is James talking about? It is clear that he is talking about the Ten Commandments, with each commandment being a "point" of God's law, for James uses two of the Ten Commandments as examples, calling them "points". Why is it true that if a person breaks one of these commandments that he has become guilty of breaking "all"? Because, as James points out, the same God who commanded we keep one point

also commanded we keep all of them. Therefore the Ten Commandments are still in force today.

This is consistent with what Jesus taught His disciples in the sermon on the mount when He said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-19).

There are no passages in the New Testament that teach that God's Sabbath day is done away, or that the Ten Commandments are no longer in force, or that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday.

Paul said, "Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12). Jesus said, in answer to the young man who asked Him how he may find eternal life, "keep the commandments". When asked which, Jesus quoted a number of the Ten Commandments. Here is the full passage: "Now behold, one came and said to Him, 'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' So He said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said to Him, 'Which ones?' Jesus said, ' "*You shall not murder,*" "*You shall not commit adultery,*" "*You shall not steal,*" "*You shall not bear false witness,*" "*Honor your father and your mother,*" and, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" ' " (Matthew 19:16-19). Jesus quoted a number of the Ten Commandments, plus the commandment to love one's neighbor as himself (Leviticus 19:18). He quoted these commandments to point the man to the Ten Commandments and to the two great commandments (Matthew 22:35-40). Why did He not quote all of the commandments? Because apparently it was with the commandments relating to loving one's neighbor that the man had a problem. Notice what the young man answered, and Jesus' reply in Matthew 19:20-22: "The young man said to Him, 'All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." Apparently, this man needed to have more love for his neighbor and for the poor and he had too much love for himself and his possessions.

The law of God expresses God's nature. The way of life that God teaches and commands men to live is the way of life that God Himself practices. God practices what He preaches. God sent Jesus Christ to live a perfect life, obeying all the commandments of God, to set an example for us, that we should live as He lived. It is a way of life that leads to everything right and good.

That way of life can be described with the one word, "love". Love can be described as an outgoing concern for the welfare and happiness of others. It can also be described with the one word, "give".

Mr. Armstrong often illustrated this by comparing the two possible ways of life, the "give" way and the "get" way. The give way of life is the way of outgoing concern for others, the way of honesty, the way of helping, of serving, of cooperating. It is the way that leads to peace, unity, and happiness. It is also the way of truth. This is the way that God practices and teaches.

The Bible teaches that God is love. Notice 1 John 4:7-11, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Also, 1 John 4:16, "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." God expresses this love by giving. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Also, James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." See also Matthew 5:42, 43-48, 7:7-11.

The "give" way of life is the way that God lives. But as Mr. Armstrong taught, the opposite way of life is the "get" way. It is the way of trying to selfishly take from others and get more for the self. It is the way of selfishness, hostile competition, vanity, greed, deception, and resentment towards others. This is the way of life that Satan the devil lives. Jesus said that Satan was a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (John 8:44). This is the way of life that leads to suffering, destruction, and death.

God's law is an expression of God's very nature. It can be summed up in one word, love. It is the way of life that God lives and commands and teaches men to live. God's commandments teach us HOW to love. According to the Bible, there is a direct connection between practicing love and keeping God's commandments. Notice, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2-3). Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

The two great commandments teach us how to love God and love other people. Someone asked Jesus what the greatest commandment is. "Jesus said to him, '*You shall love the LORD* your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second is like it: '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). In answering, Jesus was quoting the Old Testament scriptures (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). "The Law and the Prophets" is a reference to the Old Testament scriptures, which are composed of the "law" (the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible), the "prophets" (books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel as well as the other prophets), and the "writings" (such as Psalms). Jesus is saying that the Old Testament scriptures are based on love towards God and love towards neighbor.

The two great commandments are further defined by the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments fill in details about HOW to love God and love our neighbor. The first four of the Ten Commandments teach us how to love God, and the last six teach us how to love our neighbor. Then the whole rest of the Bible further teaches us how to practice the way of love and how to keep God's commandments in their practical application in our lives.

Jesus obeyed God's commandments and set an example for us in doing so. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10). "If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:14-17).

The fact that Jesus kept God's law and commandments also means that Jesus did not sin, for sin is the transgression of the law. 1 John 3:4 says "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness". The King James Version renders this verse "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." By defining God's law, God's commandments teach us what sin is. Paul wrote, "What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, '*You shall not covet*' " (Romans 7:7). Jesus obeyed His Father's law. Jesus had to live a sinless life so that when He died He would pay the penalty for the sins of mankind, not his own sins. Jesus magnified the law, and taught us to keep the spiritual intent of the law, not just the letter of the law (Matthew 5:21-28, Isaiah 42:21).

The first four of the Ten Commandments teach us how to love God and the last six commandments teach us how to love our neighbor. The Sabbath commandment is the fourth commandment. This may come as a surprise to some Catholics who may read this, because many Catholics have been taught that the Sabbath commandment is the third commandment, and I will explain why this is later in this chapter.

It takes faith for a person who has not been keeping the seventh day Sabbath to begin to keep it. This is true about the Sabbath commandment in a way in which it is not true for the other commandments. Why?

Faith is believing God. It means believing what God says, not just believing that God exists. Even the demons believe that God exists (James 2:19), but they do not believe in the way of life that God teaches. I do not think the demons believe what Jesus said when Jesus said that it is better ("more blessed") to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Abraham became what some call the "father of the faithful" when He believed God's promises (Romans 4:3, James 2:23, Genesis 15:4-6). Note especially Romans 4:16-22: "Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, '*I have made you a father*

of many nations') in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, '*So shall your descendants be.*' And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore '*it was accounted to him for righteousness*'".

Why does it take faith to keep the Sabbath for someone who was not raised in a Sabbath tradition? Because it requires that person to believe what God says. This is not true to the same extent for the other nine commandments because often men have been able to discern the moral principles behind the other commandments without believing God or the Bible. For example, most societies all over the world are able to figure out that it is wrong to steal, murder, and commit adultery, and some people may even be able to understand that it is wrong to worship idols or to use God's name disrespectfully. But human reason cannot determine, apart from the revelation from God, that we should rest one day out of seven, and WHICH day to rest on. Even societies that may rest one day each week often do not rest on the seventh day, but some other day of the week. But God tells us to rest on the SEVENTH day. God counts days from sunset to sunset (Leviticus 23:32), so God's Sabbath is from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

It can require faith to obey the Sabbath commandment because keeping it can involve sacrifice. It can make one seem different from other people. It can sometimes involve financial sacrifice and some people have lost their jobs because of their obedience to the Sabbath commandment.

But there are also benefits that arise from keeping the Sabbath. But generally, one does not fully learn about those benefits until one begins to keep the Sabbath, and it takes faith to begin to keep it.

The Sabbath day provides much needed rest for man by providing one day a week to rest from his labors. God did not intend for a person to work non-stop without rest seven days a week. But there are many other benefits. It is a time for people to draw closer to God in prayer, Bible study, thinking about God and His greatness, and assembling together for instruction and worship with others who also fear God. The Sabbath is not a time for personal entertainment and recreation, such as watching football games, playing cards, and watching movies. Notice Isaiah 58:13-14: "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, *From* doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking *your own* words, Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken." The Sabbath is a day for a man or woman to build a closer relationship with God. It is part of properly keeping the greatest commandment, to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:36-40).

The weekly Sabbath also helps picture and symbolize God's plan for mankind. When Adam chose to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and thus disobeyed God, he cut himself off from the kind of relationship he could have had with God if he had obeyed. Adam and Eve were driven out from the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24). From that point on, mankind in general has refused to obey God and has chosen instead to rule himself, living his own way, deciding for himself right and wrong. Mr. Armstrong explained that when Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was taking to himself the prerogative of deciding what is good and evil, what is right and wrong, and mankind has followed that way ever since. Instead of allowing God to set moral standards men are to live by and looking to God's word to see what God says is right and wrong, each person decides for himself or herself what is right or wrong, and then lives according to his or her own standards, not God's.

But man's ways are not God's ways. " 'For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways,' says the LORD. 'For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts' " (Isaiah 55:8-9). "There is a way *that seems* right to a man, But its end *is* the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12, also see Proverbs 16:25). It is God who has the right to decide what is right and wrong, what is sin and what is not sin. Man can only decide WHETHER to sin. But Adam and Eve rejected God's rule and chose to decide for themselves, under Satan's influence, their own standards of belief and behavior. They chose to "go their own way", independent of God. And by their choice, they rejected God's government over them. And since all mankind has come from Adam and Eve, by making the decision to reject God's government over them, they made that decision not only for themselves but for their children and the whole human race which came from them, and all mankind has been suffering the consequences ever since.

By following Satan, Adam and Eve rejected God's rule over them. Man's nature, under Satan's influence, has become evil. Note the following scriptures. "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, *I* test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). In the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11). Notice that it is to His own disciples that Jesus said, "you...being evil". This shows that the evil and wickedness of man's heart is not just the characteristic of a few wicked men, but mankind in general. "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,..." (Romans 3:23). Just as Satan deceived Eve about the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, so Satan deceives the whole world into following the wrong way of life (Revelation 12:9).

God intends that the human race learn a lesson from experience that man's ways, apart from God's rule, lead to suffering, destruction, and death. Mankind is not able to rightly rule itself. "O LORD, I know the way of man *is* not in himself; *It is* not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Man needs the rule and government of God over him for his own good and welfare. This is true individually as well as for the

whole human race. God's laws define the way that leads to life and happiness, but men do not obey those laws because they do not believe what God says. So God is allowing man to go his own way, make his own decisions, decide for himself what he thinks is right and wrong, create his own moral standards for belief and behavior, and reap the painful consequences of rejecting God's rule and laws. The result has been war, sickness, suffering, and death from the time of Adam until now. And Jesus prophesied that by the time of the end conditions would be so bad that unless He returned the whole human race would bring destruction upon itself. "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:21-22).

But then, at the time of the end, Jesus Christ will return to the earth in power to establish the Kingdom of God ruling over the nations on the earth, and God's rule will not only save man from destroying himself, but will bring an unprecedented period of peace, prosperity, and happiness to the earth. As God has allowed man to rule himself for six thousand years, under Satan's influence whose ways Adam and Eve chose, so God will establish a period of one thousand years when Christ will rule the earth, teach all mankind God's law, and bring peace, happiness, and prosperity to mankind. "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4). "But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:33-34). "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

Mankind is not learning the lesson now, but man is writing the lesson in painful history, that man's ways apart from God lead to suffering and death. But when God establishes Christ's rule over the earth and at last brings peace and happiness to mankind, mankind will be able to compare the fruits of his own rule with the fruits of God's rule, and then man will begin to learn that God's ways and laws are for man's good and are the true way to happiness.

The Sabbath pictures the millennial rule of Christ. Just as the weekly Sabbath is the last day of a seven day week, so the one thousand year rule of Christ over the earth will be the last one thousand years of a seven thousand year period from the time of Adam. Properly kept, the weekly Sabbath can be a day of delight, a day of rest, and a day of drawing closer to God, just as the millennial reign of Christ will be a day when all mankind learns the ways of God and enjoys peace and happiness.

The Sabbath commandment is also a test commandment. As I mentioned before, men can often figure out on their own that they should not murder, steal, commit adultery,

and that they should honor their mother and father, and some have even been able to learn that it is wrong to worship an idol. But a man or woman must trust and believe God in order to begin keeping the Sabbath day according to God's word. This is why it is a test commandment. It tests man's belief and trust in God and in His word. God actually used the Sabbath to test ancient Israel in the wilderness after He brought them out of Egypt. "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily' " (Exodus 16:4-5). Notice that God says He will TEST Israel. "And so it was, on the sixth day, *that* they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. Then he said to them, 'This *is what* the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow *is* a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake *today*, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.' ' So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. Then Moses said, 'Eat that today, for today *is* a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.' Now it happened *that some* of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.' So the people rested on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:22-30). Notice that the Sabbath existed BEFORE the Ten Commandments were given as recorded in Exodus 20, and BEFORE the old covenant was made with Israel as recorded in Exodus 24:1-8.

I will mention one more purpose of the Sabbath, and that is that it is a special SIGN between God and His people. A sign identifies. The Sabbath sign identifies to God's people who the true God is, and it identifies to God who his people are. Notice Exodus 31:12-17: "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for *it is* holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does *any* work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations *as* a perpetual covenant. It *is* a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed" ' ". It is a sign that identifies God because it points to the day that God rested after His work of creation, and thus identifies the true God as the Creator. Notice Ezekiel 20:18-20: "But I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I *am* the LORD your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I *am* the LORD your God.' " Notice that God says, "that you may know I *am* the LORD your God." This

shows that the Sabbath day, properly kept, will help the Sabbath-keeper know who the true God is. It also identifies to God those who are willing to obey what he says, so the sign works both ways.

It is also good to point out that Sunday is not God's Sabbath and does not point to the true God of creation. It is the seventh day of the week, not the first, that points to the day God rested from the six days of creation, and it is the seventh day of the seven day week that points to the future millennial rule of Christ for one thousand years following six thousand years of man's rule over himself.

Some people think that the Church changed the Sabbath from the last day of the week to the first day of the week in the first century. Many people think this occurred because of the traditional belief of many churches today that Jesus Christ died on a Friday and was resurrected on a Sunday morning. But God's true Church never tried to change the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week, and the Bible indicates that the Friday-crucifixion, Sunday-resurrection tradition cannot be true.

Jesus said he would be in the grave for three days and three nights. He further indicated that this would be the sign that He was the Messiah. Notice these scriptures. "But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'" (Matthew 12:39-40). "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17). From Friday night to Sunday morning would be one day and two nights, so that tradition cannot be true.

Many people are confused about this when they read scriptures that indicate that Jesus was buried right before the beginning of a Sabbath, such as the following: "Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb" (Mark 15:42-46). Many assume that the Sabbath referred to above is the weekly Sabbath, that is, the seventh day of the week. But there are annual Sabbaths also, days of commanded rest that are called "Sabbath" that fall on particular dates in the Hebrew calendar and can fall on any day of the week. I don't want to try to cover all the details of the proof of the timing of events that occurred when Jesus was crucified -- I will refer the reader to Mr. Armstrong's booklet, *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?*, and many of his other writings for more details -- but I will explain a few points.

There are seven annual Sabbaths given by God, and six of them fall on particular days of particular months in the Hebrew calendar (all except Pentecost). These are days of rest and assembly, just as the weekly Sabbath is a day of rest and assembly, and they are

called "Sabbaths". Information about these days can be found in chapter 23 of Leviticus. These days are called "holy days", "Sabbaths", and except for Atonement they are called "feast days". Notice, for example, that the Day of Atonement, an annual holy day, is called a Sabbath in Leviticus 23:32: "It *shall be* to you a sabbath of *solemn* rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth *day* of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath." Also, Leviticus 23:24: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first *day* of the month, you shall have a sabbath-*rest*, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.' " More information can be found about these days in Deuteronomy chapter 16 and many other places, and I will review these days in detail, and their meaning, in the next section.

Was there an annual Sabbath day around the time of the crucifixion that could fall on a weekday? Yes. There is an annual Sabbath that follows the day of Passover. The Passover day, which is not a sabbath but is the day that God commanded ancient Israel to observe by eating the lamb they had slaughtered, is a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Passover lamb represents Jesus Christ. "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" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Here, Christ is called "our Passover", and elsewhere, He is called "the Lamb" as in John 1:29: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' ". The sacrifice of the lamb in ancient Israel represented the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. And in fulfillment of that day, Jesus died on Passover day. Remember, as God counts days, they begin and end at sunset. As God counts days, the day of Passover began at sunset the evening that Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples. The night that Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples was same day therefore that he was crucified and died. See Matthew chapters 26 and 27, Mark chapters 14 and 15, Luke chapters 22 and 23, and John chapters 13 through 19. What was the annual holy day, a Sabbath, that follows Passover? The First Day of Unleavened Bread. Notice Leviticus 23:5-7: "On the fourteenth *day* of the first month at twilight *is* the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it."

It was the First Day of Unleavened Bread, an annual Sabbath, not the weekly Sabbath, that was the Sabbath that immediately followed the crucifixion of Christ. An annual Sabbath can fall on any day of the week. Which day of the week did this day fall on when Jesus was crucified?

Jesus said He would be in the grave for three days and three nights, that is, 72 hours. He died and was buried in the afternoon, before sunset, on Passover day (Matthew 27:45-60, Mark 15:33-46, Luke 23:44-54, John 19:31-42). His resurrection would then also be in the afternoon, 72 hours later, in order for Him to be in the grave for three days and three nights as the sign of the prophet Jonah. Keeping in mind that His resurrection would be in the afternoon shortly before sunset, which day of the week was He resurrected?

When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb as the first day of the week began to dawn, Jesus Christ had already been resurrected, and the angel told the women that He was going before them into Galilee. Notice Matthew 28:1-7: "Now after the Sabbath, as the first *day* of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead *men*. But the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.' " See also Mark 16:1-7, Luke 24:1-7, and John 20:1-2.

Since Jesus was already resurrected when the women went to the grave early Sunday morning, and if Jesus was to be resurrected three days and nights, 72 hours, after a late afternoon burial, then He must have been resurrected no later than late Sabbath afternoon, the seventh day of the week, not the first. Three days prior to this would be Wednesday afternoon, and the First Day of Unleavened Bread, an annual Sabbath, would be on a Thursday that year.

Some will notice Mark 16:9, "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons." This appears to say that Christ rose on the first day of the week. If this were true, it would contradict the other verses we have covered, and the Bible cannot contradict itself. What is the explanation?

There are two possible explanations. One, a footnote in my Bible indicates that verses 9 through 20 are bracketed in some manuscripts as not in the original text and some manuscripts do not contain them at all. This indicates to me at least the possibility that these verses were not in the original inspired text and were added later, as far as I can tell. Secondly, the original inspired Greek text did not have punctuation marks, so translators supply the comma that appears after the word "week" in most translations. Without the comma, or with the comma after "rose", the phrase "on the first day of the week" can apply to when Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene. For example, if the comma was placed after "rose", the verse would read, "Now when He rose, early on the first day of the week He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons." The translators in their decisions about where to place punctuation can be influenced by their own religious beliefs just like anyone else and can make mistakes accordingly. I believe that if these verses are truly part of the original inspired text, then the comma should go after "rose", and the first day of the week is day when Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene, not the day when He was resurrected. Otherwise, the Bible is contradicting itself.

Some people think that in the controversies with the Pharisees, Jesus taught against the Sabbath or taught that the Sabbath was done away. That is not true. Jesus kept His Father's commandments (John 15:10). Jesus attended the synagogue on the Sabbath day as His custom was (Luke 4:16). But the Pharisees added many requirements and

traditions to Sabbath observance, which God never intended, and made the Sabbath a burden rather than a day of delight. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and taught that it is lawful to heal and to do good on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1-6, Matthew 12:9-13, Luke 13:10-16, Luke 6:6-10).

The Annual Holy Days and the Plan of God

Besides the weekly Sabbath, God gave annual feasts and holy days or Sabbaths to Israel, and these days are still in effect for the Church today. When Mr. Armstrong was researching the Sabbath question, he was forced to admit that the weekly Sabbath was still in effect. But in the course of his research, he also learned that the annual sabbaths are still in effect also. This is explained in Mr. Armstrong's autobiography, and in the booklet, *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays - Which?* When Mr. Armstrong began to attend with the Church of God Seventh Day, he found that most of them did not keep the annual Sabbaths, but only the weekly Sabbaths. Mr. Armstrong did not know WHY God commanded these days to be kept, only that God DID command them. So Mr. Armstrong and his wife kept these days by themselves. It was not until years later that Mr. Armstrong began to understand, through the Bible, why God commanded the annual holy days and what they represented. This is an outstanding illustration of the principle given in Psalm 111:10: "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*." God gives more understanding of His Word to those who believe and obey what He says.

I have already touched on the fact that the weekly seventh-day Sabbath helps Christians who keep it properly to understand the coming millennial reign of Christ on the earth. But the annual Sabbaths and feasts of God help to reveal and illustrate much more detail about God's overall plan for mankind.

In this section I want to give a brief overview and introduction to what the annual feasts and holy days of God are, and I want to briefly explain what they represent and help to illustrate about God's plan and purpose for mankind. In the process, I will also be covering what that plan is. Although I am giving a brief overview, the reader can learn more from the booklet, *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays - Which?* and Mr. Armstrong's books, *Mystery of the Ages* and *The Wonderful World Tomorrow - What It Will Be Like*.

Passover -- the Sacrifice of Christ

The first day which God commands to be observed is Passover. Passover is not a Sabbath. Work is permitted. Like all days, it begins and ends at sunset. It is to be kept on the 14th day of the first month in the Hebrew calendar. You can read the details of

the institution of Passover in Exodus chapter 12. Every household of Israel in Egypt was told to kill a lamb just after sunset when the 14th day had just begun, but before it was completely dark. They were to splatter the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their house, roast the lamb, and eat it in their house and remain indoors until morning. Around midnight God killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, but God "passed over" any house that had the blood on the doorposts and did not kill the firstborn in that house. For ancient Israel, this was a lesson that God protected them and saved them from the plague with which He plagued the Egyptians. But for Christians today, there is a deeper meaning.

The symbolism with Jesus Christ is unmistakable. Jesus is called "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29) and "our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Revelation 7:14 and 12:11 makes reference to the "blood of the Lamb" in reference to the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote that we are justified with God by the blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:9).

The penalty of sin is death. "For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23, KJV). All have sinned, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, KJV). Therefore, all mankind has fallen under the death penalty. God the Father sent Jesus Christ to live a sinless life and die to pay the penalty for our sins in our place so that the death penalty could be removed and we can be forgiven of our past sins. "But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6, KJV). I think traditional Christianity understands this particular point of God's plan pretty well. This is not something new that Mr. Armstrong discovered.

When Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples before He died, He made a change in the Passover ritual for the Church, but not the date that Passover should be kept. Jesus instituted the symbols of the bread, to represent His body which was about to be scourged and broken, and the wine, to represent His blood which was about to be shed (Matthew 26:26-28). He also instituted a foot washing ceremony, which most churches today do not observe, to teach the lesson of humility and service to others (John 13:2-17). It is the shed blood of Christ that pays the death penalty in our stead so we can be forgiven and so we do not have to die the second death in the lake of fire (Matthew 26:28, Isaiah 53:4-12, Hebrews 9:11-15, 1 John 1:7-9, Colossians 1:19-22). It is the suffering that He endured and His broken and scourged body that enables us to be healed physically and spiritually (Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 8:16-17, 1 Peter 2:21-24, Psalm 103:2-3, Matthew 9:1-7, Mark 2:5-12, Luke 5:20-24, James 5:14-17).

The penalty for our sins is death, that is, the second death in the lake of fire. Christ paid that penalty with His own death, His blood being shed for us, so we do not have to die in the lake of fire, a permanent death from which there will be no resurrection. This paves the way for God to give us the gift of eternal life so we can live forever. However, death is not the only penalty for our sins. We also suffer because of our sins. When we sin, our character is damaged and our minds are corrupted. As Herbert W. Armstrong taught in *The Incredible Human Potential*, when Adam and Eve first sinned,

something happened to their minds. They began to have an attitude of rebellion against God. Their minds became sinful, wicked, perverted, hostile against God, evil, as the heart of man is described by Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 8:7, Matthew 7:11, Luke 18:19). Sin leads to more sin, which leads to the habit of sin and a sinful character and nature. And sin causes suffering. Sin is the violation of God's perfect law, and God's law when obeyed leads to happiness and everything good. The violation of God's law leads to unhappiness, suffering, and death. So in addition to death, suffering is a penalty of sin, and sin leads to an evil sinful mind and nature leading to more sin and more suffering. We become trapped in a vicious cycle of sin leading to more sin and suffering.

A comparison with the laws of health can help illustrate this. God designed and put into motion physical laws regulating health. When we violate those laws by abusing our bodies and not taking care of our health, sickness or injury results. This is a type and analogy of how violating God's spiritual law by sinning leads to a damaged character and evil nature, a nature that leads to more sin and more suffering. And the history of mankind with its violence, crime, war, broken homes, poverty, and sickness shows the consequences of violating God's laws.

But Jesus not only paid the death penalty in our place, He also suffered for us, paying the penalty of suffering in our place for our violation of God's physical and spiritual laws. This paves the way for God to remove the penalty from us by healing our diseases and cleaning up our character, and replacing our evil nature leading to sin and suffering with His perfect, righteous character leading to happiness and everything good.

It would not do us much good if God removed the death penalty and gave us eternal life, but left us with our evil, sinning nature. If He did that, we would live forever in a sinful state, sinning and cause grief and suffering for ourselves and those around us for all eternity. Living forever only has positive value for us if the eternal life we have is a happy one. So God needs to clean up our character and replace our evil nature with His righteous nature for our salvation to be complete. How this is done is illustrated by the rest of the holy days and will be described in the next sections in this chapter.

Isaiah 53:5-6 shows that we are healed by the stripes Christ suffered when He was scourged (Matthew 27:26). This certainly applies to physical healing, and James 5:14-16 gives instructions for being healed by God of our physical sicknesses. And when we trust God for physical healing, we must also trust God to heal us at the time and in the manner He chooses, and some are not healed until the resurrection. Miraculous healing of physical diseases was a major part of Jesus Christ's ministry, and this illustrates God's mind and shows His love and that it is His will to heal us. But I also believe that Isaiah 53:5-6 in principle applies to spiritual healing and opens the way for God to heal and clean up our minds and character. The actual process by which this is done includes our repentance (illustrated by the days of unleavened bread) and God's gift to us of the Holy Spirit (illustrated by the day of Pentecost) described in the next sections.

The effect of cleaning up our character so we can live righteously in God's kingdom is to remove the penalty of suffering we have brought on ourselves by our sins, because it

is our sinful nature that leads to sin which causes the suffering. Though we still suffer trials in this life, our suffering will end in the Kingdom of God when our salvation is complete (Revelation 21:4).

This is the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ, represented by the Passover symbols of the unleavened bread and wine. The wine represents Christ's shed blood and His death which pays the death penalty for our sins in our stead so we do not have to die the second death. The unleavened bread represents Christ's body and the suffering He endured in the flesh so we can be healed both physically and spiritually.

The Church of God observes Passover once a year the evening after sunset which begins the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar, the same day Jesus observed the Passover with His disciples. We observe it by assembling for services, partaking of the symbols of wine and unleavened bread, and participating in a foot washing service.

The Days of Unleavened Bread - Repentance

Immediately after Passover day are the seven days of unleavened bread. The first day and the last day of the seven (the seventh day) are holy days, Sabbaths, days of rest and assembly. The instructions for these days are given in Exodus 12:14-20, and Exodus 13:3-10, as well as various other places. During these days, only unleavened bread is to be eaten, and nothing with leavening is to be eaten or even kept in the home. For ancient Israel, this represented leaving Egypt in haste because they had no time to prepare leavened bread. But like Passover, these days are still in effect today for God's Church, and like Passover, they have deep meaning beyond the limited understanding given to ancient Israel.

What does leavened or unleavened bread represent in the New Testament? In the context of the time of Passover and the days of unleavened bread, Paul used leavening to represent sin, and unleavened bread to represent righteousness. Notice what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8: "Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 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." Here Paul likens leavening to malice and wickedness, but likens unleavened bread to sincerity and truth. He also says, "let us keep the feast." What feast is he talking about? The context indicates that he is talking about the Feast of Unleavened Bread that God gave Israel at the time of the Exodus. This shows that the days of unleavened bread were being kept by Paul and the New Testament Church of God. And since Paul was primarily an apostle to the gentiles (Romans 15:15-16, Galatians 2:7-9), this indicates that Paul understood that these days were not just for the Jews but were for gentile Christians as well.

What lessons can we learn from the days of unleavened bread? Jesus Christ was sacrificed for us so we can be forgiven, and this is pictured by Passover. But we also have our part to perform. We must repent and strive to put sin out of our lives. Christ paid the penalty for our sins so our sins can be forgiven, but that does not give us permission to continue sinning. We have to repent. After the disciples received the Holy Spirit, when Peter spoke to the crowd, he told them to repent. "Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call' " (Acts 2:37-39). Paul wrote, "do not sin" (1 Corinthians 15:34).

Keeping the days of unleavened bread represents and helps to teach us our part in God's plan, that we have to repent and strive to put sin out of our lives. We avoid leavening for seven days to learn that we need to avoid sin in our lives, and we eat unleavened bread for seven days to help learn the lesson that we need to put the righteousness of Jesus Christ into our lives. We need to study His teachings, obey His commands, and follow His examples.

The Bible commands that men repent. What do we need to repent of? We need to repent of sin, but we also need to repent of our own sinful nature and be willing to let God clean up our character and give us a new nature based on God's righteousness, not our own. We need to repent of the entire direction of our lives and be willing to begin to go in a new direction. We have to be willing to give our lives to God in one hundred percent obedience and service for the rest of our lives. We have to be willing to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. This love is more than just an emotion, though it may have an emotional quality, but it is a strong commitment of the will. Love towards God must include the submitting of the human will to God's will, as Jesus did, setting an example for us. We have to be willing to strive to live by every word of God.

The writer of Hebrews says that repentance from dead works is one of the elementary principles we need to understand (Hebrews 6:1). We need to repent of sin, but to do this, we need to know what sin is. Many people think that sin is doing what they think is wrong. They think that sin is whatever violates their conscience. This is not true. Sin is not the violation of our conscience, it is the violation of God's law. 1 John 3:4 states, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." In the King James Version this reads, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." It is the law of God that defines sin, not our conscience. Paul gives an example. In Romans 7:7 he says, "What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, '*You shall not covet.*' " It is the commandment against coveting that taught Paul that it was a sin to covet, because God's law and commandments DEFINE right and wrong. That is why sin is the transgression of the law of God.

Many people think that whatever a person does, it is not a sin if they don't think it is wrong. That is not true. A person can be sinning against God and not even know it. Notice what Jesus said about those who sinned but did not think they were doing anything wrong. "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47-48). Notice that Jesus did not say that those who did not know their master's will were free from guilt and would not be beaten at all. He said their guilt was less in comparison with the person who knew God's will and knew what he was doing was wrong, and therefore their punishment would be lighter, nevertheless, this shows that there is guilt, and punishment, for the person who violates God's law even if that person does not know it, and therefore the violation of God's law is sin.

Mankind has taken the path of each person deciding for himself or herself what is right or wrong instead of recognizing that it is God only who had the prerogative to decide right from wrong, sin from righteousness. Repentance involves acknowledging that God defines sin, and we have to look to God and His Word the Bible and to God's law and commandments to know what is right and wrong, and then strive to live the right way according to God's will and instructions.

Repentance includes a lifelong commitment to turn from the direction of pleasing the self to the direction of loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). It is a new way of life based on God's law of love. It requires striving to live, not only according to the letter of God's law, but the spiritual intent of God's law as well. Notice the examples Jesus gave about the requirement to obey the spirit of the law as well as the letter. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21-22, KJV). "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28, KJV).

Also, since we are required by God's law to love God with all our being and might, this includes living our lives to please Him in everything we do and striving to submit our wills to His will in everything. This goes beyond just obeying God's explicit commandments. This includes striving to know God's will (by studying and believing God's word, the Bible), and then striving to DO God's will. Jesus set the example by doing not only what the Father commanded Him, but the Father's will also. "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work' " (John 4:34). Just before Jesus was crucified, He prayed to the Father that if it was the Father's will, Jesus would be spared this suffering. Nevertheless, Jesus requested that this be done ONLY if it was the Father's will. "And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove

this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:41-42, KJV). Notice also John 5:30, "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (KJV). And John 6:38, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (KJV). And John 8:29, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (KJV). Repentance involves making a lifetime commitment to strive to always do the things that please God, because this is part of obeying the greatest commandment, you shall love God with all your heart.

Repentance requires a commitment to strive to live by every word of God. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he resisted and countered every temptation by referring to Old Testament scripture. For example, note Matthew 4:3-4, "Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.' But He answered and said, 'It is written, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* ' "

Repentance also requires that we acknowledge our guilt before God, that we are sinners, and ask God to clean us up. We have to come to realize that our very nature is sinful. "The heart is deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Everyone has sinned and is in need of forgiveness, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, see also Romans 5:12). When David repented after his sin in the matter of Uriah the Hittite, he acknowledged his guilt before God. "Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin *is* always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, *And* blameless when You judge" (Psalm 51:1-4). "Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:9-10).

The days of unleavened bread are given to us by God to help teach us the lesson that we have to repent and strive to put sin out of our lives, represented by leavening, and to put God's righteousness into our lives, represented by the unleavened bread that we eat. This is one of the major steps in God's plan for the salvation of mankind, and it is illustrated by this feast of God.

The Church of God observes the days of unleavened bread by getting all leaven and leavened products out of our homes and avoiding the eating of anything with leavening in it (yeast, baking soda, baking powder, etc.) for seven days, and also we eat unleavened bread during this time (matzos for example, although some members make their own unleavened bread). We observe the first and last of the seven days by refraining from work and by assembling for church services, as on the weekly Sabbath, as commanded by God (Exodus 12:16). Also, on the evening of the First Day of Unleavened Bread (the next night after the Passover observance), we keep the Night to Be Much Observed, which is a separate event from Passover, by getting together in families and small groups in each others' homes or meeting places and sharing a meal.

For ancient Israel, this observance represented coming out of Egypt, which occurred on the night following Passover night (Exodus 12:40-42). For the Church, it represents coming out of the bondage of Satan's deception and the sinful ways of this world.

Pentecost - the Gift of the Holy Spirit

The next day is Pentecost. In the Old Testament, it is called the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9-11) and is sometimes called the Feast of Firstfruits (Numbers 28:26). Its description is given in Leviticus 23:15-21. It is observed 50 days from the Sabbath that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread, so it always falls on a Sunday. In the New Testament, it is called Pentecost (Acts 2:1), which means, I believe, "count fifty". In the Old Testament, it is connected with the small, early summer harvest. In the New Testament, it is associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus was crucified, He told His disciples that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:25-26). After His resurrection and before His ascension into heaven, Jesus told His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit. "And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' *He said*, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now' " (Acts 1:4-5). The actual coming of the Holy Spirit is recorded in Acts 2:1-4, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

The Holy Spirit helps a person understand the Bible and understand spiritual knowledge in a way that the natural mind of man is not able to do. I already quoted the verse above where Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would help His disciples to remember the things Jesus taught them. Note also these scriptures. "But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). Note that Paul said that there is a spirit in man. Mr. Armstrong explained that the vast difference in intelligence between humans and that of animals such as dogs, chimpanzees, elephants, and dolphins is due to a spirit in every human that God has added to the human brain to empower the human mind with a quality of intellect that animals do not have. He called this the "human spirit". But just as the human spirit empowers humans to understand physical knowledge, such as knowledge about science, engineering, literature, and languages, in a way that animals are not able to understand,

so the Spirit of God empowers a Christian to understand, as Paul put it, "the deep things of God" in a way that the human mind, apart from God's Spirit, cannot understand.

The Holy Spirit also empowers a Christian. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). You can study the gospel accounts and the book of Acts to see how the disciples behaved differently, more courageously for example, after they received the Holy Spirit than before. When Jesus was taken to be crucified, almost all His disciples left Him, even though they previously said they would die with him, and even Peter denied Christ. But after they received the Holy Spirit they were willing to suffer and even die for Christ.

It is actually the presence of the Holy Spirit in the mind that makes one a Christian and a member of God's true Church. Paul wrote, "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:9-11).

The conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit are repentance and faith in God and in Christ, and baptism by immersion in water as a symbol of our faith in the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and a symbol of the burial of the old self. God then gives the gift of His Holy Spirit upon the laying on of hands by the ministry. Notice, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' " (Acts 2:38). On the subject of baptism see also Colossians 2:11-12, Matthew 28:18-20, and Acts 8:36-39. On the subject of the laying on of hands and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, see Acts 8:14-17 and 1 Timothy 4:14.

After one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, he is a Christian, and must then live a life of spiritual growth, developing God's righteous character with God's help, and overcoming sin. Those who overcome and endure to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13, Matthew 10:22, Revelation 2:11, 3:5). The Church of God encourages its members to spend time on a regular basis in prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation as a way of drawing closer to God. Meditation in this sense is basically thinking about God and His laws, learning how to apply spiritual principles to everyday decisions, thinking about the lessons of the Bible, thinking about God's creation, etc., as David did (Psalm 119:97, Psalm 1:2). Prayer is talking to God in prayer, but not repeating memorized prayers (Matthew 6:7).

It is obvious that the Day of Pentecost represents the next step in God's plan after repentance, the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-39). The Church keeps Pentecost today to commemorate the gift of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the New Testament Church. But is there a connection between the meaning of the "first fruits" harvest and the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Church? Yes there is, but this will take some explaining. There is truth about this that most traditional churches do not know.

Most traditional Christian churches believe that this is the time when God is trying to save all mankind. Some believe that those who do not accept Jesus Christ in this life, in this age, are forever lost. But this is not the case. God has provided a plan for EVERY human that has ever lived to exercise free moral agency to repent, to believe God and Christ, to accept Jesus Christ as savior, and to be converted and be saved. But this plan is being worked out in stages. This six thousand year age of man is not the main spiritual harvest. This is not the time when God is trying to save everyone.

Ancient Israel never had access to God's Spirit or to spiritual salvation. They never had the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. They were never promised eternal life. They were promised physical protection and blessings if they obeyed God's law, but not eternal life.

Even since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the founding of the Church of God, most of the billions of people that have lived on this earth never heard the true gospel or had an opportunity for salvation.

The fact is, God has allowed Satan to blind and deceive the whole human race for this six thousand year age of man. It is God's purpose to allow man to write the painful lesson in history that Satan's way of "get" and being independent of God's rule, with each person deciding for himself what is right and wrong, is a way that leads to suffering and destruction. Those lessons are being written in history right now, and according to prophecy the suffering of this world is going to increase even more before Christ returns. This is Satan's world right now, not God's. Satan can only do what God allows, and in God's time Satan and his evil influence will be put away, but right now it suits God's purpose to allow Satan to deceive the majority of mankind.

There is no "contest" between God and Satan over the salvation of men with God trying to save as many as possible right now and Satan opposing Him. Satan has absolutely NO POWER against God, and can do NOTHING apart from what God allows according to His will. For proof of this, read the first two chapters of the book of Job. Satan could not go one millimeter beyond what God allowed Him to go in attacking Job. If God wanted to open salvation to all mankind at this time, He would do it and Satan has no power to hinder God's efforts in the slightest.

God has allowed Satan to blind the minds and hearts of most people to God's truth so they CANNOT understand the truth and be converted. Only the few that God specifically calls and "draws" can be converted at this time. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). Jesus did not try to save everyone, but rather He often spoke in parables, not to make the meaning clear, but to HIDE the meaning from all except those few who were His disciples, whom the Father was drawing to Christ. Notice what Jesus said. "But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, 'To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that "Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them" ' ' ' (Mark 4:10-12). Here is a plain statement from Jesus that He spoke in parables to the crowds for the purpose of

PREVENTING them from understanding so that they would NOT turn and have their sins forgiven them. It was NOT the Father's will that the crowds repent and receive forgiveness of their sins, AT THAT TIME. But for His disciples, Jesus explained the parables because they were the few that God was calling and drawing to Christ at that time. But not the majority.

I do not say that every parable told by Jesus was for the purpose of hiding the meaning. There were some parables Jesus spoke for the purpose of making His teachings clear. Often these had to do with expounding on God's law and teaching right from wrong. For example, the parable of the good Samaritan recorded in Luke 10:25-37 was given to make clear how men should live. It is obvious that the parable was given to make the meaning of God's commandment to love your neighbor as yourself clear to the one who asked Jesus "who is my neighbor?", and it is equally clear that the man got the point, because Jesus said, "You have answered rightly".

Nevertheless, Jesus did often speak in parables to hide His meaning from the majority, and when it came to the secrets of the Kingdom of God, these things were revealed only to the disciples, not the crowds.

Herbert W. Armstrong taught that from the time before man existed, Lucifer was on a throne of the earth. This is consistent with Isaiah 14:12-14, which says, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' " When Jesus was tempted by Satan, Satan, as ruler over the earth, offered to give his kingdom to Jesus if Jesus would worship him. "Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, "*You shall worship the LORD* your God, and Him only you shall serve" ' ' (Luke 4:5-8). Before He was crucified, Jesus said, "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30). This is Satan's world, his civilization, his system, his way of life that men practice, not God's.

But God is calling a few now into His true Church to learn and live a different way of life. Eventually, God will remove Satan and make salvation available to every human that has ever lived. That will be the great spiritual harvest. I will go into more detail about that later. But right now, in this age of man, is the smaller spiritual harvest of the few that God is saving now. Christians in this age are called "firstfruits" (James 1:18, Revelation 14:4). These are the firstfruits, the early harvest, as pictured in the Old Testament Feast of Weeks or Feast of Firstfruits, and this is the connection between the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in the book of Acts, and the same day picturing the early summer harvest in the Old Testament. And this is another valuable lesson God uses His holy days to teach us.

Jesus Christ is also called the firstfruits in 1 Corinthians 15:23, and he is pictured in the wave sheaf offering in Leviticus 23:9-11. Christ is the first of the firstfruits, and after Him are those called and drawn by God to Christ to be saved in this age. But the majority of mankind is not now being offered salvation.

God is only saving a few now. But why? This will become clear as we go through the rest of God's holy days.

The Day of Trumpets - the Second Coming of Christ

The next holy day is the Feast of Trumpets. This is given in Leviticus 23:23-25. It is called "a memorial of blowing of trumpets." It is a Sabbath day, a day of rest, and a day of assembly for worship services. Apart from the association with trumpets, no special meaning for this day is explained in this passage in the Old Testament. However, since Passover, the Days of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost, all feasts of God commanded in the Old Testament, each have an important application and meaning in the New Testament and help us to understand various aspects of God's plan, it seems likely that the Day of Trumpets also has meaning for the Church.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind was a major milestone for God's plan, and is pictured by Passover. The days of unleavened bread show the need for Christians to repent and put sin out of their lives. The major milestone in God's plan of the Holy Spirit being given to the Church is pictured by the Day of Pentecost. After Jesus' first coming, death, and resurrection, and after the Holy Spirit was given to the Church, what is the next great event to occur in the plan of God?

"Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven' " (Acts 1:9-11). The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ will return to this earth.

Since the Day of Trumpets is the next of God's holy days in the Hebrew calendar after Pentecost, and since the return of Jesus Christ to the earth is the next great event in God's plan, is there any connection between the two in Scripture? The answer is yes. There are a number of scriptures in the New Testament that associate the return of Christ with the blowing of trumpets.

The next great event in God's plan is the return of Jesus Christ in great power and glory to the earth. Notice what Jesus said in Matthew 24:29-31: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will

mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Notice that Jesus said that when He returns He will send His angels with the sound of a trumpet to gather the elect. This shows that there will be the sound of a trumpet at the return of Christ.

Notice that at the time of Christ's return, true Christians who have died will be resurrected, and those who are alive will be changed to immortality. "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). Also, "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Notice that both of these passages refer to the sounding of a trumpet.

The book of Revelation speaks of end time events shortly before the return of Christ. Revelation 8:2 speaks of seven trumpets that are to sound: "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets." Other scriptures show that these seven trumpets sound one at a time during God's punishment of the world in a period called the "Day of the Lord." But it is at the LAST of the seven trumpets that Christ returns to rule the earth and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!' " (Revelation 11:15).

When Christ returns, He will rule the earth and establish the Kingdom of God ruling over all the nations of the earth. The resurrected saints will rule with Christ for 1,000 years. Notice Revelation 20:4-6: "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Those resurrected or changed from mortal to immortal at this time will rule with Christ over the nations of the earth. These are the few that are called and drawn to Christ by the Father in this age pictured by the Day of Pentecost. The majority of mankind will still be physical and mortal. Note also that this resurrection of

the saints is called, "the FIRST resurrection", indicating that there is more than one resurrection. I will talk about another resurrection when I explain the meaning of the holy days that follow the Day of Trumpets.

The return of Christ and the resurrection of true Christians will bring to an end the 6,000 years of man ruling himself in opposition to the ways of God, and it begins a period of one thousand years of God's direct rule over the nations of the earth.

Christ and the saints will then teach mankind then living the laws of God and the way of life that leads to peace, happiness, and prosperity. Christ will rule the nations, establish justice, and enforce the ways of peace, bringing to pass the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2-4: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *That* the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore." This is the time when Jesus' statement to his twelve apostles in Matthew 19:28 will be fulfilled: "So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' " This will be a time when salvation is open to all men then living, not just the few. All will be taught God's truth and all will have an opportunity to repent of their sins and their sinful nature, to have faith in God and in Jesus Christ, to accept Christ as their savior, and to be baptized and converted and to be saved.

I will explain more about this period of one thousand years when I cover the meaning of the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. But before I go to that I want to explain more about the resurrection of the saints.

Christians who have died are described in the Bible as having fallen asleep. Note these scriptures. "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16). "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

How does the concept of falling asleep in death, and then later being resurrected from the dead, fit with the concept of traditional mainstream Christianity that all humans have immortal souls that live on after the death of the body and can never die?

As a child, I was raised Catholic. If I remember correctly, I was taught that I had an immortal soul. The soul was pictured as the "real me", the real consciousness that in a sense lived inside my body. I was taught that when I died, if I had a mortal sin on my conscience that had not yet been forgiven, I would go to an ever-burning hell fire where I would be tortured for all eternity, but if not, then I would eventually go to heaven where I would be happy looking at the face of God for all eternity, but first I would have to spend time in a place called purgatory, which is a place of suffering, where I would be punished for whatever sins I had committed that were not "mortal sins", and after a time in that place, which might be many years, I would then be allowed into heaven. I think I was also taught that among those outside the Catholic Church and those who were never baptized, which is the majority of mankind, if anyone lived a good life, they might go to a place called limbo instead of hell for all eternity. Limbo was a place of happiness, but not as happy as heaven, not as close to God.

I do not know what Protestants teach about the ideas of purgatory or limbo. I do know that they teach that man has an immortal soul ("immortal" meaning it cannot die). I do not know what they teach about the fate of the billions of people who have lived on the earth and died who never heard of Jesus Christ or had the opportunity to become Christians. Perhaps some Protestants believe that those who died without an opportunity to become Christians will be tortured forever in hell fire.

I have not found these ideas in the Bible.

Ezekiel 18:4 says, "Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die." If you look up in Strong's Concordance the word translated "soul" in the statement in Ezekiel 18:4 that the soul that sins shall die, you will find that it corresponds to Strong's number 5315 and is translated from the Hebrew word, "nephesh". Some of the definitions of this Hebrew word given in Strong's Concordance include "that which breathes", "living being", "the man himself", and "activity of mind". In the King James Version, nephesh is most frequently translated in into the English word "soul", but is also sometimes translated "life", "person", "mind", "heart", "creature", etc.

Genesis 2:7 states, "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." The word translated in the New King James Version as "being" is the same Hebrew word "nephesh". The King James Version translates this verse as follows: "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Genesis 2:7 clearly states that God made man physical, from the dust of the ground, and that man, made from the dust of the ground, became a living soul. Ezekiel 18:4 clearly states that the soul that sins shall die. The word "immortal" means, "cannot die". There

is no evidence from the verses we have looked at so far that the soul is immortal, but rather, the soul can die.

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die' " (Genesis 2:16-17). "And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die." ' Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die' " (Genesis 3:2-4).

In Ezekiel 18:4, God says that the soul can die. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus says that the soul can be destroyed. "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

The Bible pictures those who have died to be asleep, unconscious, as we are when we sleep without dreams (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16, 1 Corinthians 11:29-30, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, John 11:11-14, Luke 8:52-55, Mark 5:39-42, Matthew 9:24-25). Man is described as mortal, subject to death, in need of immortality, but not having it yet. At the first resurrection when Christ returns to the earth, Christians must be changed from being mortal to being immortal, both those who are resurrected from the dead and those who are alive and are changed. "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: '*Death is swallowed up in victory*' " (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

This is the purpose of the resurrection, to bring back to life those who are dead in their graves. If we have immortal souls that live on after we die, and if those souls go to heaven or hell when we die, what need is there for a resurrection?

The prophecy given to Daniel shows that at the end time many will be resurrected back to life from the dead. "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Daniel himself is told that he will be among those who come up from the dead. "But you, go *your way* till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days" (Daniel 12:13). The time between Daniel's death and his resurrection is described as "rest", which is metaphor very similar to the one Paul uses when he describes those who are dead as "asleep."

Man does not yet have immortality, that is, eternal life. We must receive it as a gift from God. "For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "Now behold, one came and said to Him, 'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' So He said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. But if you want to

enter into life, keep the commandments' " (Matthew 19:16-17). The reward of the saved is to RECEIVE immortality. We do not have it yet as immortal souls.

The Bible does teach that there is a spirit in man. "But *there is* a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding" (Job 32:8). "*Remember your Creator* before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:6-7). It is the spirit in man that empowers the human brain with intellect and enables every human to know and understand the things that animals cannot understand, just as the Spirit of God enables a Christian to understand knowledge of the things of God in a way that the unconverted mind cannot understand. "But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-12). The spirit in man, which Mr. Armstrong called the "human spirit", empowers the human brain with intellect and gives understanding, but it is not a "soul". It does not provide life and consciousness apart from the human brain, and it does not live on as a conscious entity after death, but as Solomon says, when a man dies the body returns to the earth and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

There is no consciousness, no awareness, in those who have died. The only hope for life after death is a resurrection from the dead, which is yet future. Solomon wrote, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Speaking of the condition of those who have died in this age, apart from a future resurrection, Solomon wrote, "For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6). "Do not put your trust in princes, *Nor* in a son of man, in whom *there is* no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish" (Psalm 146:3-4). The King James Version translates this same passage as follows: "Put not your trust in princes, *nor* in the son of man, in whom *there is* no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."

For proof that a resurrection from the dead is NEEDED for anyone to have life after death, consider what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:12-22 and 1 Corinthians 15:30-32. First, 1 Corinthians 15:12-22: "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we

have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." Now see 1 Corinthians 15:30-32 where Paul says, "And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die' ". Why would Paul say that if there is no future resurrection from the dead, it would be better for him to say, "Let's eat and drink for tomorrow we die" if Christians who die go to heaven upon death? That would not make any sense, nor would there be any need for a resurrection if we are really immortal souls who go to heaven when we die. The answer is, Christians who have died are not in heaven with Christ and do not have immortal souls. They died and are unconscious in their graves, and they will be raised back to life from the dead and given immortality at the second coming of Christ to the earth, which is yet future. That is why a resurrection from the dead is needed. Without the resurrection, there would be no life after death at all, and there would be no hope of reward after this physical life.

Have the righteous who have died gone to heaven?

According to John 3:13, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven." After Jesus died and was resurrected, Peter spoke to the crowds on the day of Pentecost about king David, saying, "Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, *"Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"*' " (Acts 2:34-35).

Some may refer to Elijah as one who was carried into "heaven". But in the Bible, the term "heaven" can refer to this earth's atmosphere, or outer space with its planets, stars, and galaxies, or the heaven that is God's throne. Notice the phrase "birds of heaven" in Job 35:11 and Jeremiah 16:4 referring to the heaven that is this earth's atmosphere. These verses refer to birds flying in the atmosphere of the earth.

2 Kings 2:1 says, "And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal." Then in 2 Kings 2:11: "Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." But did Elijah go into the heaven that is God's throne, or just into the air to be set down someplace else where it would not be known where he was? It is clear that Elijah's work as the prophet in that area for that time was finished, and it was God's time that Elijah be removed and Elisha take Elijah's office and carry on his work (1 Kings 19:16). But was it time for Elijah to die? Or was Elijah to be taken to the heaven that is God's throne? If so, it would contradict John 3:13 which says that no man has ascended into heaven.

Those with Elisha after Elijah ascended did not assume that Elijah went up to the heaven of God's throne. "Now when the sons of the prophets who *were* from Jericho

saw him, they said, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.' And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. Then they said to him, 'Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.' And he said, 'You shall not send anyone.' But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, 'Send *them!*' Therefore they sent fifty men, and they searched for three days but did not find him. And when they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, 'Did I not say to you, "Do not go"?' " (2 Kings 2:15-18).

Some time after this, a letter came from Elijah to the king of Judah, proving that Elijah was still alive and someplace on the earth. Notice that Elisha was already prophet in place of Elijah while Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was still alive. "But Jehoshaphat said, '*Is there* no prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD by him?' So one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, 'Elisha the son of Shaphat *is* here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah.' And Jehoshaphat said, 'The word of the LORD is with him.' So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him" (2 Kings 3:11-12). The fact that the servant said that Elisha "poured" water on the hands of Elijah, past tense, shows that Elisha was not still serving Elijah. This occurred AFTER Elijah went into the atmosphere by a whirlwind and Elisha received his office. Now, AFTER Jehoshaphat died, his son Jehoram became king of Judah in his place. "And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Jehoram his son reigned in his place" (2 Chronicles 21:1). And it was to Jehoram, AFTER Jehoshaphat died and AFTER Elijah was taken into "heaven" by a whirlwind, that a letter came from Elijah, proving Elijah was still alive and on the earth. "Jehoram *was* thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for he had the daughter of Ahab as a wife; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 21:5-6). "And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus says the LORD God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father's household, *who were* better than yourself, behold, the LORD will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; and you *will become* very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day" (2 Chronicles 21:12-15).

What is the reward of the saved? Is it our destiny to go to heaven to be with God after we are resurrected? I have already covered the scriptures that show that Christ will return to the earth to rule the earth with the resurrected saints, now made immortal, for 1,000 years. What happens after that? Revelation 21:1-4 indicates that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and that New Jerusalem will come down from heaven to the earth, and God will be with men on the earth. "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from

heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' " The Church of God has taught, and the weight of biblical evidence shows that this earth is destined to be God's headquarters of the entire universe, and this is where the resurrected saints will be with God, not in heaven.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12). Does this mean our reward is to go to heaven when we die? No, because Jesus said our reward is *IN* heaven, now, present tense, though we ourselves are not in heaven. Our reward is reserved *IN* heaven, and Jesus will bring it to us when He comes to the earth. Note: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). Peter's statement that our reward is reserved in heaven is consistent with Jesus' instruction to store up treasure in heaven. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). But Christ will bring our reward to us when He returns to the earth. "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

Some have assumed that since the reward of the saved is to enter the "Kingdom of Heaven", that this means they will be in heaven itself. Notice Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." However, the word "of" indicates OWNERSHIP, not location. The "Kingdom of Heaven" is the Kingdom that is OWNED by God who is on His throne now in heaven. It is basically synonymous with "Kingdom of God", as the term is used in Matthew 19:24. Previously, in the same sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). The Christian's reward is to inherit the earth and to be with Christ on the earth.

Those who are saved will be given immortality at the resurrection and will live forever. But what about the unrepentant wicked? What is their punishment? Traditional mainstream Christianity teaches that the wicked are tortured forever in hell. What does the Bible teach?

There is indeed a hell fire that will burn the wicked, but they will not burn forever. They will be burnt up, consumed by the fire, turned to ashes, because they are mortal, physical, subject to death, not immortal souls. There will be suffering, probably mental

as well as physical when the wicked realize what they have lost forever. As Jesus said, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28). But for humans the suffering will be temporary until they are destroyed forever in the fire.

John the Baptist said of Jesus Christ, "His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12). This hell fire that burns up the wicked is called the lake of fire, and being cast into it is described as the second death in Revelation 20:14-15: "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." God will destroy the wicked in hell fire. Jesus said, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). After this destruction, the wicked are described as ashes and non-existent. " 'You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do *this*, ' Says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 4:3). "For the day of the LORD upon all the nations *is* near; As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head. For as you drank on My holy mountain, *So* shall all the nations drink continually; Yes, they shall drink, and swallow, And they shall be as though they had never been" (Obadiah 15-16).

The Bible pictures the punishment of the wicked as death, not eternal life in hell fire. Notice Ezekiel 18:21-24: "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: *and* not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die" (KJV). If you read the entire chapter of Ezekiel 18, you will see that the comparison between the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked is always life and death, not living forever in heaven or hell. The righteous will be given life and will never die the second death, but will be with Christ forever. The wicked will die and cease to exist, and will be as if they never existed.

The Bible often talks about everlasting or eternal punishment, as in the passage where Jesus describes the separation of the sheep and the goats. "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matthew 25:44-46). Some think that this means that the suffering continues for eternity. That is not the case, according to the verses we have looked at previously. Everlasting ***punishment*** does not mean everlasting ***punishing***. The punishment is everlasting, eternal, because it is a permanent death from which there

will never be a resurrection. For all eternity, the wicked will never be brought back to life. There will never be a release from that penalty. As Paul puts it, "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed" (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10). As it says in Obadiah 16, the wicked will be as if they had never existed.

The idea that God, who is love (1 John 4:8, 4:16), would create human beings with immortal souls so that some would suffer for all eternity, being tortured in pain for trillions and trillions of years without end, with no hope of release or anything to look forward to but unending pain and agony forever, seems very inconsistent to me. I doubt if any people I know would wish this kind of thing on anyone. I wouldn't wish this on an animal much less a human being. And if we humans, being evil in comparison with God, have enough compassion to not wish this on anyone, why would God do this to someone, even an unrepentant sinner? I have never heard any explanation of this that makes any sense. But it does make sense that God in His love and wisdom would put unrepentant sinners out of their misery by destroying them so that they no longer exist, so that they do not make themselves and others miserable for all eternity with their wicked ways leading to conflict, hostility, war, and destruction. The wicked will be burned up and will be as if they had never been created. Their suffering will be over, and they will not be around to any longer inflict suffering on themselves or others by their evil ways.

It also makes sense that it would suit Satan's purpose to promote false teaching and deceive sincere religious people into thinking that God created us with immortal souls and that sinners who have not accepted Christ are tortured forever. I think this teaching, however it is packaged or explained, would give the impression to any reasonable person that God is a cruel God. Most religious people who believe this teaching would not explicitly say that God is cruel, but I find it hard to believe that they don't really think this deep down if they really believe God tortures humans, any humans, forever. It was Satan who told Eve, "You shall not surely die", so this false doctrine probably started early in man's history. In my opinion, it is one of Satan's slanders against God. In the New Testament, the Greek word *diabolos* (Strong's number 1228), which is often translated "the devil", includes the meaning of "slanderer" and "false accuser", according to Strong's Concordance.

God's mercy is great. He does not torture sinners for eternity in hellfire, but He puts them out of their misery forever. The idea that He tortures men forever in hell is a slander against Him. God is a good and wise and merciful God, not a cruel God.

The Day of Pentecost pictures the giving of the Holy Spirit to the few that God calls in this life and this age and draws them to Christ, not the majority of mankind at this time. The Day of Trumpets looks forward to the return of Jesus Christ to this earth as King of the earth, and also to the resurrection from the dead and instantaneous change from mortal life to immortal eternal life of those few who are true Christians and have received God's Holy Spirit and have overcome and endured to the end in this 6,000 year age of man. This is the first resurrection, and those few who are in this resurrection will

sit with Christ on His throne ruling the nations of the earth and teaching all mankind the ways of God, bringing peace and happiness to the earth for one thousand years. Jesus said, "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations" (Revelation 2:26, KJV). And, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Revelation 3:21, KJV). And, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Revelation 2:11, KJV).

The Church of God observes the Day of Trumpets as a Sabbath day of rest and assembly for church services.

The Day of Trumpets represents the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the saints to rule the earth with Christ so that mankind can learn that God's ways lead to peace, prosperity, and happiness. But before there can be true happiness on the earth, another step must be taken, and the next holy day, the Day of Atonement, helps us understand that next step.

The Day of Atonement - the Putting Away of Satan

In this present 6,000 year age of man, Satan is the ruler of this earth. He has a throne on the earth. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north' (Isaiah 14:12-13). Satan now has authority over the kingdoms and nations of the earth. "Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours' " (Luke 4:5-7). See also Matthew 4:8-9. Satan is the ruler of this world, this civilization, this system. Before He was crucified, Jesus said, "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30). Satan can only do what God allows him to do, as shown in the first two chapters of Job, but right now it suits God's purpose to allow Satan to be on the throne of the earth and to deceive the nations.

Satan is called "the prince of the power of the air". "And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Ephesians 2:1-3). Paul calls him, the "god of this age". "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the

glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). As ruler of the world, Satan deceives the whole world. "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:9).

Before there can be true peace and happiness on this earth, Satan must be removed from his throne and position of influence over mankind. When Christ comes, He is coming not only to take over rulership of the earth, but to replace Satan as ruler of the earth. Satan will be removed and put into a condition of restraint so he can no longer influence men and deceive the nations as he does now.

After Christ returns to the earth, Satan will be removed from his throne and bound in a condition of restraint for one thousand years. "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while" (Revelation 20:1-3).

The next holy day after the Day of Trumpets is the Day of Atonement. The instructions for Atonement are given in Leviticus 23:26-32. It is a Sabbath, a day of rest and assembly, and also a day of fasting, a day of refraining from food and drink for twenty-four hours ("you shall afflict your souls"). "*It shall be* to you a sabbath of *solemn* rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth *day* of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath" (Leviticus 23:32).

If you have read the instructions for the holy days given in the Old Testament, you will notice that there are instructions for offering animal sacrifices for each of them. The Church of God rests on these days and assembles for worship, fellowship, and instruction, but does not offer animal sacrifices. Why is that?

The animal sacrifices in the Old Testament were a substitute for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They could only be offered by the Levitical priesthood. King Saul offered animal sacrifices and was rebuked by God. "And Samuel said, 'What have you done?' Saul said, 'When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and *that* you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.' And Samuel said to Saul, 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you' " (1 Samuel 13:11-14).

Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Church is under the priesthood of Jesus Christ, not the Levitical priesthood. As explained in the book of Hebrews, there is

a change in the law because there is a change in the priesthood. "For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law" (Hebrews 7:12). The Levitical priesthood, which offered animal sacrifices, has been replaced by Jesus Christ our high priest, who is the real sacrifice that animals only represented. The Church does not offer animal sacrifices today.

But the animal sacrifices are designed to teach us lessons, primarily about the meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which they represent. We can learn lessons about the sacrifice of Christ by studying the instructions for animal sacrifices given in the Old Testament. They are written for our learning. The sacrifice of the Passover lamb is an example. We do not sacrifice a lamb at Passover today, rather we use the symbols of the bread and wine that Jesus Christ instituted for the Church. Nevertheless, we can study the Passover sacrifice of the lamb as recorded in the Old Testament to help us learn lessons about how the sacrifice of Christ pays the penalty of our sins so that we do not have to ultimately die in the second death.

There are instructions for sacrificing an animal on the Day of Atonement given in the Old Testament, and we can learn lessons about the meaning of this day from those instructions.

Two goats were to be presented before the Lord at the tabernacle. One was to be sacrificed and the other turned loose in the wilderness. "And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering" (Leviticus 16:5). "He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer it *as* a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, *and* to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness" (Leviticus 16:7-10). Notice that it is God who decides which goat is which, not the priest.

"Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which *is* for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. So he shall make atonement for the Holy *Place*, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness" (Leviticus 16:15-16). This goat is killed for the sins of the people. This clearly represents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins in our place.

What about the other goat that is not killed? What does that represent? Some have thought that this other goat also represents Christ. Does it? "And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy *Place*, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness. Then

Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy *Place*, and shall leave them there. And he shall wash his body with water in a holy place, put on his garments, come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people. The fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. And he who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp" (Leviticus 16:20-26).

Notice concerning the live goat that it does NOT die, but it is taken away from the tabernacle and God's presence and away from Israel, and notice that those who have come into contact with the live goat have to bath in water afterwards, implying that there is some uncleanness about the live goat, some influence that must be removed from those who came into contact with it. These things cannot represent Jesus Christ, but they can represent Satan very well.

Why are the sins of the people placed on the head of the live goat if that goat represents Satan?

It is Satan that deceives the whole world and leads the world in sin (Revelation 12:9). Ephesians 2:2 says he works in the sons of disobedience. He is called "the tempter" who tried to tempt Jesus into sinning (Matthew 4:3). It was Satan who deceived Eve and led her to take of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Adam ate of the fruit also, and thus Satan led the whole human race to take the wrong path (Genesis 3:1-6). Thus Satan is partly responsible for the sins of mankind. He shares in the responsibility, and the guilt, of the sins of man.

When Satan tempts people into sinning, and people give in to the temptation and sin or are deceived into sinning, the responsibility and guilt for the sin is twofold. The person who sins is responsible for committing the sin, but also Satan is responsible, and guilty, for tempting or deceiving the person into sinning.

By becoming a human being, living a sinless life as a man, and then dying to pay the penalty for our sins, Jesus Christ took on himself the penalty for the share of the guilt for our sins that falls on human beings. But Jesus did not pay the penalty for Satan's share of the responsibility. He did not pay the penalty for Satan's sin. Satan must bear his own penalty. But Satan, like the angels of God, cannot die (Luke 20:35-36). Satan will be removed from his throne over the earth, put into a condition of restraint so he cannot influence man, taken away from the presence of God and mankind, but he cannot die. Likewise, the live goat is taken away from the presence of Israel and God's tabernacle and let loose in the wilderness.

Leviticus 16:21 says, "Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man." The King James Version uses the term "fit man" for the one who was to take the goat into the wilderness. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting

them upon the head of the goat, and shall send *him* away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness" (Leviticus 16:21, King James Version). The "fit man" parallels the angel in Revelation 20:1-2: "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years".

There is also a lesson in the fact that lots had to be cast to decide between the two goats. It was not left to the priests to decide. God had to reveal which goat would be sacrificed and which was the one to be taken into the wilderness. Before lots were cast and God revealed which goat was to be sacrificed (representing Jesus Christ) and which goat was to be taken into the wilderness (representing Satan), the people could not know which goat was which.

Satan deceives all mankind right now (Revelation 12:9). He has blinded the minds of men (2 Corinthians 4:4). As part of the deception of mankind, Satan also practices religious deception, deceiving false ministers into teaching error. "For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). It is even possible for false ministers, who may be sincere not realizing that they themselves are victims of Satan's deceptions, to teach a false concept of Jesus Christ and a counterfeit Jesus. Notice what Paul warned about in 2 Corinthians 11:3-4: "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!"

How do we tell false ministers from true? How can we tell who are the ministers of the true Jesus Christ and who are the counterfeit ministers? How do we tell the true concept of Jesus Christ from a false Jesus, or as Paul put it, "another Jesus whom we have not preached"? Just as the priest in ancient Israel had to look to God to reveal which goat was which on the Day of Atonement, so we must also look to God to know who the real Jesus Christ and His true ministers are, not by casting lots but by looking to God's Word, the Bible. Notice this instruction in Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them." We have to look to the Bible and be willing to believe the Bible to know who is speaking the truth. The Bible must come first, not the ministry, the church we attend, the traditions we were raised in, or the traditions we have adopted and become comfortable with. God's ministers have a role in teaching and helping us find answers in the Bible. But we should not look to the ministers to teach us what the Bible means or to "interpret" the Bible for us. The Bible interprets itself, and difficult scriptures are interpreted by clear scriptures. Rather than look to ministers to interpret the Bible for us, we should look to the Bible to tell us who the true ministers are.

The Church of God teaches that the Day of Atonement represents the application of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind, but also the

future removal of Satan from his position of rulership and influence over the earth. The Church of God observes this day by resting from work, assembling for church services, and refraining from all food and water during this day.

The Feast of Tabernacles - the Millennial Rule of Christ

When Christ returns He will rule the nations of the earth, and the Church, resurrected and made immortal, will rule with Him (Revelation 2:26, 3:21, 20:6). Then Satan will be put away and will no longer be allowed to deceive the nations and tempt men to sin (Revelation 20:1-3). There will follow a thousand years of unprecedented peace, prosperity, joy, and happiness all over the earth.

The Bible is filled with descriptions of what that time will be like.

Jesus Christ will be king over all the earth. Those who have been converted and received God's Holy Spirit and overcame and endured to the end from the time of Adam until the second coming of Christ will be in the first resurrection and will receive positions of authority under Christ, helping Christ to rule, judge, and teach the nations. "But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them." (Jeremiah 30:9, KJV). "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28, KJV). "And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this *man* to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities" (Luke 19:11-19, KJV).

In this age of man, God is only saving a few. But in the millennium God will finally open salvation to all mankind. Christ and the saints will judge the earth and teach mankind God's law. All Israel and mankind will finally have the opportunity to learn God's truth and be converted. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house

of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:2-4, KJV).

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:1-9, KJV).

God will make a new covenant with Israel, this time writing His law in their hearts so they will obey, by giving them His Holy Spirit. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34, KJV). "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you" (Ezekiel 36:24-29, KJV).

Not only Israel, but all nations will have the opportunity to know God and be converted. "And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath

sent me unto thee" (Zechariah 2:11, KJV). "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *It shall yet come to pass*, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD" (Zechariah 8:20-22, KJV).

The result of God's rule and the conversion of the world will be unprecedented peace, prosperity, and happiness, for all Israel, but also for all nations that learn to obey God. "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, *even* a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed *be* Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isaiah 19:23-25, KJV). "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isaiah 25:6, KJV). "Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures" (Isaiah 30:23, KJV). "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame *man* leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, *shall be* grass with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it *shall be* for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*. No lion shall be there, nor *any* ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk *there*: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:5-10, KJV). "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt" (Amos 9:13, KJV). "For the seed *shall be* prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these *things*" (Zechariah 8:12, KJV).

The next feast of God after the Day of Atonement is the Feast of Tabernacles. This is a seven-day festival to rejoice before God. The instructions God gave ancient Israel for this Feast are in Leviticus 23:33-43 and Deuteronomy 16:13. Israel was to observe a Sabbath rest on the first of the seven days, and on the eighth day. The eighth day, though closely related to the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, is actually a separate feast, and I will cover it next. The Feast of Tabernacles came after the fall harvest in ancient Israel, and was a celebration of the prosperity God gave to Israel.

God commanded Israel to tithe of their income ("tithe" meaning "one tenth"). One tenth of their increase belongs to God (Leviticus 27:30, Malachi 3:8-10), and God gave this tithe to the priests and Levites (Numbers 18:21-22). Since the Levitical priesthood has

been replaced by the priesthood of Jesus Christ for the New Testament Church, members of the Church of God pay their tithes to the ministry of the Church for the expenses of the Church including feeding the flock and preaching the gospel to the world (1 Corinthians 9:8-14). But in addition to this tithe (we call "first tithe"), God gave Israel instructions for SAVING a tithe of their increase (we call "second tithe") to spend or consume at the Feast of Tabernacles, to help them rejoice before God (Deuteronomy 14:22-26). And on the subject of tithing, Israel was to pay a third tithe every third and sixth year in a seven-year cycle to support the widows and the poor.

Also, God commanded that Israel dwell in temporary dwellings, called booths, during the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:39-43).

The Church of God observes the Feast of Tabernacles by going to one of several festival sites that the Church organizes each year, staying in temporary dwellings (called "motels" or "hotels") for seven days (plus the eighth day that follows), resting on the first and eighth days as commanded by God, and attending church services for worship and instruction. During the Feast we rejoice before God and enjoy food and various recreational activities available at the site. We save a tenth of our income (second tithe) during the year and use this money for the expenses of attending the Feast. For us, the Feast of Tabernacles pictures the happiness that will exist all over the earth after the return of Jesus Christ.

During the millennial rule of Christ, He will teach the nations to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. Notice Zechariah 14:16-19: "And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, *that* whoso will not come up of *all* the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, *that have no rain*; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (KJV).

The Last Great Day - the White Throne Judgment

During this six thousand year age of man, almost complete, only a few are called by God to salvation. The rest are blinded by Satan. After the return of Christ, Satan will be removed and salvation will be opened to all mankind.

But what about all of humanity that has lived and died without ever having a real chance for salvation? What about the billions of people who have lived on the earth since Adam and Eve without even hearing the name of Jesus Christ? Will they have an opportunity for salvation?

The answer is yes. Every human being that has ever lived will have the opportunity to accept God's way of life, to repent, to exercise faith in God and in Jesus Christ, to have their sins forgiven, and to be saved and receive eternal life. For those who have lived and died before Christ returns, this will require a resurrection from the dead, not to immortality as with the saints in the first resurrection when Christ returns, but a future resurrection back to physical life so they can be taught the truth of God and have an opportunity, free from Satan's deceptions, to choose life. As Paul says, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). Everyone will be resurrected, but there is an order to the resurrections. "For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:32-33).

There is a specific prophecy in the Bible that describes this resurrection back to physical life of those who lived and died without being converted in this life. This prophecy applies to Israel specifically, but it can be shown that this prophecy about Israel will also apply to all mankind. "The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it *was* full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, *there were* very many in the open valley; and indeed *they were* very dry. And He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' So I answered, 'O Lord GOD, You know.' Again He said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, "O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: 'Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD.' " ' So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but *there was* no breath in them. Also He said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.' " ' So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, "Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!" Therefore prophecy and say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken *it* and performed *it*,' says the LORD" ' " (Ezekiel 37:1-14). This has to be a different resurrection than the first resurrection to immortality and spirit life of the saints at the return of Christ. This is a physical resurrection back to physical, mortal life. Those that are resurrected in this resurrection need the breath of air to enter their lungs before they can live.

Does this apply only to Israel? God judges all without partiality (1 Peter 1:17, Ephesians 6:9). "Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God

shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him' " (Acts 10:34-35). "For there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:11).

Jesus gave examples of gentiles who would rise in a resurrection with Israel. "The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here" (Luke 11:31-32). The men of Nineveh that Jesus referred to, and the "queen of the South" who sought the wisdom of Solomon, are dead and in their graves. The only way that they can rise up in the judgment with Israel is to be resurrected from the dead when Israel is resurrected from the dead. So even though the prophecy of the valley of dry bones given to Ezekiel mentions only Israel by name, the gentiles must be resurrected at the same time.

When does this take place?

Notice again Revelation 20:4-6: "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Notice that it says, "the REST of the dead" did not live again until AFTER the thousand years are finished. Now, a few verses later, Revelation 20:11-13 says, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works." This is where the name "White Throne Judgment" comes from. It is a time when the valley of dry bones prophecy will be fulfilled, and when, as Jesus said, the men of Nineveh will also be resurrected. It is the time when the billions who have lived and died will rise from their graves back to physical life, and each individual will be judged. But it will be a time when men can learn the truth of God, and repent, and be forgiven. Note that the above verses say that the Book of Life will be opened, implying that men's names can be written in it. Note also what God says in Ezekiel 33:18-20: "When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it. But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it. Yet you say, 'The way of the LORD is not fair.' O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways."

Those that come up in this resurrection will have every opportunity to learn the truth. They will be able to learn and know the history of mankind, both the six thousand year age of man in which there was war and suffering, and the one thousand year reign of Christ, in which there was peace and joy. They will be able to see and know that living according to the "get" way of life in rebellion and disobedience to God and His law leads to suffering, destruction, and death, but living according to God's law of love and submitting to God's rule over them leads to peace and happiness. They will learn that they are guilty of sin they have committed in their past life ("for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" - Romans 3:23), but they will also learn that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for their sins so that they can be forgiven if they repent and turn to God. And then each individual can make his own choice. Those who repent and are forgiven can have their names written in the Book of Life and receive eternal life. Those who choose not to repent will die in the second death. "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). There they will be destroyed so that they cannot continue to bring suffering upon themselves and others by their evil ways. After that will be fulfilled what is written in Revelation 21:1-4: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' "

No wonder Paul said, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33). God truly is fair and merciful, and He gives everyone a chance for salvation. No one is left out because of circumstances of birth or circumstances in their lives over which they have no control.

As the White Throne Judgment follows the one thousand year period, so the eighth day of the feast follows the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles. Note what Jesus said on the eighth day of the Feast: "On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39). During the White Throne Judgment following the one thousand years, for the first time all mankind, all those who have died without knowing the truth and having a chance for salvation, will have the opportunity to repent and come to Christ and receive the Holy Spirit, thus fulfilling Jesus' words which He spoke on the last day of the Feast.

The Church of God calls this "the Last Great Day" and observes it as a Sabbath day of rest and assembly for church services immediately following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles.

Traditional Christian Holidays

God commanded that the annual holy days be kept, and there are examples in the New Testament that show that they were kept by the first century Church of God, not just by Jewish Christians, but by gentile Christians also. The annual holy days help to teach and illustrate God's plan and purpose for mankind. Today, not only has traditional mainstream Christianity rejected the holy days instituted by God, they have substituted other days borrowed from pagan traditions, such as Christmas and Easter.

Where did these days come from? You will not find any instructions or commandments from God in the Bible for keeping Christmas, Easter, Halloween, or similar days. Rather, if you look up their origins in encyclopedias, you will find that many of the customs of those days and even the times of the year of the days themselves come directly from paganism.

Have you ever wondered what an evergreen tree has to do with the birth of Jesus Christ, or why Christmas falls on December 25 around the time of the winter solace? Or what rabbits and eggs have to do with the resurrection of Christ? Rabbits, eggs, or evergreen trees are often fertility symbols in ancient pagan religions, and the winter solace is the time when the days stop getting shorter and start getting longer, which is a factor in sun worship. In ancient times, after the time of the original apostles, many of those who wanted to spread Christianity realized that the masses did not want to give up their pagan holidays, so they reasoned that they could make it easier for people to accept Christianity if they allowed them to keep their traditional pagan holidays with their pagan symbols, and just change the meaning to fit Christianity.

Is this lawful in God's eyes? What does God say in the Bible?

"Thus says the LORD: 'Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, For the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples *are* futile; For *one* cuts a tree from the forest, The work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; They fasten it with nails and hammers So that it will not topple' " (Jeremiah 10:2-4).

"When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:29-32). Note that God says, "You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way" and "Whatever I command you...you shall not add to it". Here God clearly states that we are not to use pagan methods and practices to worship God, but only to worship God in

the way He commands without adding any customs to it that are borrowed from paganism.

Does God accept any kinds and methods of worship as long as it is towards Him, even in disobedience to God's commands? I don't think so. Jesus said, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). God rejected ancient king Saul because he offered sacrifices to God, but it was not lawful for him to do so because he was not a priest (1 Samuel 13:8-14). In a later incident, Saul again disobeyed God in order to save animals that he was commanded to destroy so they could be sacrificed to God. Did God accept Saul's act of worship because Saul had good intentions? "So Samuel said: 'Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from *being* king' " (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

Therefore the Church of God does not observe Christmas, Easter, Halloween, and other religious holidays whose customs and observance have been borrowed from paganism, but rather we observe the annual holy days commanded by God in the Bible.

Using Images in Worship

The Church of God does not use images such as holy pictures or statues as an aid in worship.

As I mentioned earlier, I was raised Catholic. When I first began to read literature published by Herbert W. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God, I was surprised when they referred to the commandment to observe the Sabbath as "the fourth commandment". I always thought the Sabbath commandment was the third commandment.

Catholics and non-Catholics agree that there are ten commandments, but they number them differently.

The Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21. In the listings of the Ten Commandments, they are not numbered. If the commandments are not numbered in the places where they are listed, how do we know there are ten of them? There are two verses elsewhere that indicate the number of commandments is actually ten. "So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments" (Exodus 34:28). Also, Deuteronomy 4:13: "So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone." Now, how should they be numbered? By this I mean, where does one commandment end and the next begin?

Notice how the Ten Commandments start out in Deuteronomy 5:6-10: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments". Catholics consider verses 6 through 10 to be all one commandment against worshipping false gods. Most Protestants consider verses 6 and 7 to be the first commandment against worshipping false gods, "I *am* the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me" and verses 8-10 to be the second commandment against using images and pictures as an aid in worship, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." Then Catholics continue numbering the rest of the commandments starting with the command against using God's name in vain as the second commandment while most non-Catholics continue numbering the rest of the commandments starting with the commandment against using God's name in vain as the third commandment.

Now, if Catholics and non-Catholics are one number off from each other in the way they number the commandments, how do they both end up with ten? Non-Catholics count the verses that command us not to covet as one commandment, the tenth commandment. Catholics consider the verses telling us not to covet as two commandments. They would paraphrase the commandments as "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife" as the ninth commandment and "you shall not covet your neighbor's goods" as the tenth commandment. Here is the verse from Deuteronomy 5:21: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that *is* your neighbor's." Catholics would consider the first part of the verse "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife" as the ninth commandment and the second part of the verse "you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that *is* your neighbor's" as the tenth commandment.

Which is right? The Ten Commandments are listed in two places, and though both carry the same meaning they are worded differently in the two places. In Deuteronomy 5:21, neighbor's wife is listed before neighbor's goods, and all of the words pertaining to neighbor's goods are together, and conceivably could be thought of as a separate commandment. But not in the listing given in Exodus. Exodus 20:17 says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor's." Coveting your neighbor's wife is in the middle of coveting your neighbor's

goods, right between "neighbor's house" and "male servant". I see no way that the words in this verse could be correctly separated into two commandments.

And that means that the commandment against worshipping false gods in Deuteronomy 5:6-7 and the commandment against using images in worship in Deuteronomy 5:8-10 are two separate commandments.

Why is this important?

I think it is well understood that God commands us not to worship any other gods but the one true God. But God also commands us not to use images as an aid to worshipping even the true God. Those who use holy pictures and statues of God or Christ to look at while they pray to "help them" focus on God may think they are pleasing God. If you tell them that using images in worship is a form of idolatry, they will say, "Oh, no. I don't WORSHIP the image. I only use it to picture what God looks like. I only worship the true God." But that is exactly what the second commandment forbids. Not the first commandment. The first commandment forbids worshipping false gods and putting anything in place of the true God. But the second commandment forbids using images to worship even the TRUE God.

No finite image can represent the infinite God, and God does not accept worship using images.

There is an example in the Bible that proves that God does not accept worship using images to represent what people think He looks like. "Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, 'Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And Aaron said to them, 'Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me.' So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron. And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD.' Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (Exodus 32:1-6). Notice, this was NOT a different pagan god that Aaron was making or teaching the Israelites to worship. It was a representation of what they thought the true God LOOKED like. It was an aid to worship, since Moses was no longer with them. They weren't trying to turn away from the true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that had just brought them out of Egypt by a tremendous series of miracles. Notice that Aaron said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD". That word Lord is in all-caps in many Bibles to indicate that it is a translation from God's name as He gave to Moses when He spoke to him from the burning bush. "Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What *is* His name?' what shall I say to them?' And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Moreover God said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: "The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations" ' (Exodus 3:13-15). God's name can be translated "I Am" or "the Ever-living One" or "the Eternal". The Hebrew word means, the One Who Is Self-existent. I make this point because this is the name Aaron used when he proclaimed a feast "to the LORD". He was using God's exact name that the Israelites already knew Him by. He wasn't trying to point them to a different god. He was trying to point them to the true God but using the image of a calf to do it, using the image to represent what they thought God might look like!

What was God's reaction to the Israelites' use of an image to help them worship Him?

"And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" ' And the LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation' " (Exodus 32:7-10). God was so angry He was ready to kill them all and start over with Moses. From Israel's point of view, they were using the image to worship "the LORD", but from God's point of view they weren't really worshipping Him at all because they were disobeying His commands. He did not accept their worship when they tried to worship Him using an image as an aid.

Also, God points out in Deuteronomy 4:15-19 that the Israelites saw no form of God when God spoke to them and gave them the Ten Commandments, and this is said in the context of commanding them to make no images to worship Him. This is further evidence that God commands us not to use images even in worshipping the true God because it was for that reason that God did not allow them to see His form when He spoke to them from the burning mountain. See also Deuteronomy 12:3-4 in which God tells Israel to destroy all the images they found in the land of Canaan and not to worship God with such things. "Such things" includes images. See also Deuteronomy 12:29-32 which I have previously quoted in the context of not using pagan customs and days to worship God. Not using pagan customs to worship God also applies to images, for the use of images in worship is a custom borrowed directly from paganism.

The greatest commandment is to love God with all our being. But God decides HOW we are to express that love, and we are not free to express that love in any manner we choose, even in disobedience to God's instructions. God tells us HOW we should love Him, and loving God with all our heart and all our mind includes obedience to God's commands and submitting our wills to God. The first four of the Ten Commandments teach us HOW to love God. The fourth commandment teaches us to rest on the seventh day and use that time to draw closer to God. The first commandment teaches us to love God above everything else and to put no other god or no other thing first in our lives in place of the true God. The second commandment teaches us not to use images, holy

pictures, and statues as an aid in worshipping God to help us picture or visualize what He might look like.

God's Purpose for Mankind

This chapter is about the true gospel. In order to understand this fully, we must understand the destiny of man and God's purpose in creating mankind.

We have seen from Scripture that God created man mortal, of the dust of the ground, subject to death, but that God gives every human who is willing to learn to live the way that God lives, the way of love, an opportunity for eternal life, an opportunity to live forever.

But why did God create man in the first place? What is God's true purpose for mankind? Why did God create man, and what does God intend man to become?

Much of mainstream traditional Christianity teaches that it is our destiny to be happy forever looking at the face of God in heaven. At least that is what I was taught growing up. But that view pictures an eternal life of passive inactivity. The image I learned is somewhat like the idea of a dog lying on the floor looking at his master's face. Is that really man's destiny?

1 Corinthians 2:9 says "But as it is written: '*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*' " Could it be that God has in mind for man much more than what the traditional religions of this world have taught?

The Bible calls Christians "sons of God". "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:14-17). "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:18-19). "Blessed *are* the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Jesus Christ calls Christians, "brethren", meaning, His brothers and sisters. "For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: '*I will declare Your name to My*

brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You' " (Hebrews 2:10-12).

"But He answered and said to the one who told Him, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother' " (Matthew 12:48-50).

In the resurrection to immortality, Christians will be like Jesus Christ and God.

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

We are to be conformed to the image of Christ so that Jesus Christ might be the FIRSTBORN among MANY brethren. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:28-30).

The Church of God is called the bride of Christ and will marry Jesus Christ at His return. " 'Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.' And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write: "Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" ' And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God' " (Revelation 19:7-9).

"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. '*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*' This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:22-32).

As I covered previously, we will be made immortal, and will be given eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:51-53, Mark 10:29-30, Romans 6:23, Matthew 19:16-17, Matthew 25:46).

Those in the first resurrection will sit with Christ on His throne. "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21).

We will be higher than angels, as Christ is, because we will rule and judge angels. "Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:3).

We will be worthy of worship, and we will bear God's name. "Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him My new name*" (Revelation 3:9-12). Notice that Christ clearly says He will cause some to WORSHIP before our feet!

Yet the Bible is very consistent that no man or angel should ever be worshipped, but only God may be worshipped. "And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, "*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve*" ' " (Luke 4:6-8). "As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man' " (Acts 10:25-26). "Then he said to me, 'Write: "Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" ' And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God.' And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'See *that you do not do that!* I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' " (Revelation 19:9-10). "Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, 'See *that you do not do that*. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God' " (Revelation 22:8-9).

After God created animal life on the earth, each after its own kind, He made man after God's image and likeness. "Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, *each* according to its kind'; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was* good. Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said

to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth' " (Genesis 1:24-28). Would it be fair to say that after God created the animals, each after its own "kind", that in making man in the image of God, He made man after the God "kind"?

Let's summarize what we have so far:

- After creating the animals each after its own kind, God made man, not after the animal kind or after "his own kind", but after GOD's image and likeness.
- At the resurrection of the saints we will be given eternal life, immortality.
- Christians are called "sons of God" and "children of God".
- We are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.
- In the resurrection, Christians will be LIKE Jesus Christ and God.
- Christ is the firstborn among many brethren, referring to Christians, and we are to be conformed to His image.
- Collectively, the Church is the bride of Christ who will marry Christ at His second coming.
- Those in the first resurrection will sit with Christ on His throne as He has sat on His Father's throne.
- We will be greater than angels.
- We will bear the name of God and of Jesus Christ.
- We will be worthy of worship.
- Only God may be worshipped.

What does all this add up to? What is man's destiny to become?

Mr. Roderick C. Meredith of Living Church of God has used the term "full sons of God" to describe our future state. Mr. Armstrong was very bold, saying very directly, "God is reproducing Himself". The Church of God under Mr. Armstrong's leadership has taught that God is a Family, and that those who are given eternal life will become God and be part of God's Family for all future eternity.

Is this blasphemy? Are we taking these verses too far in saying that God is reproducing Himself in man, that we will become members of the God family, that we will become God?

Why?

When the Jews accused Jesus Christ of blasphemy for saying He was the Son of God, Jesus quoted Scripture. Notice John 10:31-36: "Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, 'Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?' The Jews answered Him, saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.' Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, *"I said, 'You are gods' "*? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"?' ".

Is God able to reproduce Himself? Jesus said that for God all things are possible, and nothing is impossible for God (Matthew 19:25-26).

God's purpose in creating mankind is to reproduce Himself. And our destiny, if we exercise our free moral agency to submit to God and His way of life by repenting, believing what God says, and obeying God and letting Him rule our lives, is to become God as members of God's Family under the authority and supervision of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Mr. Armstrong's covers this in more detail in his writings. The reader can study this in his books *Mystery of the Ages* and *The Incredible Human Potential* and his booklet *Why Were You Born?* for more information on this subject.

I have heard some make the argument that we cannot become God because one of the attributes that defines God is that God is uncreated, eternal, and He has existed forever. They say that, no matter what we become, we will always be less than God because we had a beginning, we were created, we did not exist for all past eternity.

It will always be true that we did not exist for all past eternity. It will always be true that God the Father and Jesus Christ will have greater honor, glory, and authority than us. But in many other ways we will be like God.

In all the examples given of our relationship with God, all indicate a FAMILY relationship. We will be sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and collectively those in the first resurrection will be the wife of Jesus Christ. This does not indicate that we will be so far below God that we will be like a dog looking at his master's face for all eternity.

Most importantly, in the resurrection at the return of Christ, we will be worthy of WORSHIP (Revelation 3:9). The Bible is absolutely clear that ONLY GOD may be worshipped. Not even angels may be worshipped. Anyone can object to the terminology of saying that Christians will become God by setting their own definition

of the term "God" to mean "only that which has never been created", and then pointing out that this can never apply to Christians, but I do not find this definition in the Bible. Rather, the Bible is very consistent that only God should be worshipped. Therefore, a more biblical definition of God would be, that which is worthy of worship. And God says in Revelation 3:9 that He will make men come and worship before the feet of those He is addressing in the message to the Church in Philadelphia.

Just as God provided a wife for Adam that was comparable to him and like him, human as he was human, so God will provide a bride for Christ that will be like Him, God as He is God. Read Genesis 2:18-24 and compare with Revelation 19:6-8. Jesus is called the "last Adam" and compared with the first man Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:42-49. If God provided a wife for the first Adam that was like him, at his same level, of the same "kind", the human kind, not a lower animal, why would it seem so strange to us that God would also provide a wife for Jesus Christ that will be like Him, at His same level, of the same "kind", the God kind? Are all things possible for God or not? That wife will be the whole Church whose members will be resurrected if dead or changed to immortality if alive at the second coming of Jesus Christ and will rise to meet Christ in the air (1 Corinthians 15:51-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Can a man become God?

IT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED! Jesus Christ is called a "forerunner" (Hebrews 6:19-20). He was God who became flesh, became a man just like us (John 1:14). He died for our sins and was in the grave, and then was resurrected back to life as God. God has shown by the resurrection of Christ from being a man, dead in the grave, to being God again with the glory He had with the Father before the world existed (John 17:5), that it IS possible for a man to become God!

Why is this so important?

Besides understanding the greatness of God's love for us and the greatness of the gift that God wants to give us, there is a great misconception that we must get rid of if we are to fully understand how we should be living our lives now, the WAY we should be living, and why we need to be living that way. It is the same misconception I had when I was taught the traditional religious beliefs I was raised in.

Mr. Armstrong taught that there are two opposite ways of life, the "give" way, and the "get" way. The give way of life can be described by the word "love". It is the way of righteousness. It is the way of outgoing concern for others. It is the way of giving, helping, cooperating, serving, and doing good. It is the way of truth. It is the way that God Himself lives, the way that Jesus Christ lived as a man on the earth, and the way God teaches us in the Bible to live. The opposite way is the "get" way of life. It is the way of hostility, of trying to get for the self by taking away from others. It is the way of vanity, envy, greed, and violence, and the way of selfishness. It is the way of hostile competition against others. It is the way of dishonesty, deception, and lying. This is the way that Satan lives and the way of this world to the extent that men are influenced by Satan to live this way.

God teaches us to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Anyone who has read and believes the Bible knows that this is important to God. Why?

Part of the reason is that loving God and our fellow man is the way of life that brings happiness to ourselves and others, in this life. But it is also important, as are all of the spiritual principles of God's laws in the Bible, because it is the way of life we need to live for all eternity if we are to have the happiness God intends for us.

This is where the misconception comes in.

Many people have the idea, as I did, that the eternal life God intends for us in His Kingdom is a life of inactivity, passively looking at the face of God, perhaps singing and praising God, but nothing more. Somehow they think, that though God has given us ability in this life and a need to work and a desire to accomplish things, that in the Kingdom of God we will be doing nothing, accomplishing nothing. It seems to me that would be very boring.

I think the Bible reveals a different picture. The book of Hebrews quotes the writer of Psalm 8 in reference to putting all things under man's feet: "For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: *'What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.'* For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:5-9). What are "all things"? Not just this earth. The universe. Hebrews says that all things, the universe, are to be put under man's feet, but NOT YET.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:18-22).

Christ rules the universe (Matthew 28:18). The destiny of the Church is to be resurrected at the return of Christ to sit with Him on His throne. When we sit with Christ, we will rule the universe with Christ. Jesus gave the parables of the talents and the pounds (or minas) (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27) indicating there will be organization and positions of authority and we will be rewarded according to our works (Revelation 2:23). The twelve apostles will be over the individual tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). This indicates organization and teamwork. Paul refers to the whole creation (the universe) waiting for the Sons of God to be revealed (Romans 8:18-22). God did not create this vast universe, with the billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars, each star similar to our sun, some smaller and some larger, and with

planets orbiting many or all of these stars, in vain, for no purpose. God created the universe for a purpose.

All of this paints a picture, I think, of future creative activity and accomplishment for us in the Kingdom of God. God reveals some things about the millennium on earth, but does not go into very much detail about what we will be doing for all eternity. But God is a Creator, and we will be serving with and under the Father and Jesus Christ for all eternity.

What does this have to do with how we live our lives now? Everything!

God wants us to learn, in this physical life, the lessons we need in order to learn to live the way of life that God lives, the way of love, the way of giving, the way of helping, serving, and cooperating with others as a team and as a family, because that is the way we will be living for all eternity. It is the only way that will produce happiness. Its importance is not so evident if we are going to be idly looking at the face of God, doing nothing, but if we are going to be part of God's Family and a team, serving under Jesus Christ in whatever creative projects God has in mind concerning this whole vast universe, we are going to have to get along with each other. In fact, I think it is safe to say we will have to get along with each other much better than humans are getting along with each other right now on this earth. We will be working with each other, cooperating with each other. God is not going to give eternal life in His Kingdom to someone who is going to live the "get" way of life, the way of hostile competition, trying to take from others to get for the self. That wrong way of life will produce misery, not only for the person himself, but for everyone else around that person.

This physical life we are living now is a model of how the two ways of life work. We can often see by the fruits which way works best as far as producing a happy environment is concerned. Consider the family environment. Which is a happier environment, a home where there is love and cooperation, everyone working together for a common purpose, or a home where there is hostility, fighting, and hatred? Or look at the workplace. Many people have held a variety of jobs at different companies during their life. Many of us have seen workplaces and situations that are dominated by contentions, competition, lying, politics, back stabbing, people maneuvering to get ahead at the expense of others, but we may have also seen places and situations that are dominated by a spirit of cooperation, helping, teamwork, even friendship between employees, where people are each willing to help the other person succeed. Which is best? Which way of life produces the most happiness and the most accomplishment?

God's purpose for humans is that we learn to live the right way of life, the way that produces happiness for ourselves and others, so that we can be part of God's divine Family and share in God's power, and rule this universe with Jesus Christ, and work together in harmony, cooperation, teamwork, and love in accomplishing whatever creative projects God gives us to do for all eternity. This physical life is the testing and training ground to determine who is willing to learn that way of life and to give those who are willing the opportunity to build the kind of righteous character, with God's help through His Holy Spirit, that God Himself has.

How righteous God is, and how great is His wisdom, His power, and His love that He would offer such a tremendous future to the people He has created! He can give us nothing greater than to bring us into His divine family as His very sons and daughters and share with us His tremendous life, power, and authority over the universe. There can be no greater generosity towards us on God's part.

This is an important part of the "good news" of the Kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit

Before Jesus Christ was crucified, He told His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit, which Jesus called the "Helper" and the "Spirit of truth". Jesus said to His disciples, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:15-18). The King James Version translates "Helper" as "Comforter". Jesus further said that this Helper was the Holy Spirit which would help His disciples remember the things which Jesus taught them. "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:25-26). Later, after Jesus' resurrection but before He ascended into heaven, He told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem. "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). "And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' *He said*, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now' " (Acts 1:4-5). Note that Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as "power from on high" in Luke 24:49.

On the Day of Pentecost, the disciples received the Holy Spirit. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). This had a dramatic effect on the disciples. They now had courage, even to suffer and risk death to stand up for the truth, which they did not have previously (Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75, Acts 5:40-42). Note what Paul said to Timothy about the Holy Spirit: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

The Spirit of God helps us to understand spiritual truth. "But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have

received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-12).

The New Testament reveals that God's Holy Spirit is a Spirit of love, of power, of a sound mind, that it brings to remembrance the teachings of Jesus Christ, that it helps us to understand spiritual knowledge.

The Old Testament also speaks about God's Spirit. Here is an example. "Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: 'Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD *is* with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:1-2). Also, Genesis 41:37-40: "So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?' Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you' ". King David had God's Holy Spirit, for he said in Psalm 51:11: "Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me."

The Jews in Jesus' day must have known from the Old Testament scriptures that the Spirit of God existed. But I doubt if they thought of the Spirit of God as a person. Probably most of them did not think of the coming Messiah as being God, a person distinct from God the Father, yet also God. Jews today do not think of God as more than one person.

We know that Jesus Christ is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, and that both God the Father and Jesus Christ are distinct persons, yet both are God. There may be ways to prove from Old Testament scriptures only that the Messiah is God and that God is more than one person. In the creation account in Genesis for example, God says, "Let US make man in OUR image", indicating that the Creator God is more than one person. In Psalm 110:1, David says, "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool' ". There is no evidence David had any "Lord" but God, yet here he speaks of God making David's "Lord" sit at His right hand. Abraham, Moses, and even the elders of Israel SAW the God of Israel, and Jacob even wrestled with Him (Genesis 18:1-33, Exodus 33:11, Numbers 12:7-8, Exodus 24:9-11, Genesis 32:22-30), yet on another occasion Moses was told that no man could see God's face and live (Exodus 33:17-23), suggesting that that Moses was allowed to see Christ, but not the Father (compare this with John 1:18 and 1 John 4:12). So it may be possible to prove from Old Testament scriptures alone that there is more than one person who is God and that both the Father and the Messiah, Christ, are God. But if so, it seems that most of the Jews of Jesus' day and today have missed it. Nevertheless, the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that God the Father is a person and that Jesus Christ is a different person, and both are God (John 1:1-14, Philippians 2:5-11, John 17:1-5, 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, Hebrews 1:6-8).

What about the Holy Spirit?

Traditional mainstream Christianity teaches that God is a trinity, and that the Holy Spirit is a person. Besides being a tradition of the Catholic and Protestant churches, there are scriptures some use to support this teaching. For example, 1 John 5:7-8 says, "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one." But a marginal note in my Bible indicates that the words starting with "in heaven" in verse 7 through "on earth" in verse 8 are not in any early manuscripts but only a very few late manuscripts, indicating they were added later, not in the original Greek text inspired by God and written by the apostle John. In the original, this would read, "For there are three that bear witness: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one."

Why would someone add these words to the text? Apparently there was some controversy in the early traditional church over whether God is a trinity or not, and someone added these words to the Bible to support the trinity doctrine.

Many will also point to personal pronouns that refer to the Holy Spirit as "He", not "it". I am no expert in Greek, but I understand and have been taught that like many languages (not English), Greek assigns gender to nouns that do not all refer to persons. In English, this is not the case, but in some languages, everything is either masculine or feminine, even things that are not persons, and some languages allow masculine, feminine, and neuter articles, nouns, and pronouns, but again, masculine and feminine genders are assigned even to inanimate objects. When a word is masculine in one language, when it is translated into English, the translators determine whether to treat it as masculine ("he") or neuter ("it") based on whether it is a person or not. But since many translators of the Bible already believe, based on their personal religious upbringing and training, that the Holy Spirit is a person, it seems to me that their personal beliefs may influence whether they translate a reference to the Holy Spirit as "He" or "it", and if their beliefs are wrong, the choices they make in translating these pronouns could be wrong.

I have studied the scriptures relating to the Holy Spirit, and while I do not claim to know and understand everything about this subject, I believe the preponderance of evidence is that, though God's Holy Spirit is divine and comes from God, it is not a distinct person with an individual will and center of consciousness like God the Father and Jesus Christ. Rather, the Bible seems to show that the Spirit of God is the power of God that emanates from the Father and Christ, and it is the power through which God acts in His creation. The Holy Spirit indwelling in the mind of the converted Christian is also the mind of God, both of the Father and of Christ, imparting to the Christian the love, power, and understanding of God that enables the Christian to live the right way of life and to build God's righteous character. When the Holy Spirit acts, it is the Father or Christ who is acting through the power of the Holy Spirit.

For example, it is clear that God the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ, yet Mary became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. "Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His

father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.' Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?' And the angel answered and said to her, '*The* Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God' " (Luke 1:30-35). It is clear that it was the Holy Spirit that impregnated Mary. Now, if the Holy Spirit is a person, then the Holy Spirit would be the Father of Jesus Christ, not the one Jesus referred to as "My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). But if the Holy Spirit is the POWER of God the Father which emanates from God and is the power through which God acts, as the angel Gabriel called it, "the power of the Highest", then it was the FATHER who was the person who impregnated Mary acting THROUGH His Spirit, which is His power in action.

In John 14:16-18, Jesus said, "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." Notice, in saying that the Holy Spirit will be given to His disciples, Jesus said, "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you", implying that it is Christ, acting through the power of the Holy Spirit, that will come to them. Notice also John 14:23, which says, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him' ". Jesus is indicating that the Father and Christ will dwell IN the disciples. How? By the power of the Holy Spirit.

Look at this passage in Romans 8:9-11: "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." This whole passage speaks of the Holy Spirit, being called alternatively "the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead" and "the Spirit of Christ", dwelling IN a Christian as being synonymous with both Christ and the Father dwelling IN a Christian. In other words, Jesus Christ and the Father dwell IN a Christian by the power of their Spirit in the mind of the Christian.

Likewise, when the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit acting, doing this thing or that thing, or telling the disciples one thing or another, it is God the Father or Jesus Christ who are acting and speaking to the disciples, not in person as Christ did when He was with His disciples after His resurrection, but through the Spirit of God dwelling in the minds of the disciples. This does not picture the Holy Spirit as a person with a will and consciousness distinct from the Father and Christ, but rather the extension or power of the Father and Christ acting miraculously in Their creation. So when the Bible says that the Holy Spirit told the disciples to do this thing or that thing, it is Christ as head of the church telling the disciples, not in person face-to-face, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. Saying it is the Holy Spirit doing or saying these things is a figure of speech.

We can sometimes speak in a similar manner today. John Smith might send me a letter, and if I tell someone about what John said in the letter, I might say, "the letter said...". If someone writes an article in a magazine, or a book, someone might say, "what did the article say" or "the book says that..." We understand that it is not a letter or an article or a book that speaks, but the person who wrote the letter, article, or book. These are just ways that the writer communicates. Likewise, saying that the Holy Spirit said something is not proof that the Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit can be power through which God the Father or Jesus Christ speaks to us.

Furthermore, some passages that may seem to imply that the Holy Spirit is a person may be using figurative language. Notice what Jesus said in John 16:25: "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father." This statement in John 16 follows chapter 14 where Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit being the Helper. God used figurative language before in personifying wisdom as if it were a person in Proverbs 1:20-33 and Proverbs 3:13-18, calling wisdom "she" as in Proverbs 3:15, which says, "She is more precious than rubies, And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her", even though wisdom is not really a person.

If you look at the greetings in the epistles of Paul, you will notice a pattern that greetings are sent from God the Father and Jesus Christ, but not the Holy Spirit. If God is a trinity and the Holy Spirit is a person, doesn't it seem that Paul would send greetings from all three persons in the trinity? Notice: "To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:7). "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:3). "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:2). Those are just examples, you can check the other epistles. Also notice this statement from the apostle John: "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). John does not say we have fellowship with the Holy Spirit. What John says would not make sense if the Holy Spirit were a person, because if the Spirit was itself a person, we would indeed have fellowship with the Spirit. But it makes perfect sense if the Holy Spirit is the power, the presence, the mind of the Father and Christ because then, as John says, our fellowship is really with the Father and Christ. Notice also John's greeting: "Grace, mercy, *and* peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (2 John 3). Again, no greeting from the Holy Spirit.

Notice Colossians 2:2-3: "that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Here Paul speaks of the knowledge of God, both of the Father and Christ, indicating both the Father and Christ are God. But Paul does not mention the Holy Spirit as being a person who is God as the Father and Christ are. This omission would not make sense if God is a trinity and the Holy Spirit is a person.

There is also the evidence of the absence of teaching in the New Testament that the concept that the Jews had of the Holy Spirit being the power of God was being changed. Consider that the original apostles and disciples grew up in a Jewish culture. The Jews must have known that the Spirit of God exists because the Old Testament refers to the Spirit of God and David asks God not to take His Holy Spirit from him in Psalm 51:11. The Jews never thought of God as a trinity or the Holy Spirit as a distinct person, but always thought of the Spirit of God as the power or presence of God acting in His creation. This was the tradition the disciples were raised in.

For Jesus to teach His disciples that the Holy Spirit is a person and God is a trinity would be a major doctrinal change and very controversial among the Jews. Saying that the Holy Spirit is a person, or that God is three persons, would be just as offensive to the Jews as the teaching that Jesus is the Messiah and is God. The teaching that the Holy Spirit is a person would be a raging controversy as great as the controversy over the teaching that Jesus is God, and I would expect to see evidence of this in the entire New Testament, not only in the gospel accounts, but also in Acts and the epistles in the form of proofs, arguments, and teachings, just as there is to show that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God and is God. But I see no sign of controversy with the Jews in the New Testament about the nature of the Holy Spirit. I think it is obvious that there was no controversy because Jesus and the early church did not teach that the Holy Spirit is a person or that God is a trinity.

The Church of God teaches that God is not a closed trinity, but rather that God is a family into which humans can be born, that God's family consists now of the Father and Christ, and will include those humans that are given eternal life, and that the Spirit of God is the power and presence of God through which God acts in His creation and the mind of God (both the Father and Christ) dwelling in Christians that empowers them with spiritual love and understanding beyond what is possible only on the human level.

Clean and Unclean Foods

The doctrine of clean and unclean meats is not a major doctrine compared with the other things I have covered, and it is not my intent to explain every doctrine of the Church of God, but this comes up briefly later in the book, and I want to cover it briefly here.

God gave instructions in the Old Testament for which animal foods Israel could eat and which ones to avoid. These instructions are given in Deuteronomy 14:3-20 and elsewhere. Some examples of meat from four-footed animals that God calls "clean" and may be eaten include beef, lamb, and deer. Most other animals are unclean for food, such as pork, rabbit, mouse, etc. Seafood that may be eaten includes fish with fins and scales, but does not include catfish, lobster, shrimp, and crab. Poultry such as chicken, turkey, and duck are clean, but there are a number of other types of birds that are listed as unclean.

The distinction between clean and unclean animals existed before Moses and before the Old Covenant was made with Israel because Noah was instructed to take a different number of clean animals with him on the ark than unclean animals (Genesis 7:1-3). Moreover, Peter understood the law of clean and unclean foods to be still in effect after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ because when God gave him a vision telling him to eat unclean animals, Peter said he never ate anything unclean and did not want to eat them (Acts 10:9-16). Many people interpret this vision to mean that God has cleansed meats that were previously unclean, but Peter did not jump to this conclusion and wondered what the vision really meant (Acts 10:17). Later he learned that the vision meant that he should not call any man "unclean" and that salvation was open to the gentiles (Acts 10:26-28).

God does not reveal in the Bible why he wants us to avoid certain meats, but since God designed and created both the human body and all animals, it seems likely that some animals are more fit for food and healthy to eat than others, and that by declaring certain foods "unclean" He is commanding us to avoid them because they are not really fit for food. Scientists may or may not know of anything harmful in unclean animals, but as much as scientists and doctors have learned, they still know only a fraction of everything that God knows about food and human health, and they are very far from knowing all the causes of all diseases. Therefore, the Church of God observes the dietary laws of the Bible and teaches them as a matter of good health.

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Jesus began his ministry by preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15). He also prophesied that the gospel would be preached to all nations. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). He trained His disciples and sent them out also to preach the gospel (Luke 9:1-6).

What is the true gospel?

It is important to ask and answer that question, because not every gospel is a true gospel. There can be false gospels.

The true gospel is the gospel that Jesus Christ preached. It is the same gospel that Peter, Paul, and the other apostles preached.

But Paul warned the members of the Church that he had taught that they should beware of any false gospel. "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6). "But even if we, or an

angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

So I ask again, what is the true gospel?

Jesus Christ preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23, 6:33, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 9:11, 12:31, Acts 1:1-3). "Gospel" means "good news" or "glad tidings" (Luke 8:1). So the true gospel is the good news of the Kingdom of God.

This gospel is also called the "gospel of Jesus Christ" or "the gospel of Christ" (Mark 1:1, Romans 15:19, 1 Corinthians 9:18). The word "of" can indicate ownership. The gospel of Christ is Christ's gospel (2 Corinthians 2:12). It is His message, the message God the Father gave Him to preach to the world and to give understanding of to the Church.

In Matthew, the term "Kingdom of Heaven" is used. This is synonymous with Kingdom of God. "Of" denotes ownership, not location. The Kingdom of God is the kingdom owned by God. It is God's kingdom. Likewise, the Kingdom of Heaven is the kingdom owned by heaven. It is the same as the Kingdom of God.

What is the Kingdom of God?

One of the accounts in the Bible about the Kingdom of God and how it will be established is in the book of Daniel. Daniel interpreted a dream that King Nebuchadnezzar had about an image. This dream was from God, and God inspired Daniel to understand its meaning (Daniel 2:1-30). Nebuchadnezzar had dreamt that he saw a great image. The head of this image was made of gold, the chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, the legs of iron, and its feet were made of iron and clay. Then a stone struck the feet of the image and crushed the whole image and became a great mountain that filled the earth. Daniel gave the interpretation of this dream from God. "You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others" (Daniel 2:37-40). The different metals represented different kingdoms that would rule on the earth in sequence, with the head of gold first and the feet of iron and clay last. Then Daniel explained the meaning of the stone that crushed the image in the days of the last kingdom made of iron and clay. "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure" (Daniel 2:44-45).

This kingdom that God will set up to rule over all the earth is the Kingdom of God, and it will replace man's kingdoms. This will happen in the days of the last kingdom, the one represented by the feet and toes of iron and clay, at the end of the age. This will happen at the last trumpet, when Christ returns and the Church of God is resurrected. "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (Revelation 11:15).

The Kingdom of God is a coming world ruling government that Christ will establish over the entire earth at His second coming. It is also the divine family of God and it will include the resurrected saints as members of God's family, sons of God the Father and brethren of Jesus Christ. It is the members of God's family, including the resurrected Church of God, that will make up that government that will rule over all the earth.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God is the good news of that kingdom, and it includes the knowledge about all aspects of that kingdom. In its broadest sense, it includes the whole truth of the Bible.

There are many aspects of a kingdom.

A kingdom has a king. The king of the Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ. He was born to be that king (Luke 1:31-33, John 18:37). Christ shall return to the earth as king of kings, to rule the earth. Everything about Jesus Christ is therefore included in the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

A kingdom has a headquarters location. The headquarters of the Kingdom of God will be Jerusalem on this earth after the return of Christ (Zechariah 14:16-19, Revelation 21:1-2).

A kingdom has laws. In the kingdom of God, the basic law is the law of love. In the Kingdom of God, God's law will be a way of life. It will be the way of life that causes peace and happiness for all eternity. This way of life is expressed by the two great commandments in the Bible, to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus Christ, the king of the Kingdom of God, lived a perfect life, not only so He would be a perfect sacrifice so that His death would be payment for our sins, but to teach us by His example (John 13:12-17, 1 Peter 2:21-22). We can learn much about the Kingdom of God and the law of love that will be the way of life in that kingdom by studying the life of Christ and seeing the examples of how He put obedience to God and love towards men into action. He went around doing good, healing the sick, and teaching the people for their good.

The law of God is defined in further detail by the Ten Commandments, the first four of which teach us how to love God and the last six which teach us how to love our neighbor. The law also includes as major principles the three things Jesus said were the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23). The Ten

Commandments and the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faith will all be taught in the Kingdom of God as a way of life.

This way of life is further illustrated by an abundance of instruction in the entire Bible. The gospel accounts and the epistles of the apostles in the New Testament are filled with detailed instructions about how we should live to practice the way of life of the Kingdom of God, and the Old Testament is filled with examples, both good and bad, that help to illustrate the consequences of obedience or disobedience to God's law, examples we can learn from (Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, Hebrews 4:11, James 5:10, 2 Peter 2:4-9, Jude 5-7). We need to learn that way of life by putting God's laws into practice in our lives now and making that way of life a part of our character if we want to be in God's kingdom (Matthew 7:21, 19:17, 1 Corinthians 6:10). Instruction in that way of life, the laws of the Kingdom of God, is all part of the true gospel, and that includes the entire Bible.

The gospel includes the good news that God will send Jesus Christ to return to this earth to rule the nations and teach all mankind God's truth, opening salvation to everyone and bringing peace, justice, prosperity, and happiness to all the earth. It includes the good news of the happiness and blessings that will be experienced in the kingdom, and the Old Testament prophecies are filled with teaching about the peace, righteousness, prosperity, and happiness that will reign all over the earth after Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom of God over all the earth, which I have already covered.

The good news of the Kingdom of God includes instructions in how we can be saved and enter that kingdom. The Kingdom of God is the ruling family of God, and to enter that kingdom means to enter the family of God as a member of that ruling family. But if we could never be saved and enter that kingdom because of our sins and because this physical life was the only life we could have, that would not be good news. If we merely lived out our physical lives now, then died and ceased to exist for all eternity, just like any animal, that would not be good news for us personally. But God has provided a way for all men to be saved and to enter that Kingdom. That way is called salvation, and everything in the Bible that teaches us how we can be saved and enter into God's kingdom is part of the good news of the Kingdom of God.

And as I have already covered, it is the king of that kingdom, our savior Jesus Christ, who makes salvation possible. Without His saving work, including being born as a man, living a sinless life, preaching the message of the Kingdom of God that the Father gave Him to preach, training His disciples, dying a torturous death to pay the penalty for our sins, sending the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to build the Church of God, and His present work of interceding for us as high priest and leading the Church as head of the Church, our salvation would not be possible and we would not be able to enter the Kingdom of God. It is His sacrifice that makes forgiveness of sins and our entry into the Kingdom of God possible. And it is His resurrection from the dead that is the sign of His Messiahship and a proof that what He taught was from God. It is also His resurrection from the dead back to life that enables Him to continue His saving work today as head of the Church and our high priest and to be the king of the Kingdom of God (Romans 5:8-10, Ephesians 5:23, Hebrews 2:17, 3:1-2, 4:14, 6:19-20, 7:24-27, 8:1-

2, 9:11). And it is Christ who will resurrect us so we can be in that kingdom (John 6:39-40).

Therefore everything about salvation through Jesus Christ and the life and saving work of Jesus Christ, is a vital part of the true gospel of the Kingdom of God. It is salvation through Christ that makes the Kingdom of God good news for us personally, and this includes what Christ has done in the past, what He is doing now, and what He will do in the future.

The good news of the Kingdom of God includes the whole plan of God for building and increasing that kingdom and providing for men to be saved and to enter into that kingdom, as outlined by the holy days. It includes the truth that Christ will return to this earth and put an end to suffering and bring peace and happiness to this earth.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God includes the truth that God is reproducing Himself in man and that man can enter into the divine family of God. It is that divine family that IS the Kingdom of God.

If you look up in the Bible every instance of the term "gospel" or "kingdom of God", you will see the broad scope of what these terms cover. These terms include salvation through Jesus Christ and much more besides.

A variety of terms is used for the true gospel. In various places, the gospel is called, "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14), "the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1), "the gospel of Christ" (Romans 15:19), "Christ's gospel" (2 Corinthians 2:12), "the gospel of God" (2 Corinthians 11:7), "gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24), "gospel of peace" (Romans 10:15), "the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13), "our gospel" (2 Thessalonians 2:14), and "my gospel" (2 Timothy 2:8). But all these terms refer to the same gospel.

Paul taught that God's judgment of men through Christ is part of the gospel (Romans 2:16). The gospel includes God's law because the gospel is something that must be obeyed (Romans 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 1 Timothy 1:8-11, 1 Peter 4:17). The gospel was preached to Abraham and to ancient Israel (Romans 10:16, Galatians 3:8). The gospel was also preached to Israel in the wilderness, but because they lacked faith and did not believe it, they could not enter the promised land (Hebrews 3:16-19, 4:2), yet there is no record that Moses taught ancient Israel about the future life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. They had certain elements that referred to Christ such as the Passover ritual and the instruction about a future prophet who we know is Jesus Christ (Deuteronomy 18:15, Acts 3:22, 7:37), but they were not given enough information to fully know what these things meant. Yet the gospel was preached to them. What was preached to them? The law of God and the prophecies of the blessings that would come from obedience to that law. Those things are part of the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

The gospel is also called "the gospel of your salvation" in Ephesians 1:13, so it includes everything relating to the subject of how to be saved.

Can you see how the good news of the Kingdom of God expands to include the whole truth of God from the Bible? It includes everything about the way of life that will be lived in the Kingdom of God, the law of God, and that means it includes the laws and instructions in the Bible and the examples both good and bad that are written for our learning, in both the old and new testaments. It includes the whole plan of God recorded in the Bible for establishing that kingdom, including the history of what God has accomplished so far and the prophecies about what God will do in the future. It includes everything about Jesus Christ including what He has done in the past, what He is doing now, and what He will do in the future as the King of the Kingdom of God. It includes everything about salvation through Christ because that is how we can enter the Kingdom of God. There is little if anything in the Bible that does not relate to one or more aspects of the good news of the Kingdom of God. That is why the true gospel IS the truth of the whole Bible.

And while there are many aspects of the gospel, they all center on the one theme of the Kingdom of God. And actually, the good news of Kingdom of God is the central theme that runs through the whole Bible.

Does the Kingdom of God refer only to future events, or can it also apply in the present tense?

Jesus taught His disciple to pray to the Father, "Your kingdom come." Christ will return to set up that kingdom on the earth at the end of this age, and that is what Christians should look forward to. The establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth and the resurrection of the saints into that kingdom is yet future. But while the coming of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth is yet future, there is also an aspect of the Kingdom of God that is in the present because the Bible sometimes speaks of the Kingdom of God in the present tense. Jesus Christ is the king of the Kingdom of God and He represents that kingdom now. The law of God, the law of love as defined in the Bible, is the law of the Kingdom of God, and that law represents the way of life of that kingdom. When we obey God's law we are placing ourselves under the rule of God, and we are learning the way of life of God's kingdom now.

Notice Luke 17:20-21: "Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.' " Jesus was not telling the evil Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was within their hearts. Rather, Jesus as king of that kingdom, representing the teachings and way of life of that kingdom, was within their midst.

Paul considered himself an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), and in Colossians 1:13-14 he writes, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." How are we conveyed into the kingdom of Christ? When we repent of our sins and believe the gospel and are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, we then belong to Christ. We come under the rule and authority of the Kingdom of God, and as we submit to God and obey His word, we are learning to

practice the way of life of the Kingdom of God. Our citizenship in that Kingdom is reserved in heaven. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

So while the main fulfillment of the Kingdom of God is yet future, we can learn the way of life of that kingdom and submit to the authority of that kingdom now.

I believe all the doctrines of God's Church could be written as a single book about the Kingdom of God, with every doctrinal teaching organized around one or more of the aspects of that kingdom. It is all part of the gospel.

I started by saying there can be false gospels. What is a false gospel?

There can be more than one false gospel, but only one true gospel. There can be many lies, but only one truth.

Let me say here that mistakes in small matters do not make the overall teaching of a church false. None of us is perfect and we all make mistakes because we are human. God commands us to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:17-18). There is a learning process involved. None of us starts out perfect and none of us achieves perfection in this physical life. Perfection must be our goal, and when we are resurrected into the Kingdom of God after a life of growth and overcoming, we will indeed be perfect (Matthew 5:48). Mr. Armstrong understood this. He made mistakes and strove to correct his mistakes as soon as he learned about them from the Bible. Paul wrote, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9) and "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (verse 12).

But men can teach a false gospel if they remove major aspects of the true gospel from their message or if they introduce major false doctrines and heresies.

Some today teach a gospel about Jesus Christ, but they omit teaching the laws of the Kingdom of God, and they omit the prophecies concerning the return of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. They also introduce many false concepts into their message, doctrines based on the traditions of men, the traditions of their church, not on the Bible. As Mr. Armstrong pointed out, they preach a message about the messenger, Jesus Christ, but they omit the true message that the messenger brought. The true gospel includes the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, but it includes much more. If you preach ONLY about Jesus Christ, but omit teaching the other aspects of the Kingdom of God including the way of life of that kingdom as defined by God's law, you are preaching a false gospel.

Jesus Christ preached the true gospel, but He did not just talk about Himself. He taught a way of life, and He taught His followers to keep the commandments of God. He also prophesied and taught His disciples what was to come.

Sometimes those who preach the gospel may place special emphasis on one part or another according to the needs of their audience. This is not wrong, as long as all the major aspects of the gospel are also taught.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). Notice that Paul says that he FIRST of all preached that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was resurrected. This was not the only thing Paul taught, for if you read all his epistles you will notice that he taught the way of life of the Kingdom of God as well as prophecies about the future. But he taught the Corinthians about Jesus Christ first.

Why did he start with knowledge about Jesus Christ and not the other aspects of the Kingdom of God? Because that is what they needed to hear first. They were already able to know about the fact that God will establish His kingdom over the earth. They could know that from the teachings of the Jews in the synagogues. The Jews knew something about the Kingdom of God from the book of Daniel and other prophecies in the major and minor prophets. They also knew about the Ten Commandments and the law of God (Acts 15:21). But they didn't know about Jesus Christ. So Paul first taught them the part that they lacked, but needed to know.

Notice the emphasis that Paul placed on Jesus Christ and His sacrifice when he first began to teach the Corinthians about the true gospel: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Paul was so determined to place emphasis on Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, that he made a decision that when he first began to teach the Corinthians he would teach nothing else, and not get sidetracked with other matters, for a time.

It is not wrong to place special emphasis on one part or the other of the true gospel in order to first teach those things that your audience most urgently needs to learn, and then teach the other parts that they may already know later. The Corinthians were able to know many things about the Kingdom of God and the law of that kingdom from Moses and the prophets. But they knew nothing about Jesus Christ, so Paul covered that topic first.

But Paul certainly taught other things later. Notice how he taught and emphasized and expounded one of the points of the law of God, the seventh commandment against adultery, in chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians. In chapter 6 he taught principles about one of

the major points of God's law, loving our neighbor as our self, saying it is better to accept wrong than to sue a brother in court, and he also taught that in the Kingdom of God we will judge angels. In that same chapter he explained that those who practice sin as a way of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God, and he mentions a number of sins that are violations of the law of God. These are just examples. You can go through all the chapters of the two letters to the Corinthians to see that Paul did teach them many things about the Kingdom of God besides the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And you can continue in his other epistles to see that he gave the churches under his care a broad range of instruction. This is all part of the gospel (Romans 1:15).

The first century Church of God placed emphasis on the name of Jesus Christ and the personal salvation made possible by His life, death, and resurrection because this was new knowledge at that time. But they also taught the other aspects of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. In several places in the book of Acts the Bible says that Paul or some other teacher taught "things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ", or words to that effect (Acts 8:12, 28:23, 28:31). It is all part of the one true gospel.

Today, there exists an opposite problem. Most people in our western nations have heard about Jesus Christ, and every person who claims to be a Christian, and many who don't, have heard the teaching that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins so we can be forgiven and saved. But people are not so much aware of other aspects of the gospel message, the coming Kingdom of God that will rule over all the earth and the way of life and laws of that kingdom. And for this reason, when Mr. Armstrong preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God on radio and TV and in the Church's magazines and booklets, he placed special emphasis on the return of Jesus Christ to rule the earth and on the laws of God that will be observed in that kingdom, including the weekly Sabbath, which most people do not understand. He certainly did teach about forgiveness of sins and salvation through Jesus Christ, but he made a decision to place special emphasis in his teaching on the other aspects of the gospel, based on his perception of what most of his audience lacked and therefore most needed to learn. This is not wrong.

Just as Paul made a decision to place emphasis on salvation through Jesus Christ because he knew his audience did not know this, so Mr. Armstrong placed special emphasis on the prophecies about the Kingdom of God and the teachings about the law of God because most people today do not properly understand those subjects. But it is all part of the true gospel, and both Paul and Mr. Armstrong taught the whole gospel, all major parts of it, everything about salvation through Jesus Christ, the prophesied return of Christ to the earth to set up His kingdom, the resurrection of the saints, and the law of God that will be observed in the kingdom which we should be learning now.

There may also be times when certain subjects or points may be emphasized at first, not because your audience does not know these things, but to establish common ground with your audience and to speak to your audience from their point of view. Paul did this when he spoke to the men of Athens. You can read of this in Acts 17:22-34. Paul began by speaking of things the Athenians already were familiar with, such as their inscription to "the unknown God", and Paul referred to the writings of their own poets.

He did this to establish common ground. This is part of the principle that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 of being "all things to all men".

Someone who preaches the true gospel today may use the same strategy, and that is not wrong. For that reason, one might at first establish common ground with the majority religious culture in this country who already know about Jesus Christ by speaking first of His sacrifice for our sins and how we can obtain forgiveness and salvation through Christ, and then secondly about the law of God and the prophecies concerning the return of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God. This is a different approach than Mr. Armstrong used most of the time. Which approach is most effective for teaching your audience under any given circumstances is a decision that those who preach must make. But neither approach is wrong because both have biblical precedent.

These are all decisions made on judgments about the best and most effective way to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God. But all these things are about the kingdom, and as long as all are taught, no major aspect of the gospel is removed, and no major falsehoods are added, the message is the true gospel.

The true gospel is the gospel Jesus Christ preached, the gospel given to Him by God the Father, the message about the good news of the Kingdom of God. In its widest sense, that message includes all the truth of the Bible, the whole message of truth from God. It includes everything about Jesus Christ because He is the king of that kingdom. It includes salvation through Jesus Christ, because that enables us to enter that kingdom. It includes the prophecies about the Kingdom of God that show how it will be established on the earth and the peace and happiness that will result. It includes everything about the law of God, the law of love, and all the commandments of God because that is the way of life of the Kingdom of God that we should be learning now, and it is the way of life that will be practiced in the Kingdom of God.

The true gospel is about all these truths, but it centers on the Kingdom of God.

The truth of God is indeed "good news". It is happier news than the materialistic view of the universe that says that there is no God who created man and that this life is all there is, and once you die, that's it forever. It is happier news than any pagan religion ever offered. Very few in this world have heard this message, even in Western nations with Christian cultures. But it is God's will that the message of this truth go to all the world before the end comes, "as a witness" (Matthew 24:14).

Christ will return and bring happiness to the earth, and there are indications I think in Bible prophecy and chronology and in the conditions of the world today that suggest this will be soon. But prophecy also indicates that there are severe troubles that all Israel and the world will go through before this happens, and that is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 - THE EZEKIEL WARNING

Introduction

Chapter one on the United States and Britain in Prophecy showed that the United States, Britain, Canada, and other English-speaking nations are among the lost ten tribes of Israel that were taken into captivity by ancient Assyria around 720 B.C. and that their punishment would last 2,520 years, or until around 1800 A.D. Since then, the prophecies and promises concerning the prosperity and power of the descendents of Joseph have been fulfilled in the English-speaking people of the world. That chapter also covered Bible prophecy indicating that in the last days knowledge would increase and men would run to and fro. Bible chronology shows that we are now near the end of 6,000 years of man's history, and the Bible shows that Christ will return to rule the earth for 1,000 years. Every indication therefore is that the return of Christ is near.

But it is not yet. Christ will not return in the next one, two, or three years. Some major events must occur first. These events will have a major impact on the entire world, but most particularly the United States, Great Britain, and other English-speaking nations around the world.

The Great Tribulation

The disciples asked Jesus what would be the sign of His coming and the end of this age. You can read the whole account of what Jesus said in Matthew 24:4-46. I want to draw your attention to one statement. In Matthew 24:21-22 Jesus said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (KJV). Jesus said that there would be a time of trouble (tribulation) greater than any time of trouble before, and it would be so bad, that unless the days were cut short, no flesh would be saved. To me this seems to indicate that the tribulation would be so bad that unless God intervened, man would destroy himself.

There is a parallel verse in the Old Testament that speaks of a day of trouble so great that none is like it. Notice Jeremiah 30:7: "Alas! for that day *is* great, so that none is like it: it *is* even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it" (KJV).

There cannot be two times of trouble greater than any other time of trouble. Jesus and Jeremiah must be referring to the same tribulation or time of trouble. But Jeremiah adds the information that it is JACOB's trouble. Jacob is Israel, particularly the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 32:27-28, Genesis 48:2-5). Notice what Jacob said about Ephraim and Manasseh. "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (Genesis 48:16, KJV). When the Bible says "Jacob's trouble", it is referring to the trouble of Ephraim and Manasseh in the end time just before the return of Christ. And I have shown in chapter one that Ephraim is Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and that Manasseh is the United States.

So prior to the return of Christ there will come upon the English-speaking nations of the world a time of trouble greater than any time of trouble in history. We will see as we go how great that time of trouble will be.

Old Testament prophecies indicate that at the time of the end when Christ returns to set up His Kingdom on the earth, all Israel, the 10 tribes as well as the Jews, will be gathered back to their original land in Palestine that God gave them when they came out of Egypt. However, the descriptions of this return to the land of Israel indicate that Israel will be returning from a scattered condition of captivity, not freedom and prosperity. God will rescue all Israel, including the United States, Britain, and the Jews, from the suffering and captivity of the great tribulation that Jesus talked about. Furthermore, these prophecies indicate that the suffering Israel goes through and their resulting scattered condition of captivity to enemy nations will occur because of God's punishment upon them for their sins. God will first punish our nations for our sins, then will rescue and regather the survivors at the time of the return of Christ. Notice the following scriptures.

"Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. And these *are* the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it: it *is* even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, *that* I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them. Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make *him* afraid. For I *am* with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will

not leave thee altogether unpunished" (Jeremiah 30:2-11, KJV). This passage directly relates to the great tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble, which places the time frame just ahead of us but before the return of Christ. Notice that it is GOD that scatters Israel, and that God does this as a punishment to correct Israel, yet afterwards He will save them and bring them back from a condition of captivity.

"And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made *them* afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I *am* the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 39:23-29, KJV). This is talking about the "house of Israel", not just the Jews. It clearly says that God will send them into captivity for their unfaithfulness, as a punishment, but then will regather them FROM a condition of captivity at the time when He will pour out His Spirit on the house of Israel, so this must be in the next few years: the captivity, the rescue, and the conversion.

You can find other supporting scriptures that show that at the end time prior to the return of Christ all Israel, not just the Jews but the lost ten tribes also, will go into captivity as a punishment from God for their sins, but after they have suffered and been humbled Christ will rescue them and save them from their enemies and regather them into the land of Palestine, and also convert them. See Isaiah 11:11-12, Isaiah 60:10-12, Jeremiah 3:18, Jeremiah 16:14-18, Jeremiah 23:5-8, Jeremiah 30:15-18, Jeremiah 31:10-14, Jeremiah 46:27-28, Jeremiah 50:4-5, Ezekiel 28:25-26, Ezekiel 36:16-19 and 24-28, Ezekiel 37:15-23, and Ezekiel 39:23-29.

Why will Israel be punished?

The Blessings and Curses

When God established His covenant with ancient Israel after He brought them out of Egyptian slavery, He gave them his laws which lead to peace, safety, and happiness, and He commanded Israel to obey Him. He told them that if they obeyed they would be blessed but if they did not obey God's law they would be cursed and God would punish them with grievous punishments. Israel agreed to the covenant and promised to obey

God (Exodus 24:1-8). God pronounced a blessing and a curse. "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28, KJV).

Notice the blessings that would come upon Israel for obedience. "If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely" (Leviticus 26:3-5, KJV). "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe *and* to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed *shalt* thou *be* in the city, and blessed *shalt* thou *be* in the field. Blessed *shall be* the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed *shall be* thy basket and thy store. Blessed *shalt* thou *be* when thou comest in, and blessed *shalt* thou *be* when thou goest out" (Deuteronomy 28:1-6, KJV).

But if Israel did not obey there would be curses and punishments from God. "But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, *but* that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you" (Leviticus 26:14-17, KJV). There would be drought and famine. "And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits" (Leviticus 26:19-20, KJV). There would be disease epidemics, and Israel would be defeated by our enemies. "And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of *my* covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy" (Leviticus 26:25, KJV).

You can read the whole chapter of Deuteronomy 28 for a full description of God's curses and punishments for disobedience. These prophecies describe drought, famine, disease, conquest by enemy nations, and captivity as a result of disobedience to God's commands.

Many of these prophecies have been fulfilled, at least in part, in the punishments and captivities that came upon first the house of Israel and then also the house of Judah in ancient times. But they are also yet to be fulfilled in our time among the modern descendents of Israel including the American and British peoples.

God has prospered our English-speaking people these last two hundred years as probably no nations on earth have ever been prospered before, in spite of our sins. God has done this to fulfill the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because of Abraham's faith and obedience, and to fulfill the prophecies that the sons of Joseph would become a great nation and a great company of nations. But those promises have been kept and those prophecies have been fulfilled. God is not obligated to continue to bless us in spite of our sins and disobedience. The curses are about to go into effect once again, and more severely than ever.

God's role for Israel has always been for Israel to be a model nation that would show the other nations in the whole world how obedience to God's law leads to peace, prosperity, and happiness. This was true from the beginning. "Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people" (Deuteronomy 4:5-6, KJV). But ancient Israel failed to be that role model, and our modern descendents of Israel have also failed to be a positive role model of morality for the rest of the world. Today, we are anything but a model of God's way of life.

Have we obeyed God? Based on how we live today, should we expect blessings or curses from God?

Using the United States as an example, if I wanted to catalogue our sins as a nation in detail, I could make this the longest chapter in this book. I think anyone with spiritual discernment can observe that we are not keeping God's commandments as a nation.

The vast majority violate God's Sabbath commandment by working or pursuing their own recreation and pleasure. Even among those who observe the weekly Sabbath, few observe God's annual sabbaths and the Feast of Tabernacles, which God instituted to help man understand God's plan and purpose for mankind. Instead, mainstream Christianity has borrowed customs from paganism, observing holidays like Christmas and Easter, which God commanded our forefathers not to do. As a nation we are consumed with a love of money and a love of pleasure. We make money and pleasure our god which we serve and worship rather than the true God who created us and blessed us. How much time do Americans, on average, spend watching TV and movies and playing games per day? How much time do we, on average, spend each day reading or studying the Bible? That comparison is just one measure of where our priorities are.

Within some mainstream churches, many use images and "holy pictures" as an aid to worship, which God in the Bible forbids.

Tens of millions of unborn children have been aborted for the sake of the convenience of the mothers or of society. Abortion advocates talk about the "right to choose" to justify this practice, but little is said about the unborn child's right to choose. The mother has had the opportunity to make many choices in her life, but for the sake of the

convenience of the mother, every choice that the baby could ever make in his or her life is taken away. Despite the "pro-choice" label abortion advocates place on their position, abortion is NOT "pro-choice". It is anti-choice because it robs the unborn child of every choice he or she could ever make. God has harsh words for those who have innocent blood on their hands, and you can't get more innocent than a baby who has never even had the opportunity to choose between right and wrong. Notice what God says in Jeremiah 2:34: "Also on your skirts is found The blood of the lives of the poor innocents. I have not found it by secret search, But plainly on all these things."

Our land is filled with violence, injustice, pornography, and immorality of every sort. Violence and illicit sex are staples of entertainment. Lying is common in the workplace and the home. Promises made by men cannot be trusted. Schools at every level teach a philosophy and way of thinking that denies the existence of God. This society clearly is practicing Satan's "get" way of life of selfishness, greed, and dishonesty.

The taking of God's name in vain, using God's name carelessly as an expression of surprise or anger, is so common in TV and movies that it is hard now to even find a movie or TV show that doesn't have this expression of disrespect towards God in it, even among movies rated PG-13. Not only do screen writers write such dialog and actors perform it, but millions of people pay money to watch and listen to this. The actor who takes God's name in vain may do it only once, but the millions of people who watch it and listen to it with their VCRs and DVD players replay it and listen to it millions of times. Who is more guilty?

Our morality is sinking so low that many foreign nations want to try to keep our culture out of their nations because they realize that our entertainment and lifestyle is a corrupting influence on their own people and society.

Even most of those who consider themselves to be religious disobey God's commands in the Bible regarding how they should worship God, inventing their own customs or following the customs they were raised in rather than obeying what God commands in the Bible. So people substitute Sunday for the Sabbath, Christmas and Easter for God's holy days, and use holy pictures and statues as an aid to worship when God clearly commands His people not to follow such practices.

I could go on, but I think the point is made.

But God still intends to make our people, the modern descendents of ancient Israel, a role model for other nations to follow, an example of the right way of life. He will make Israel a role model in the beginning of the millennium. He will convert Israel and give them His Holy Spirit. But before we can receive His Spirit we need to repent. And as a loving mother or father will punish their children to teach them right from wrong for their own good, so God will use suffering to teach our nations a painful lesson to bring us to repentance so we can be converted at the beginning of the millennium. "You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, *so* the LORD your God chastens you" (Deuteronomy 8:5). " *For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.*" If you endure chastening, God

deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?" (Hebrews 12:6-7).

The Responsibility of a Watchman

One of the two main points of God's law is "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27, Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:29-31, Leviticus 19:18). One of the applications of this law of love is to warn someone who is headed for disaster but they don't know it. Proverbs 24:11-12 says, "Deliver *those who* are drawn toward death, And hold back *those* stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'Surely we did not know this,' Does not He who weighs the hearts consider *it*? He who keeps your soul, does He *not* know *it*? And will He *not* render to *each* man according to his deeds?"

Ezekiel was a prophet sent by God with a message for the house of Israel (Ezekiel chapter 2 and Ezekiel 3:3-11). God told Ezekiel he was to be a watchman for the house of Israel with a responsibility to warn about a coming disaster, and that if Ezekiel failed to warn Israel, Israel's blood would be on Ezekiel's head! "And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous *man* doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous *man*, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul" (Ezekiel 3:16-21, KJV).

The rest of the book of Ezekiel shows the sins of Israel, and the punishment that is to come upon them if they do not repent.

Ezekiel was told that when God gave him a warning for Israel that He was about to punish them for their sins, if he failed to deliver the warning, Israel would still be punished for their sins, but their blood would be on Ezekiel's head. He would share the responsibility because he failed to warn Israel. But if Ezekiel delivered the warning message, if Israel did not repent, they would die for their sins but Ezekiel would not be guilty.

Furthermore, God extends this principle beyond just Ezekiel or anyone whom God makes a watchman to Israel, but even to a watchman for Israel whom God did not put into the position of watchman. Notice Ezekiel 33:1-6: "Again the word of the LORD

came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand" (KJV). Notice, in this case it is not God who makes the person the watchman, but the people. Nevertheless, even though God did not make him the watchman, he is a watchman nevertheless, and God holds him responsible for delivering the warning. Verses 7 through 9 then repeat what was said earlier, that God made Ezekiel a watchman and he was therefore responsible for delivering the warning God gave him for the people.

God gives the warning so that people can repent and escape the punishment. But what about someone who has led a sinful life for a long time? Is it too late for them? Are they going to be punished no matter what they do now because of all the evil they have done in the past? "Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins *be* upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, *As I live*, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:10-11, KJV). "Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; *If* the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live" (Ezekiel 33:14-16, KJV).

What about a righteous person who has lived righteously for a long time, and then turns to sin? "Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his *righteousness* in the day that he sinneth. When I shall say to the righteous, *that* he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it" (Ezekiel 33:12-13, KJV). "When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways" (Ezekiel 33:18-20, KJV).

If you love someone, and you see that they are headed towards disaster, but you have information that they don't have, information that can help them avoid the disaster if they act upon it, you will share that information. You will tell someone what you know,

to help them, if you love them. You can't force someone to believe you or to act upon the information, but you can at least share it. That way, the person you warn has a chance. They might listen and heed the warning. But if they never hear the warning, if they never receive the information, they have no chance to escape.

This does not mean that a Christian should cram his religion down other people's throats. It does not mean that one should force or pressure someone who does not want to listen. But one can answer questions, even tactfully offer information, without trying to push. If the person wants to learn more, they will ask. If not, we don't have to pursue the subject any further. And a Christian can support the ordained ministry of the Church who offer the public information to warn the nation over TV, radio, and with magazines and booklets. Those who are willing to listen and heed may do so. Those who do not are not forced to.

The Ezekiel Warning

God sent Ezekiel specifically to "the house of Israel". "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me" (Ezekiel 3:17, KJV). See also Ezekiel 2:2 and 3:1-4. We know from the separate histories of Israel and Judah that the "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah" are two different houses (see Jeremiah 3:18, 5:11, 11:10, 13:11, 31:27 and 31, 33:14, Ezekiel 4:1-6, Zechariah 8:13, and Hebrews 8:8). The house of Judah is the Jews and the house of Israel is the ten tribes especially Ephraim and Manasseh, which are the English-speaking nations today.

Ezekiel was to warn the house of Israel of God's punishments to come if they did not repent of their sins. Does that warning apply today or only in Ezekiel's time? It could not primarily apply in Ezekiel's day because the vast majority of the house of Israel had already been conquered by their enemies and taken into captivity as punishment from God for their sins about one hundred years before Ezekiel's time! You can determine when Ezekiel received his vision in comparison to the captivity of Israel by comparing Ezekiel 1:1-3, which says that Ezekiel received the vision from God in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity with the chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel given in 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, and 2 Chronicles. See 2 Kings chapter 17 for the account of the conquest and captivity of the house of Israel, which occurred during the reign of Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah (2 Kings 18:1-3). Hezekiah was several generations before Jehoiachin.

Ezekiel's warnings apply to the house of Judah also (Ezekiel 4:6, Ezekiel 8:17). But the primary application of the warning is to the house of Israel. And in the book of Ezekiel, the prophecies against Jerusalem apply to the house of Israel because a small number of Israelites from the ten tribes were in Jerusalem and because Jerusalem, as the former capital city of all Israel, can represent the house of Israel (Ezekiel 4:1-16).

The prophecies given to Ezekiel which are written in the book of Ezekiel for us today apply to the modern descendents of the house of Israel, namely the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other English-speaking countries, as well as several nations in Northwestern Europe who are descended from various tribes of Israel.

What are the sins of Israel?

The book of Ezekiel often describes the sins in a general sense, as rebellion against God's laws, disobedience, and wickedness (Ezekiel 5:5-7), and you can look at God's laws, the Ten Commandments, and compare them with the behavior of our peoples today to see what our sins are. There are also many other prophecies in other books of the Bible where God rebukes those who commit specific sins, and many of these apply to us today. But there are some sins that Ezekiel specifically mentions.

"Then say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "The city sheds blood in her own midst, that her time may come; and she makes idols within herself to defile herself. You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and have defiled yourself with the idols which you have made. You have caused your days to draw near, and have come to *the end of* your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all countries" ' " (Ezekiel 22:3-4).

"In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow. Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths. In thee are men that carry tales to shed blood: and in thee they eat upon the mountains: in the midst of thee they commit lewdness. In thee have they discovered their fathers' nakedness: in thee have they humbled her that was set apart for pollution. And one hath committed abomination with his neighbour's wife; and another hath lewdly defiled his daughter in law; and another in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter. In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD. Behold, therefore I have smitten mine hand at thy dishonest gain which thou hast made, and at thy blood which hath been in the midst of thee" (Ezekiel 22:7-13, KJV).

"As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter *also*, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols" (Ezekiel 20:39, KJV).

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto her, Thou *art* the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. *There is a* conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed *difference* between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof *are* like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, *and* to destroy souls, to get

dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered *morter*, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully" (Ezekiel 22:23-29, KJV).

"Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, And tookest thy broidered garments, and coveredst them: and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them. My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, *wherewith* I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savour: and *thus* it was, saith the Lord GOD. Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. *Is this* of thy whoredoms a small matter, That thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through *the fire* for them?" (Ezekiel 16:17-21, KJV).

What will be Israel's punishment?

Ezekiel and other books in the Bible indicate that God will punish our nations with drought, famine, disease epidemics, and death from war. We will be defeated by our enemies, invaded and conquered, taken captive, and scattered among the nations. The vast majority will die in the famine, disease, warfare, and captivity.

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, And say, Ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys; Behold, I, *even* I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken: and I will cast down your slain *men* before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars. In all your dwellingplaces the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. And the slain shall fall in the midst of you, and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD" (Ezekiel 6:1-7, KJV).

"Thus saith the Lord GOD; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. He that is far off shall die of the pestilence; and he that is near shall fall by the sword; and he that remaineth and is besieged shall die by the famine: thus will I accomplish my fury upon them" (Ezekiel 6:11-12, KJV).

"I will scatter you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you" (Ezekiel 22:15).

The prophecies of Ezekiel indicate that one-third of our population will die in famine and disease epidemics, one-third will die in war, and one-third will be taken captive by

enemy nations and many will die in captivity. "One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them" (Ezekiel 5:12).

How many will be left in the end? According to the book of Amos, perhaps one-tenth will survive. "Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel: The virgin of Israel has fallen; She will rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land; *There is* no one to raise her up. For thus says the Lord GOD: 'The city that goes out by a thousand Shall have a hundred left, And that which goes out by a hundred Shall have ten left to the house of Israel' " (Amos 5:1-3). It is not clear to me if this one-tenth refers to the whole population before the deaths caused by famine and war, or only to the third that goes into captivity. If the latter, then only about 3% of our population will survive! No wonder Jesus said this would be the greatest time of trouble ever!

Once the tribulation begins, how long will it last? Mr. Armstrong and the Church of God have taught that the great tribulation upon Israel will last two and one-half years, followed by one year of the Day of the Lord when the whole world will be punished for its sins. There are scriptures that indicate that there will be a total time of three and one-half years at the end before the return of Christ (Daniel 12:6-7, Revelation 11:1-3, Revelation 12:6, Revelation 13:5).

If you read the whole book of Ezekiel, you will find not only warnings for Israel, but for other nations in the world also. You will also find warnings directed towards the ministry, who have not properly instructed and cared for their flocks. Not all the warnings about the sins of Israel and the world are in the book of Ezekiel, but many can be found in other prophetic books in the Bible. But the book of Ezekiel outlines and lays out basic principles about the sins of the world, Israel, and the ministry, and the punishments coming from God for these sins, and also the responsibility to warn those who need to repent and are about to be punished. It also sets the principle that those who have done evil can be forgiven if they repent and turn from the evil they have done and learn to do good.

One of the best ways to get a good feel about how God looks at Israel, and how God looks at everything, is to read the whole Bible. If you have never done this before, I recommend it. You can use a literal translation such as the King James Version or the New King James Version, start with the first verse in Genesis, and read from that point, little by little each day, till you read through Revelation. You will not understand everything you read, and you can keep a notebook for listing questions, but you will understand a great deal if you are willing to believe and obey what God says. Then over time, as you continue to read and study the Bible and believe and obey what God says, you will understand more and more.

Mr. Armstrong has taught the Church of God that we have the responsibility to deliver the Ezekiel warning message to the modern descendents of Israel today. We have the responsibility to tell the nations their sins, call them to repentance, and warn our nations about God's punishments to come if they don't repent. Some who hear the message may heed, and many probably will not heed. Those who hear and heed may be spared. But

if the Church does not do its part to warn the people, then the responsibility for that failure rests on us.

I find it interesting that the information that can be used to prove that the Bible is the word of God, that is, the seven thousand year plan of God and the prophecies and history that identify the English-speaking people as the tribes of Joseph, is also the same information needed to understand the responsibility to give a warning to Israel about the punishments to come. These two things come "bundled together". It is as if the proof of God's Word comes at a price. It carries with it a responsibility to put that knowledge to good use. It cannot be rightly used just to selfishly help one's own self only. It has to be used in God's service to help others also.

In other words, as soon as God gives us the knowledge that the Bible is God's word, He also gives us a job to do: warn Israel. He gives the gift, and at the same time tells us how to use it. But also, with the responsibility, God gives the gift we need to be able to fulfill it. Without the knowledge of who Israel is, we would not know who to warn. Without the knowledge of the seven thousand year plan of God, we would not know when to warn.

I think that those who have any spiritual discernment at all can see that our nations are declining in moral values. But at the same time, we are becoming weaker and we are losing our dominance and our strength as compared with other nations. I am sure that many do not see this and perhaps think that the United States will remain the strongest, richest, most powerful nation in the world for another hundred years or more. Still others may see that we will not remain dominant for very long, but they put their faith in a kind of collective world peace based on democracy and the enlightened good behavior of all nations on earth.

But I do not think that is the reality. The world has been at relative peace for the last sixty years (by relative peace I mean an absence of a world war of the scope of World War I or World War II), but it has been because of the economic and military strength of the United States and its allies as a force for peace, not the good will of all nations on earth. And now, that strength is declining.

The United States has declined and is declining at such a rate that it has reached a point that any objective, informed observer can tell we are in trouble, even without recourse to Bible prophecy. Our recent history and current affairs tells the story. We helped to win World War II because of our enormous industrial capacity and capital resources. We defeated the Japanese and German forces not because our soldiers were braver or our officers more skillful in the military arts, but because we out-built our enemies and we had superior technology. No other nation even had the scientific and industrial resources to build the atomic bomb at that time, although several nations had considered it and even started on the project. But since that time, we have been losing blue collar jobs and our industrial base to other nations continuously, and in the last decade we have also begun to lose white collar jobs and our technological and scientific superiority to other nations. In the modern world, information handling jobs can be done anywhere in the world over computer networks. Computer programming and engineering jobs are

just two examples of jobs that American workers have been losing to overseas workers who do the same work for less pay.

I think most economists agree that our balance-of-payments deficit cannot continue to grow indefinitely at an ever-increasing pace, but there is no painless solution in sight. Agreement breaks down when speculation turns to what will actually happen, when it will happen, and how it will happen, but I think most experts agree that something has to happen sooner or later.

God taught ancient Israel to trust Him for their protection. As a nation today, the United States trusts in its military and in its allies for its protection, not God. As a nation our military obligations are far extended, yet recruitment is not providing the manpower in sufficient numbers for the military that this nation relies on. At the same time our relationships with our allies are deteriorating.

Our population is aging, and there is a looming crisis as more "baby boomers" reach retirement age and more and more money is required to take care of them while proportionately fewer younger workers are earning money and paying taxes. And as the population ages, medical science and technology continue to provide more treatments, but these treatments come at an ever-increasing price, and medical care is consuming a greater and greater proportion of our earnings.

At the same time, there is a potential world-wide problem growing out of the convergence of two and possibly three trends. One, this world's economy is dependent on oil, and there is only a limited amount of available oil in the earth, and the world is approaching a point where it will be more and more difficult to find and extract more oil. Experts do not agree on how much oil is left, but all agree it is limited, and the supply is running down. There will come a time when it is no longer possible to extract the amount of oil this world's economy needs each year. Two, the rate of consumption of oil is rapidly increasing, not decreasing, year by year. This puts the nations of this earth on a collision course with the inevitable reality that a point will soon be reached when there is not enough oil to go around. At that point, the nations that control the oil will survive and the economies of the nations that cannot obtain oil will collapse, or be greatly reduced. There may be alternatives to oil, such as converting coal into oil or gasoline, but that is expensive and takes time to gear up, and sudden disruptions in the supply of oil can still hurt any nation's economy. And third, nuclear technology and the ability of nations to make nuclear weapons as well as the delivery vehicles to use them is spreading.

And while the whole world, and especially the most powerful nation on earth, the United States, is facing unprecedented problems and dangers, I think it should be apparent to those with a sense of the times we live in that there is a decline in the quality of leadership in the United States at every level of government and business. It is more and more difficult to find examples of the kind of integrity, strong competence, diligence, and effectiveness needed to solve problems and get jobs done among those in leadership positions. Our response to hurricane Katrina is one example. Our leaders are making too many mistakes and are not working effectively and cooperatively with each other. The decline in moral values, in family stability, in respect for authority, in

discipline, in basic honesty is all taking a toll. I don't think we are producing the caliber of leaders we used to. It may be that what is prophesied in Isaiah 3:1-5, where God says He will take away the "mighty man", the "honorable man", and the "counselor", is being fulfilled today.

At the same time, our internal divisions hinder our efforts to solve our problems. We are not united as a nation. We were mostly united during World War II, but since then we have become one of the most divided nations on earth. Jesus Christ said that a house divided cannot stand (Luke 11:17). We are divided Democrat vs. Republican, liberal vs. conservative, rich vs. the poor, religious vs. the secular, and by race. The predominance of negative campaign ads shows how divided we have become. Politicians prefer to belittle and attack their opponents rather than propose solutions to our problems.

So at a time when we are about to face our greatest dangers and challenges, we seem to be equipped with less and less wisdom and skill to deal with them. That is a very dangerous combination. We are still the richest, most powerful nation on earth, but we are living off of the sacrifices and accomplishments of generations past who paid the price to build this country, and I don't think today's generation is the same sort. That cannot last indefinitely.

God has blessed this nation far more than we ever deserved, but we have not sufficiently appreciated what God has done for us, nor have we obeyed and acknowledged the God who blessed us, and now God is taking our blessings away.

The Ezekiel warning is two-fold. Firstly, it is a warning message for our time today to the modern descendents of the house of Israel, especially the United States, Britain, and Canada, and also a warning to the Jews. But secondly, it is a warning to the Church of God that they better DELIVER the warning to Israel. Notice that in Ezekiel 33:1-6, Ezekiel is told to tell the PEOPLE about the watchman's responsibility. In other words, the warning about the responsibility of the watchman to warn is not just for Ezekiel. It is also for the people. The warning about the responsibility to warn is as much a part of the Ezekiel warning as the warning to repent of our sins. See also Isaiah 58:1. The Church of God, plus those who learn the truth from the Church and from the Bible, have that responsibility today.

This is the meaning of the Ezekiel warning.

BOOK TWO

THE WHY AND HOW OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL

CHAPTER 4 - WHY PREACH THE GOSPEL?

A LESSON FROM THE HOLOCAUST

DOES SUFFERING, WITHOUT TRUTH, LEAD TO REPENTANCE?

This chapter summarizes WHY the true gospel and the Ezekiel warning still need to be preached to the public BEFORE the tribulation and the work of the two witnesses described in Revelation chapter 11. Part of the answer comes from lessons that can be learned from the Holocaust, the death and suffering of millions of Jews before and during World War II at the hands of the Nazis. The Holocaust can serve as a model of what the tribulation will be like. There are lessons in the history of how the Jews reacted to the Holocaust that indicate reasons why the gospel and the warning still need to be preached, reasons many Church of God members may not have considered before.

Introduction

In the course of recent years, in conversation with church members, I have heard some people say that the work of preaching the gospel and a warning message may be over, and that even though most people in the United States and the world have not heard the message, a large enough sample of people have heard it so that God knows that the nations will not repent. In this view, it is not necessary or important that we reach everybody before the tribulation occurs. Many feel that the Church should only concentrate on feeding the flock and getting the bride ready.

I have thought about this issue. I have heard it taught in the Church for years that the great tribulation that is to come upon Israel is correction in love from God to bring Israel to repentance. Israel will repent in the tribulation and become humble and teachable so that Christ and the saints can work with the Israelites in the millennium and they can be converted and become a model nation that will serve as an example of God's way of life for all other nations to follow.

The tribulation prepares Israel for the return of Christ. It is commonly thought, at least I have thought this, that intense trial and suffering brings one closer to God. This is illustrated by the saying, "There is no atheist in a foxhole". But is this true? Will the intense suffering of the tribulation cause Americans, Britons, Jews, and other Israelites to repent, to seek God, to be more humble, to be more teachable?

I began to think. What effect would the tribulation have on our peoples if they don't hear the true gospel and the warning? Would suffering alone bring about a repentant attitude? Would people know they are being punished for their sins? Would they know what they need to repent of? What effect would the tribulation, without the true gospel, have on the average American's attitude toward God? And what would be their mental condition and attitude by the time Christ returns? Would they be teachable and humble towards God? Or would they be resentful and bitter?

Does national calamity and suffering alone, without a true message about the meaning of that suffering, produce or encourage a condition of repentance?

In thinking about these things, I thought about the death and suffering experienced by the Jews and others in the Nazi concentration camps during World War II. The Holocaust is probably the closest recent historical event that can picture for us what the tribulation might be like. The Bible describes the tribulation as the greatest time of trouble ever, so the Holocaust can hardly be worse. We may be able to learn something about how the human mind reacts to this kind of suffering. Does it tend to produce a repentant, humble, teachable mind?

How did the Jews react mentally to the suffering they endured? They, like the majority of Americans today, never heard any prophetic warning message that gave them an explanation of what they were about to go through. Did suffering by itself, without a message of repentance, produce a humble, teachable, repentant attitude in the Jews that went through the camps and came out alive? Were they closer to God afterwards, more willing to obey and be corrected? Or were they embittered, confused, and cynical?

Hundreds of books have been written about the Holocaust. I thought it would be worthwhile to read some of them and research how the concentration camp experience affected the Jews mentally, and in particular, how it affected their attitude towards God. If in fact the Holocaust did not draw the Jews closer to God or cause them to become humble, teachable, and repentant because they did not associate the experience with a just and fair punishment from God, then this demonstrates the importance of preaching the gospel as a witness and giving the warning of the great tribulation to come. It would show that we need to tell our peoples what they are doing wrong that they need to repent of and that there is a punishment coming from God if they don't repent. It would show that they need to know the purpose of the tribulation before it begins so they can understand it when they go through it.

I am not implying that what happened to the Jews was a punishment for their sins. I am only using them as an example of how the human mind reacts to this type of calamity without explanation as to its purpose and meaning.

What I found in this study was that, rather than producing a humble, repentant, teachable attitude on the part of most survivors, the suffering of the Holocaust often produced confusion, questioning of God's goodness, anger, bitter resentment towards God, suicide both during and after the Holocaust, and a variety of mental problems. It generally did not cause the Jews to repent, but caused many to actually lose faith in God. Why? Because they didn't think they were doing anything seriously wrong. They didn't see it as a punishment. They thought God was unfair to allow it.

This chapter summarizes what I found in the books I read about the Holocaust and how it affected those who went through it.

This chapter also tries to answer the question, why must the gospel be preached as a witness to all nations before the end comes. Jesus said that it would. What is the purpose of it in these last days? Is it only to make new members of the Church? Is the only purpose of the gospel at this time to feed and nourish those God has called? Or, is the purpose of preaching the gospel to all nations, "as a witness", to make them more guilty before God so that God will have more reason to punish them? Or could there be another reason?

What I am suggesting in this chapter is that suffering, without instruction, will not bring repentance, humility, or draw a person closer to the true God. I am also suggesting that an important reason for preaching the gospel and the Ezekiel warning to Israel and the world is that they will need to hear this message to prepare them for the tribulation so they will understand its purpose and what they need to do to repent and will have hope for the future. If Israel does not hear our message, the suffering of the tribulation, by itself, will not make them repentant and teachable and will not prepare them to be converted in the millennium.

I also suggest that it is important for Israel to hear the warning message and the true gospel before the tribulation begins so they have time to repent and escape and so that they will know that God was fair to warn them while there was still time to do something about it. This will make it easier for those who go through the tribulation to accept responsibility for their actions and the consequences without blaming God.

The Effect of the Holocaust

The effect of the Holocaust on the minds and attitudes of the people who went through it varied, just as the personality types, attitudes, and backgrounds vary among any population. Before the Holocaust, some Jews in Europe were very religious and had faith in God, and some were atheists. Many who went through the Holocaust lost their faith in God in the concentration camps because they could not believe in a God who would allow such a thing to happen to so many innocent people. In some cases, faith grew stronger. There were a variety of reactions, but one thing that is missing is any general sense that the Jews were being punished for their sins and needed to repent.

That doesn't mean no one reacted that way, but it seems to have been rare. What was very common however was the reaction that God can't exist or was unjust in abandoning the Jews to their fate. People knew they weren't morally perfect. But they couldn't believe that they were guilty of anything that warranted such extreme punishment. They couldn't understand how God could allow little children to be tortured and murdered. I have read an account of the Jews watching as small children were thrown alive into the flames of the furnaces that cremated the bodies because it was easier and quicker than sending them first to the gas chambers to be killed.

Holocaust survivors came out of the camps with a variety of mental problems. Many committed suicide in the camps. Many committed suicide years later after release, even after establishing outwardly successful lives, even to this time.

What follows are some accounts of people that have gone through the Holocaust and some lessons we can learn about how the experience affected or failed to affect the victims' faith, repentance, morality, and attitude towards God. As you read these accounts, ask yourself if these quotes describe a people that would be good material for God's model nation at the beginning of the millennium.

1. The Holocaust generally did not draw people as a whole closer to God.

"I entered the prisons and the concentration camps as an agnostic and, on April 15, 1945, freed by the British in Bergen-Belsen, I left the Inferno as an agnostic. At no time could I discover within me the possibility for belief, not even when I lay bound in solitary confinement, knowing that my file was stamped 'Troop Demoralization,' and for that reason constantly expecting to be hauled off for execution." (1)

"These lessons seem to be confirmed by studying the religious attitudes of holocaust survivors. They are unwilling to judge God, and, hence, they accept various theodicies available through the tradition. They also believe that actions are more important than faith, and so they continue to be active in Jewish causes and even to be religiously observant. However, they never fully recover their belief; they serve God, but not in love." (24)

"Studies seem to show that the percentage of Jews who believed in God upon entering the camps was quite similar to the percentage of believers who survived the Shoah [holocaust]. But we are told also that many individuals were changed. Some nonbelievers gained faith; some believers lost theirs. Perhaps a third category should be established: those who came to despise God, acknowledging his existence in a negative way." (25)

"In this camp there are some very devout Jews who pray all day long, which does not prevent some among them from contracting typhus and disappearing in short order. Some will survive and will thank God for having saved them. And I see with my own eyes that religion has no importance, that the only things that count are the desire to

survive and perhaps luck. Among the people I see survive there are some who pray and others who curse God. I tell myself that God has nothing to do with what goes on in Bergen-Belsen. I tell myself that he does not exist. And if he exists, if he allows what is being done to us at Bergen-Belsen, then I don't want to have anything to do with him. I don't want to hear any mention of his name. Never, during the whole of my life, shall I give two hoots about religion. I shall not even be against it; I shall simply not care about it. Nothing said to me on the subject will cause me to change my mind." (53)

2. Those who suffered in the Holocaust usually did not interpret their suffering as punishment from a just God for their sins. There were exceptions, but even those who believed the Holocaust was punishment usually believed that God may be punishing the Jewish race for something, but they didn't feel they personally had done anything that merited punishment. However, I noted that occasionally someone believed they were personally being punished, but that was rare.

"I had another teacher who taught me to sing....He taught me a song U'mipnai Chata'enu, it is because of our sins that we had been exiled. I sang it then. I sing it now, and I resent it. No, it is not because of our sins. There were no sins, not that many. I refuse to believe that there could have been so many sins to provoke such a punishment. If there was such a punishment, it is because someone else had sinned, not we, not the people of Israel." [Elie Wiesel, a survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, in a radio address 4/8/73] (16)

"Not for a single moment shall we entertain the idea that what happened to European Jewry was divine punishment for any sins committed by them. It was injustice absolute. It was injustice countenanced by God." (22)

"But if God who was, is, and will ever be, is it possible that at Auschwitz he rejected Israel, he turned away from Israel as a punishment for its sins? To believe this would be a desecration of the Divine Name. No matter what the sins of European Jewry might have been, they were human failings. If the holocaust was a punishment, it was a thousandfold inhuman." (23)

"During the interviews, the most frequently used word by survivors was 'innocent.' Why did I have to suffer? Why did they have to die? These questions superseded particular circumstances which engulfed individual survivors during the Holocaust. There was no solace to be found in rationalizing one's fate as punishment for a crime or sin committed." (32)

"In their assessment of the victims, Holocaust survivors repeatedly invoke the adjective 'innocent.' So many innocent people. The innocent children. Wasn't God supposed to protect the innocent and strike down the guilty?" (40)

"While survivors have been repelled by any offered causality between the transgressions of the Jewish people and the Holocaust as a manifestation of the wrath of God, some rabbis, many of them Chasidic, have proposed such a link....The umipenei hata'einu ('because of our sins we were punished') premise has been the prophetic to explaining calamities befalling the Jews for thousands of years. Did God use the Nazis as He used Assyria of old, as 'the rod of his anger' (Isaiah 10:5)? The Piazneser Rebbe, whose son, daughter-in-law, and mother were killed in a German bombing of Warsaw, attributed their deaths to his own sins." (41)

3. The Holocaust did not cause people to repent and did not improve people's morality, ethical conduct, or way of thinking.

"It goes without saying, I believe, that in Auschwitz we did not become better, more human, more humane, and more mature ethically. You do not observe dehumanized man committing his deeds and misdeeds without having all of your notions of inherent human dignity placed in doubt. We emerged from the camp stripped, robbed, emptied out, disoriented -- and it was a long time before we were able to learn the ordinary language of freedom." (2)

"Ella Lingens-Reiner, an Austrian prisoner, reports in her recollections of Auschwitz that she met another Jewish doctor there, Ena Weiss, who defined her philosophy of life this way: 'How do I keep alive in Auschwitz? My principle is -- myself first, second, and third. Then nothing. Then myself again -- and then all the others' " (3)

"Terrible as the food was, prisoners would go to any length to get it, including stealing it from their comrades." (4)

"Pregnancy could prove fatal. Some women were in the early stages of pregnancy when they arrived. Some managed to become pregnant in the camps despite the segregation of the sexes. They were in danger because as soon as a child was safely delivered, baby and mother were sent straight to the gas chambers. So, in order to save the mothers, inmate doctors killed their babies and told the Germans the infants had been born dead. 'We pinched and closed the little tike's nostrils and when it opened its mouth to breathe, we gave it a dose of a lethal product,' wrote Lengyel. 'And so, the Germans succeeded in making murderers of even us.' " (5)

"Lengyel wrote about a Roman Catholic nun who was forced to stand, nude, while SS guards stomped on her rosary beads and performed obscene dances while wearing her habit. The nun kept her faith through all manner of torture and abuse." (9)

"Many women traded sexual favors for food or clothing. It was the only way they could stay alive." (10)

"Hate was perhaps a stronger emotion than love in the death camps. As they watched their families and friends murdered, many prisoners used hatred for the Germans to fuel the spark of life that burned within them." (11)

"Life in the camps was a day-to-day battle for survival, and the normal rules of right or wrong did not apply....Sometimes the only way to stay alive was at the expense of other prisoners. In Auschwitz, the head of a Kommando killed his own brother when he fell and was unable to get up rather than let the Germans think he was soft. Some prisoners became informers for the Germans in hopes of getting a little extra food, but this was risky: If they were discovered, they were hanged in the middle of the night by their fellow prisoners and, when morning came, would be considered just another suicide." (12)

"Stealing was literally a way of life in the death camps. People simply could not live on the food they were given. They had to steal food or steal goods to trade for food in order to live. Stealing, whether from the Germans or one another, was called 'organizing' in Auschwitz slang." (13)

"The death camp system made thieves of everyone....'Women who had been mothers of honest families, who formerly would not have taken a hairpin, became utterly hardened thieves and never suffered the slightest feeling of remorse,' wrote Lengyel. 'Perhaps the Germans wanted to infect us with their own Nazi morals. In most cases, they succeeded.' " (14)

"The full range of emotions -- hate, love, anger, courage, lust, envy -- was present in the death camps. Emotions seemed to be magnified, however, by the pressure under which the prisoners lived. Generally, people behaved as they had before, only more so. The religious person's faith grew stronger. The person who tended to bully others became brutal." (15)

"It [the German concentration camp] was a world unto itself, a state within a state, a society without law. Men were flung into it to fight for their naked lives, for mere survival. They fought with all the virtues and vices at their command -- and usually there was more vice than virtue. Was the SS alone the enemy? Far from it. Inmate fought fellow inmate with the same tenacity, if not even more bitterly! Traditional behavior patterns were utterly disrupted, moral values strained to the bursting point. The human tragedy ran its full gamut. The despair of those compelled to recognize to what extent certain SS practices were emulated in the ranks of the victims, was only deepened after liberation, when they saw a credulous world invest injustice and brutality with an aura of heroism." (17)

"Homosexual practices were actually very widespread in the camps." (18)

"Every prisoner was dependent on his fellow prisoners, utterly at their mercy. The predominant impulses that governed their lives were selfishness and common sense, sharpened by many feelings of aversion. There were, however, outstanding examples of solidarity to the death, of the unfaltering assumption of responsibility for the whole group down to the last....But such demonstrations of the ultimate spirit of fellowship

were isolated acts, sacrifices made in the face of inescapable death. When the fight was not to the death but for daily survival, the opposite applied. Everyone who has been through a concentration camp knows the saying: 'The prisoner's worst enemy is the prisoner!' It is not that his was literally true, but that the constant and direct impact of unrestrained selfishness made it appear so." (19)

"In one car [railroad car shipping Jews to concentration camps] there were horrifying cases of mass insanity in which the prisoners killed each other with excessive brutality." (30)

"Incidents of cannibalism were not unheard of." (31)

"We were only interested in survival. I don't remember in camp thinking about moral issues, or any other issues for that matter." (33)

"I have to give the Germans credit for turning a normal person into a kind of monster I am. They put us through such terror....terror doesn't even describe it...that after a few days in Auschwitz, there were no tears. That sensitive child became a monster...The Germans removed any of that tenderness." (34)

"And many survivors are bitter. 'If you could lick my heart, it would poison you,' Itzhak Zuckerman, a leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, has remarked. 'I am bitter,' Hershel Kaplan, the seventy-nine-year-old sole surviving member of his family from Vilna, confessed." (35)

"Ida Koch, who from fourteen to sixteen years of age was incarcerated for various periods of time in Auschwitz, Dachau, and Maldorf, told me, 'I became one hundred....The first thing they teach you is how to lie and how to cheat and how to steal. But I was young....I was able to catch on to everything very quickly.'" (37)

"To tell the truth I was not much of a Jew in Europe. More than this, I'm ashamed to admit I wasn't a very nice person either. During the time I spent in the camps I was even worse. I behaved like an animal, but I also must point out that is why I was able to survive." (46) (56)

"One after the other we lose our reflexes as social beings, and before long we lose our elementary human dignity, with its educated, its civilized aspect. Aggressiveness reigns. The beast takes over. In Bergen-Belsen, the human dimensions waste away....I learn to defy prohibitions. I learn not to tell the truth. I learn to hide and not get caught. In Bergen-Belsen, all social rules are at an end. I learn that the one thing that counts is survival, survival and nothing else. Thefts occur every day, and every day there are fights -- terrible, violent, bestial. It's the cave man who has wakened in each of us; it's the law of the strongest and of the most cunning that we have to obey. The weak, whether they be weak with themselves or towards others, stand no chance." (54)

"You learn to be pretty callous towards the suffering of others." (55)

4. Many who had faith in God before the Holocaust lost their faith in the concentration camps. They either came to believe that God did not exist, or they no longer believed God was good.

"Those of us who were not there [in the concentration camps] must, before anything else, heed the responses of those who were, for theirs alone are the authentic ones. Many who were there lost their faith....there were others, too, in the thousands, in the tens of thousands, who were there and did not lose their faith....The disbelief was not intellectual but faith crushed, shattered, pulverized;" (20)

"For numerous Jews the Jewish fate in the ghettos and the death camps led to a crisis of religious faith. 'Where was God all the time? How could He countenance the infliction of such suffering and degradation on helpless millions, among them untold numbers of innocent children?' The faith of many a Jew in the God of his fathers was choked in the smoke of the crematoria. And today, in the third decade after the last chimney was blown up in the German death factories, the questioning has not subsided." (21)

"What took place in the minds of the death camp prisoners, even as their bodies suffered? They had been ordinary people leading ordinary lives. Suddenly, they had been thrust into an extraordinary situation, one in which few of the old rules seemed to apply. They had done nothing wrong. Why was this happening to them? Some lost hope, some preyed on their comrades, some became heroes, some lost their faith, some lost their minds." (6)

"The death camps tested people's religious faith to the limit. Some prisoners found comfort that heaven awaited them after the living hell they were enduring....Many Jews looked for God to rescue them as their Old Testament ancestors had been rescued.... In some cases, prisoners not only kept their faith alive, but were also able to hold limited religious services....Some people in the death camps became religious in response to their surroundings....As the months passed and the slaughter mounted, however, many Jews began to lose their faith. 'Where is God?' they demanded....Others continued to believe in God, but thought that God had abandoned them. Elie Wiesel, on hearing someone begin the Kaddish in Auschwitz, 'felt revolt rise up in me. Why should I bless His name? The Eternal, Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful and Terrible, was silent. What had I to thank Him for?' To believe in a God who was either unwilling or unable to stop the slaughter was a greater burden for men like Wiesel than to stop believing altogether. When Yom Kipper came, Wiesel refused to fast as prescribed. He wrote that 'there was no longer any reason why I should fast. I no longer accepted God's silence. As I swallowed my bowl of soup, I saw in the gesture an act of rebellion and protest against Him. And I nibbled my crust of bread. In the depths of my heart, I felt a great void.' " (8)

"During this prayer, another picture came to my mind: the final liquidation, in June 1943, of the Jewish ghetto in Lvov. I was sitting with my two younger brothers on the 'sands,' a desolate area where Jews were rounded up outside the Janowska camp. We were among the last few thousand Jews out of 170,000 from before the war. The cradle

of Chasidism. Behind us sat a childless couple whom I knew from the ghetto. They were in their forties and, being very well-to-do, were able to survive until this moment. He prayed daily, did not fail to put on his tefillin every morning, self-righteously pious and critical of anyone not sharing his devotion. There is a belief that the nonpious bring down God's wrath on all Jews, and thus God punishes everyone without exception. Up to this point, God had taken care of him and his wife. When we were all lined up to be taken to be shot he was the only one whom I heard screaming, 'There is no God.' God, whom he had implicitly trusted, had failed him. All the others stood quietly, awaiting their fate." (26)

"A former inmate of Auschwitz says that he became an atheist in five minutes. He was standing next to another man, and they were both gazing at the smoke billowing out of the crematoria chimneys. Finally the other man spoke up: 'Well, I suppose all this must have been God's will.' And the first man was instantly transformed into an atheist." (27)

"The most terrible aspect of Wiesel's book *Night* is its description of this loss of faith, not in God's existence, but in his goodness." (28)

"And, yet, whatever else this Holocaust has done to me as I have grown toward maturity, it has shattered for all time the easy acceptance of the Jewish religious thinking that is most particularly identified with thinking about God and the just ways in which this world, supposedly created in response to Divine desire, came to be. My family background is not Reform; generations of my German-Jewish family were Orthodox. My Grandfather, whom I never knew, may his ashes rest in peace, was a pious Jew whose place was in his little synagogue every Sabbath year-round. For my Father, may he rest in peace, as best as I can express it, his Orthodoxy died in the concentration camps of Europe, amidst the ashes of his family. For the first three decades of his life in this country, after having escaped from Germany at age 18, he could not even put on a skull-cap without renewing the pain of the former experience." (29)

"My father, he died spiritually before he died physically....He kept asking, 'Where is God? How is this possible?' I got frightened, I got scared, but I wasn't internally destroyed. So many adults lost their will to survive...." (36)

"I hate to say it. It's a big sin. To confront God? How dare I? But I can't help it...when I read the translation, the tears roll down my cheeks....My parents believed so much. On Yom Kippur, they asked for God's forgiveness, for His help....if you knew how they believed God would help them....My dog is better protected by me than God protected His people. When I arrived at Auschwitz, a mother was holding her baby and she was told to give the baby to her mother and she would survive. The grandmother tried to take the baby, but the mother wouldn't let go....And they argued and an SS man came over, took the baby, and threw it against the wall, and the baby's head smashed open in front of the mother. Was God watching this?" (38)

"There has always been a tradition of Jews putting our faith in the miraculous. He brought us out of Egypt. He parted the Red Sea. He saw us safely to the Promised

Land. The God of the Holocaust survivor's prewar family was a God who intervened. He was an all-seeing, all-knowing God who punished individuals for their sins and rewarded individuals for their good deeds. He was the Parent who judged fairly, who loved His children, who promised His shield. And for countless Holocaust survivors, He was the Parent who abandoned them." (39)

"Approximately one-half of those survivors who were believers before the war remained believers throughout the Holocaust and until today." (42)

"Approximately three-fourths of the survivors who were nonbelievers before the Holocaust have retained that stance." (45)

"In the face of the evidence, many survivors lost their faith entirely. They felt abandoned by Him and chose to abandon Him in kind. Solomon Goldstein had been brought up as a deeply religious Jew. 'When you sit in the barracks of Auschwitz and you look on the burning chimneys....Now, let me ask You, God, Did all those people commit the same sins that they should have to die by fire?' " (44)

"How anyone can live through the concentration camps and still be an observant religious Jew is beyond me. I just do not understand it. The camps convinced me that all the good Jewish practices in the world are of no value. Man is not going to be changed and made good by them and God doesn't seem to care. This is what I learned in the camps." (47) (56)

"Survivors have never expressed their rage to their former tormentors, nor have they exacted their revenge upon them. However, they can and have expressed their feelings toward God by shouting His nonexistence to His face. And by denying God's existence, they punish Him. 'Nothing can excuse God for not having saved us,' many survivors insist. But the more they shout, the more the boundary between belief and nonbelief is blurred. Why shout if He is not there? So God provides a punching bag enabling the ventilation of so much hurt, so much anger. 'When the topic comes up in conversation of religion or God, I have difficulty with it,' explained Jerry Singer, who is a very active participant in his synagogue. 'I'm always the rebel by bringing up the Holocaust or bringing up the murder of children. I witnessed a Hungarian bayonet through an infant and mother in one thrust. I saw deeply religious people praying and being killed anyway. I'm talking about good people, innocent people...children.' " (48)

"For those Jews living after the Holocaust, it became more difficult to speak of God as good, loving, merciful, or powerful." (49)

"According to Weisel, *Night* is the only book in which he writes about the Holocaust directly....In the following sections, Wiesel first experiences the incongruity between the teachings of Jewish tradition and the experience of Auschwitz. As *Night* unfolds, Wiesel describes how his faith was painfully consumed by the flames that sent the bodies of the innocent and the young skyward. Wiesel writes of his move from religious rebellion to defiance and from defiance to an encounter with the void -- the void of God's absence from history and from the author's personal life, the emptiness where His presence once had been." (50)

"At Birkenau on Christmas Day Jewish women who had been starved were brought from the barracks. Trucks drove up to the block where they were assembled, and women were piled into them. The victims knew they were going to the gas chamber and tried to escape and were massacred. According to an account of this incident, when the lorry motors started, a terrible noise arose -- the death cry of thousands of young women. As they tried to break out, a rabbi's son cried out 'God, show [them] your power - this is against you.' When nothing happened, the boy cried out: 'There is no God.' " (51)

"Yet there are signs that Jewish society has become increasingly secularized in the last forty years. Indeed, the destruction of six million Jews in the Holocaust has caused many Jews to abandon their belief in God; others have substituted the state of Israel as the major focus of their lives." (52)

5. With little hope for the future, some lost the will to live.

"My father, he died spiritually before he died physically....He kept asking, 'Where is God? How is this possible?' I got frightened, I got scared, but I wasn't internally destroyed. So many adults lost their will to survive...." (36)

"Suicide was an everyday occurrence as people reached the limits of their endurance." (7)

There were exceptions to the above observations. Here is an example of one who prayed to God and made resolutions to change how he lived:

"The following concentration camp inmate, a non-believer before the war, also sensed God's presence in his survival. 'You must remember what I went through and what I saw: monstrous things with my own eyes in the camps and out, infants being dashed to death and other young people being starved. And yet I escaped and lived. I had to interpret that fact for myself. Others say, How could you be religious and keep the commandments after what God did to you and all the Jews and how He let the Nazis murder us like flies? I can only speak for myself and try to understand what happened to me personally. Time and again I survived the appel, the selection. I'd pray to God and He would hear me. And I made vows that if I would survive this selection I'd eat only kosher after I was set free. And when the next came I'd say if I will survive this selection I will keep the Sabbath 100 percent. And if I'd fool them into thinking me healthy and strong when I was weak and nearly dropping, and should have been selected for death, I'd vow to do more, be a still better, more observant Jew. I never went back on my word. And in this way I became a religious Jew, keeping the commandments and living a Jewish life.' " (43) (57)

MY COMMENTS AND CONCLUSION

It should be apparent from the reactions of the Holocaust survivors that trials and suffering do not automatically produce good results. Suffering can be destructive, not edifying, to a person's character and attitude if he is not able to understand the reason for it.

If the people who go through the tribulation never hear the true gospel or a warning that they will be punished for their sins, and what those sins are, they won't know why God is allowing them to suffer. Imagine the reaction of a devout Catholic who never heard the true gospel. He or she can say, "I don't understand it. I have always been close to God. I am a good Christian and a good Catholic. I've gone to mass every Sunday and Christmas and Easter. I say the rosary and I have holy pictures and crucifixes in my home. I pray to Mary to intercede for me. Why is God punishing me? Doesn't He care that I am good?" Such people are faced with a choice of continuing to practice their existing religious beliefs, or giving up on God altogether. But they won't be able to repent and change and begin to practice the way of life that the Bible teaches because they don't think they are doing anything wrong.

This is why we need to tell our nations what their sins are and that God is going to punish them for their ultimate good, so when the tribulation comes, they will understand the purpose of it. They will know what they need to repent of. They will know there is a purpose to their suffering. And they will know that God gave them a fair warning ahead of time. And finally, they will have hope for the future, without which they may lose the will to live.

Although the Church under Mr. Armstrong's leadership has reached millions with the radio and television broadcast and the Plain Truth magazine, the percentage of Israelites who have heard and remember the message is very small. Probably less than one person in twenty in the United States has heard our message with enough power to remember that they were warned about a coming punishment if they don't repent and what they need to repent of. And most of those who have heard it, heard it when Mr. Armstrong was alive. There is a whole younger generation today that wasn't born or wasn't old enough to hear and understand the message when Mr. Armstrong was preaching it with power, and every year that goes by more and more of the older generation are dying out and more and more younger people are coming into adulthood. These people need to hear the truth.

Just as an example to illustrate the point, how many Americans thought of the possibility that God was punishing the United States when He allowed the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center buildings? Rather, they focus on the perception that those who died were "innocent victims". And even if some people, because it was a time of trial, turned to religion more than they did before, they turned to false religion, because that is the only religion they know. This is a small example of how most

people would react in the tribulation. They will think of themselves as victims and wonder why God is allowing it. Unless they hear our message.

I have heard that opinion polls show that the American nation considers itself to be religious and righteous. Many Catholics and Protestants think they are going to go to heaven when they die. They have been trained to think that sin is a violation of their conscience, and as long as they are not doing anything against their conscience, they think they are all right with God. But although the ability to have a conscience comes from God, every person's conscience is "educated" by their environment and their choices, and when that education and environment is wrong, the conscience will be wrong. But people don't know this. There are things people are doing wrong, such as working on the Sabbath, that they don't know are wrong, and there are things they are doing that they think will please God, such as celebrating Christmas and Easter, using pictures and statues of Jesus Christ, etc. that are actually wrong. That's why they won't understand their guilt without a message of truth.

We could speculate that someone who is an obvious sinner and hasn't thought much about God, and knows he has been living a sinful and selfish life, might find it easier to repent than a devout Catholic or Protestant who believes he is Christian and thinks he has nothing to repent of. But what will that person think when he sees the same suffering happen to the devout traditional "Christian" as happens to those like himself who seem sinful? To such a man, traditional Christianity seems righteous. Won't he conclude that the same thing happens to the righteous as to the wicked, so what is the use of changing? Many Jews who did not believe in God before the Holocaust were confirmed in their non-belief during the Holocaust because they saw so many religious and "innocent" Jews die and suffer the same as they, so they concluded that belief in God and morality was useless.

Preaching the gospel as a witness and warning the nations that make up the tribes of Israel about the coming great tribulation is a vital part of preparing Israel to be a model nation in the beginning of the millennium. They must repent and become teachable during the tribulation if Christ is going to convert them and teach them God's law so they can serve as an example for all the nations on the earth. They need to know what they need to repent of and how they need to change. They need to know that God was fair to give them a full warning before the tribulation started, while there was still time for them to change and escape the punishment. They need to know that there is a purpose in their suffering and that God has not forgotten them. They need to have heard the good news of the return of Christ to rescue them and bring peace to the earth so that they will have hope for the future and a will to live.

God must grant repentance. But a message of repentance is part of that process. I think one way God will grant repentance to Israel is to empower the Church to preach the gospel to the public before the tribulation, then open their minds during the tribulation to realize that they should have heeded it.

There is a passage in Deuteronomy that indicates that at the end time, just before the return of Christ, when Israel is in captivity, the Israelites will know that God has punished them for their sins. Deuteronomy 30:1-7 says, "Now it shall come to pass,

when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If *any* of you are driven out to the farthest *parts* under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. Also the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you." Note that verse 6 says that God will circumcise their hearts, which indicates that this must refer to the end-time return from captivity. But notice especially verse 1, where it says "...when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you...". Israel will REMEMBER the blessings and curses while they are in captivity. This indicates that it is God's will that they hear our message so they will be able to remember it. Also, notice the sequence. FIRST they return to God and obey Him "according to all that I command you today" (verse 2), THEN God brings them back from captivity (verse 3). That indicates Israel must repent and turn to God DURING the tribulation, before God rescues them, and that they begin to obey God according to God's law. For this to happen, Israel must hear God's truth before Christ returns and rescues them.

Besides the warning, the good news of the Kingdom of God will be needed by our peoples as they go through the tribulation or many more of them may die because, without something to look forward to, they won't have the will to live. Our people need to hear the good news of the gospel so they have hope for the future. Otherwise, they can easily conclude that there will be no end to their suffering. Once they are in the tribulation, they may think there will be no end to it, that death will be their only release. Without the hope of the return of Christ, they may not have the will to live, and without a will to live, perhaps none would survive, which would suit Satan's purposes. They will need a reason to live, something to look forward to.

Without hope, the mind cannot function properly. Suffering in a state of futility will not produce repentance. In order to repent Israel will need to trust God, and to trust God they will need to be able to have hope in God, to have an expectation that if they turn to God and obey Him there will be a positive solution to their problems.

Matthew 24:14 says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come". One minister has said that this is not a commission or command, but only a prophecy. Technically, he may be correct. In this particular verse, Christ is not commanding his disciples to preach the gospel to all nations as a witness. It is phrased as a statement of fact and a prophecy by Jesus that this will happen. However, we find examples where Jesus did this or that thing so that Scripture might be fulfilled (Matthew 26:54, John 19:28, John 13:18).

Jesus looked to Scripture, including prophecy, to know the Father's will, and then He took steps to make it come to pass, setting an example for us. Matthew 24:14 shows the Church that it is the Father's will that the gospel be preached as a witness to all nations, and as we follow the example of Christ, we will do what we are able to do to help that scripture be fulfilled. In that sense, it is correct to view Matthew 24:14 as a goal for the Church.

The Two Witnesses and God's Fairness

The Church has taught that the two witnesses are granted power at the beginning of the tribulation (Revelation 11:1-13). They will do a work of preaching the truth of God, and perhaps all of Israel will be able to hear it once the two witnesses are given power and begin their work. But by that time the tribulation has begun and it will be too late to escape. How will that demonstrate God's fairness?

If a person only hears the truth after it is too late to escape the punishment, that person may easily think that he would have responded and changed if he had heard the message earlier. He would tend to blame God for not warning him sooner instead of accepting responsibility for his own actions. This will make his own repentance more difficult. If he doesn't hear the warning before the tribulation begins, he may say, "If I heard the warning earlier, I would have heeded, but God never gave me a chance". That may not be true, but human nature is deceptive. It is always trying to shift the blame for our mistakes on others. But if the Church gets the warning message out before the tribulation, everyone who hears it can say later, "I should have listened", and that would be a first step towards accepting responsibility and becoming repentant. It will simply be easier for a person to recognize his own fault and repent if he knows he was warned ahead of time and chose to ignore the warning. By preaching the gospel we can remove his excuse that God never gave him a chance. That is good for the man and glorifies God.

In order for Israel to repent and have faith in God, they must learn to trust God. But to trust God they must believe in God's fairness and goodness. How much harder will that be if they do not see evidence of God's fairness to warn them and give them a chance to repent before the punishment comes and it is too late? To the degree that faith is confirmed by evidence, Israel should see evidence of God's mercy and fairness. They must know that God warned them while there was time to repent. Otherwise, it will be harder for them to have faith in God even later, after He rescues them. For Israel to trust God in the millennium, they have to remember a pattern of behavior on God's part, that God was fair with them and did give them a chance to know the truth and escape the punishment by obeying God. The Church can provide that evidence by preaching the gospel to the world before the tribulation begins.

God sets an example in the Bible of giving abundant warnings of consequences of sin while there is still time to change. The Bible is full of warnings from Genesis through

Revelation. God not only commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, He also warned him of the consequences. God warned Cain before he killed Able that "sin lies at the door." God required Jonah to warn Nineveh while there was time for the Ninevites to repent and escape the punishment, which they did. The last few verses of the Bible are a warning to those that would add words to or take away words from "the book of this prophecy." The giving of warnings and the restraining of punishment until the warning is given is an aspect of God's mercy. There is a principle that God does not expect us to act on knowledge we do not have, and therefore God instructs us of His requirements before He holds us accountable for them. For God to hold Israel fully accountable, Israel must have a full opportunity to hear and obey the truth. Jesus says that he who knows God's will and commits things worthy of stripes will receive many stripes, so if the tribulation would be classified as "many stripes", then Israel must have the opportunity to hear the truth and know God's will. See Genesis 2:16-17, Genesis 4:6-7, book of Jonah, Revelation 22:18-19, Luke 12:47-48.

The Bible seems to show that God is very zealous for His name and reputation. Since the tribulation is to be the greatest time of trouble of all time, would not God want to prepare Israel and the world with the greatest warning of all time? Would He not abundantly demonstrate His fairness by making sure everyone is warned while there is time to repent before the tribulation begins? If this is to occur before the tribulation, then it must happen before the two witnesses are given miraculous power. This means it must be the work of the Church.

Once Israelites are taken captive by their enemies, it is likely that their captors under the rulership and influence of the beast power and the false prophet will try to do whatever they can to prevent Israel from hearing the message of the two witnesses. I am sure that the false prophet will have his own message for the captives to hear. Perhaps he will teach them that they need to become good Catholics.

God is about to let the mankind receive a witness of just how evil human nature can get. But that is not enough. Holocaust survivors lost their faith in man and society and themselves, both because they saw the evil in their German captors and the evil and weakness in themselves and their fellow prisoners. That can be a positive first step before repentance, but when this happens, there is a void that needs to be filled - one needs to have faith in God to replace faith lost in the human race. But a person cannot have faith in God if he thinks of God as unjust, uncaring, or non-existent. Yet that is how many Israelites will feel if they go through the tribulation without first hearing our message.

It is said that first impressions are important. There are many places in the Old Testament in the prophecies about end-time punishments to come where God says, "Then you will know that I am the Lord." Though many Israelites think they worship God, it is really their false concept of God that they worship. They do not know the true God of the Bible. They will begin to know the real God when He begins to deal with them. What will be their first impression? Will they begin to know God as a God that is fair and is right to punish them, or will their first impression of God be that he withheld a warning because He wanted to punish them?

For people to not be warned will open the door for Satan to put the thoughts in their heads that God is unfair, that they would have repented had they been warned, that God didn't want them to repent because He wanted to punish them, and that is why He never warned them. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Satan and his demons do all they can to stop the gospel from going out. They may know that the preaching of the gospel to the world is a vital prerequisite for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth and the removal of Satan from his throne.

God also often says in the prophecies that "then they will know that a prophet has been among them." Why is that important to God? Does it glorify the man delivering the prophecy? Or is the purpose to glorify God, to show that God was fair to send a prophet or prophets to deliver a warning message prior to the disaster so that the people would have a chance to escape? I think the purpose is to demonstrate God's fairness, and this shows how God is concerned about His name and reputation. In Ezekiel 2:1-7, God says, "...whether they hear or whether they refuse -- for they *are* a rebellious house -- yet they will know that a prophet has been among them." Note that God does not say that a FEW among them will know but that THEY will know. This implies that a majority will be reached with a warning message, not just a few. "Whether they hear or whether they refuse" implies they will hear this message while there is time to hear and escape, not after it is too late. This means before the two witnesses.

While in the tribulation, and after it, many may question if it was necessary. They may ask, could not God have taught us the truth without all this suffering? Israel and the world must learn through experience that the tribulation really was necessary, that there was no other way to wake Israel up. But to learn that, they must know and remember that the true gospel and the Ezekiel warning was delivered powerfully to Israel, yet they did not respond. The work of the Church in preaching the gospel to Israel before the tribulation will provide the proof that the intense suffering of the tribulation was necessary to turn Israel to God.

I have heard some use Matthew 10:23 ("When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.") to support the idea that we will not reach everyone with the gospel before the end. However, the immediate context of this passage in Matthew 10:16-23 does not support this interpretation. The context indicates that this refers to fleeing from persecution, not preaching the gospel. To illustrate the point, the verse does not say, "When you finish preaching the gospel in this city, go to another...". The context is being protected from persecution and having a place to flee to. This verse does not necessarily mean that we won't reach everyone with the gospel, especially with modern technology such as broadcasting, mass publishing, and the Internet, which goes to all cities anyway. I am not saying that the Church will definitely reach every person in Israel with the gospel and the Ezekiel warning before the tribulation begins, but that possibility cannot be excluded by using Matthew 10:23.

If God is to be glorified by giving Israel a demonstration of His fairness, then Israel must be given the warning by the Church before the two witnesses are given power at the beginning of the tribulation, not afterwards when it is too late to escape. Each person needs to be able to make his or her own decision and have an opportunity to

escape by choosing to believe and obey God. For this to happen, the Church must give the warning now, not the two witnesses during the tribulation.

I have stressed in this chapter the importance of the warning message for the sake of those who do not know they are sinning. But even among those who know they are breaking God's law, some may repent if they are warned of the consequences. Isn't that the purpose of a warning? When God warns, He does not just tell people what they are doing wrong. He tells them in advance what the punishment will be to give them the strongest motivation to obey. Even in the Church, do not ministers in their sermons warn members of the consequences of sin? So the warning is for every person whether he knows he is sinning or not.

The Church

I do not mean to imply by all this that the calling and teaching of new members is not one of the purposes of preaching the gospel to the world. As the Church preaches the gospel to the public, God may indeed call many new members into the Church. Or, He may only call a few at this time. That is God's decision. God knows exactly how He is working with each individual, what each individual needs, and God knows the condition of the Church. That He is likely to continue to call new people may be indicated by Haggai 1:2-9. In this passage, God rebukes the people for saying that now is not the time to build the temple, and God admonishes them in verse 8 to "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified". If the temple can represent the Church of God today, and if mountains represent nations, then by telling the people to bring wood from the mountains into the temple, God may be saying that it is still time to bring new members into the Church. Since Haggai was written after the captivity of Judah, this may symbolically represent the Church of God at this time after the apostasy and subsequent scattering of the Church. This may actually help to strengthen the Church at this time. New members often have an enthusiasm and zeal we refer to as "first love", and that enthusiasm for the truth of God can be contagious. God can control who He calls into the Church at this time and can bring in people who have particular strengths and assets that will help revitalize the Church. New members can enrich the Church just as children can enrich a marriage.

Even if there are problems in the Church and we are not all setting a good example, God may choose to bring in certain new members who will have the zeal and commitment to be example setters instead of example followers, and then let them be a core that will be the right example for new people after that. Mr. Armstrong may be an example of how God can work with a person before bringing him into the Church, then use that person to help the Church.

But my point is, whether God calls many new members or only a few into the Church at this time, bringing in new members is not the only reason for preaching the gospel and

the warning to the public. Even if God brings in no new members, we need to reach Israel with the message before the tribulation for the sake of Israel's repentance and conversion as end-time events unfold and the millennial reign of Christ begins. And we need to do it for the sake of God's glory and honor, to demonstrate His fairness towards those He is about to punish.

If we know that our message will help Israel and the world, then the Church needs to preach the gospel to the world from a motivation of love. This is a way of learning by doing, of putting love into practice. It is something every member can participate in through fervent prayers and financial sacrifices.

We should learn to have the same love and compassion for people in the world, the unconverted, as God does. Our motive in sacrificing at this time for the unconverted world should be the same as God's motive in sacrificing His Son. He was slain from the foundation of the world, while we were still sinners, because of the hope that we would become converted. Likewise, we preach the gospel to sinners for the same reason, to make it possible for them to be converted, if not now, then at the beginning of the millennium after they have repented in the tribulation. The motive and purpose is the same, to enable people's conversion, and if it is a strong enough motive for Christ to die hundreds of years before His death would bear fruit in our conversion, surely we can be motivated to sacrifice to support the preaching of the gospel to the unconverted when it will bear fruit within a few decades at the most.

We in the Church have been entrusted with God's truth, and it is important that we share it with Israel when they need to hear it. God in the Bible speaks warnings to Israel, and He wants those warnings delivered. We have a responsibility to use that knowledge we have been entrusted with, not for ourselves only, but also to share that knowledge with others who will need it, so they can be made ready for the events to come. Christ said, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8), showing that the gift is reciprocal. God specifically commands us to warn those headed for disaster in Proverbs 24:11-12 "Deliver *those who* are drawn toward death, and hold back *those* stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'Surely we did not know this,' does not He who weighs the hearts consider *it*? He who keeps your soul, does He *not* know *it*? And will He *not* render to *each* man according to his deeds?"

I think there is a danger for the Church if we do not share what we know with the public. The danger is, we can lose the knowledge and discernment of spiritual matters that God has given us. There is the principle of reciprocity involved. God will treat us as we treat others. God has sacrificed, and others have sacrificed, so that we might have the knowledge we have so we can prepare ourselves for what is coming. I think God expects us treat others the same way, to sacrifice to share that knowledge with others that have not received it yet so they also have a chance to prepare themselves. But if we don't, is it not possible that God may take from the Church the spiritual knowledge and discernment he has given us? Isn't this another application of the principle, what we sow we will reap? We need to sacrifice for others as those before us have sacrificed for us.

Some say that Church members can share the truth just by our example with our friends, neighbors, family, and people we work with. In other words, we are a witness and a light to the world by our example of living God's way of life. Because we live God's way of life, some people who know us will be motivated to ask us questions and by answering their questions we can introduce them to God's truth. I agree that this is important, but by itself it is not sufficient to warn all Israel before the tribulation begins. We simply do not come into contact personally and individually with enough people. Each individual church member may have a hundred or more acquaintances, but only a few of those know us well enough to ask us about our religion. More than this will be needed to get the job done. Most of us came into the Church because we heard Mr. Armstrong on radio or television. Broadcasting and publishing, whether by radio, TV, print, or the Internet, is still the most effective way to reach the greatest number of people.

Why the Gospel Must Still Be Preached to the World

At the beginning of this chapter I raised the question, why is it important to God that the gospel be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations before the end comes (Matthew 24:14). I believe the answer to this is that the preaching of the gospel to the world just before the tribulation and the Day of the Lord, along with the Ezekiel warning, is needed for God's plan for mankind. It prepares Israel and the world for the events the people will have to go through, and it is an integral part of God's plan for the ending of this age and the beginning of the millennium. Israel will need the gospel to be able to endure the tribulation and be repentant and teachable at the end of it. The preaching of the gospel to the world by the Church is a vital part of God's plan for reproducing Himself.

The purpose of preaching the gospel as a witness to all nations, just before the end of the age, is not just to call new members into the Church, nor to condemn the world and make the nations more guilty so that God can punish them more, but to help Israel and the world know that God is fair and to help them accept responsibility leading to repentance.

This time in the history of the world and the Church is unique in that, for the first time since the Church was founded almost two thousand years ago, the Church has the opportunity to preach to the generation that will live into the millennium and be the first generation ruled by the Kingdom of God. Most people who will make up the first generation of Israel in the millennium are probably alive today. The Church of God never had this opportunity before. If Christ indeed returns soon, then the first adult generation of the millennium is alive now. Their re-education has actually started through the message of the Church. Even though they do not believe it now, they can remember that they heard it, even in the millennium. They can teach their children that God was fair to warn them before the tribulation began.

In a sense, the work of preaching the gospel to the world that the Church can do now is actually a part of the re-educating of mankind in the millennium. It is the first stage in Israel's re-education. As we get closer to the end of this age, all who hear our message in Israel can be thought of as prospective members of God's Church, though they don't know it yet. We can be doing the preliminary work of the millennium now.

When people hear the gospel message now, most will not believe it, but they can remember it when the tribulation comes. When things happen as we told them it would, that will give us credibility and show them that our message was really from God. They won't remember every detail, but they can remember the basic points of our message. They can remember that we told them what they need to repent of, and they can remember whether or not they heeded the warning. They can also remember that after the tribulation and the Day of the Lord, Christ will return and bring peace and happiness to the earth.

Some may say that it doesn't matter if Israel understands the purpose of the tribulation because Christ will teach them when He returns. But what would be the mental condition of people who have gone through three and one-half years thinking God has abandoned them for no good reason? They will be conditioned to think that God doesn't exist, or doesn't care, or is unjust, or they may be indoctrinated with the false teachings of the false prophet. Mr. Armstrong has said that it is ten times harder to unlearn false concepts than to learn new ones. How much would they have to unlearn, and how many years would it take?

Our warning to Israel now has a direct connection to their repentance in the tribulation, and their repentance has a direct connection to their teachability and responsiveness to Christ and to the saints when the millennium starts. They will be the example nation on the earth, the first to experience the blessings of God's way of life, and they will have a head start on the rest of the world. It is our warning to them and their repentance before Christ returns that gives them that head start. Our work of warning can make the difference between starting the nation of Israel with several million mind-shattered, personality-destroyed, totally broken and hopeless people who have no concept of what they have done wrong, what they should believe, and why this has happened to them, who would have to be taught from scratch and led to repentance, or several million Israelites who understand the basics of God's truth, have repented, have fervently looked forward to Christ's return, and are now teachable and ready to obey Christ.

Have you ever gone through a trial and you understood the reason and purpose of the trial? You understood the lesson God wanted you to learn, and you understood the purpose of the trial while you were going through it? Now, have you also ever gone through a trial in which you did not understand the reason for it -- you didn't have a clue? You felt confused, maybe betrayed. You didn't know if you were being punished for something, and if so, what. You didn't know what God was trying to teach you. Maybe you were very confused because the trial didn't seem to make sense. Maybe you felt abandoned by God for no apparent reason and perhaps even had doubts about whether or not God cared about you. All physical things being equal, which type of trial is harder, the one you understand or the one you don't understand?

Some trials we understand and some we don't. Of all people, we in the Church should know from experience that the trial we don't understand is harder to bear than the one we understand. Several hundreds of millions of people are about to go through the most intense trial the world has ever seen. Our message will not alleviate the physical suffering of the tribulation, but it can provide an understanding and hope that will alleviate much of the mental suffering. When we go through a trial, don't we ask God to help us understand it? We have an opportunity now, by preaching the gospel and the Ezekiel warning to Israel, to help our Israelite people understand their trial when it comes, and love should motivate us to help them just as we want God to help us in our trials.

Mr. Armstrong has taught the Church that there are two ways of life: the give way and the get way. The Church teaches its members the give way of life. Preaching the gospel to the world is one way of putting the give way of life into practice. We learn that way of life not just by hearing but by doing. Supporting the organized preaching of the gospel to the world and the Ezekiel warning to Israel, through fervent prayers as well as through tithes and offerings, is part of the training of the members in God's way of life, as Mr. Armstrong taught.

There may be two ways members of the Church can help Israelites understand the tribulation when they go through it. One way is to support the organized work of preaching the gospel and the Ezekiel warning to the public now before the tribulation begins. Another way is to go through the tribulation with our fellow Israelites. During the tribulation and the captivity, some members of the Church can help to explain to their fellow captives the meaning of the tribulation in more detail than most Israelites will remember from the Church's message, and can answer their questions, then prove their sincerity by being martyred. Perhaps God will use the combination of both of these methods to help Israel understand their trial and come to repentance.

God tells us in Ezekiel that the blood of the people is on the watchman's head if he doesn't give the warning. It may be that God will see to it that most members of the Church participate in teaching our people the meaning of the tribulation one way or another. It may be that those who do not have enough love for their fellow Israelites to support the work of warning them may have to go through the tribulation with them.

I believe that God will use the Church of God to preach the gospel to the whole world, especially Israel, and to give the greatest, most powerful warning God could give to precede the greatest time of trouble that will ever occur. This will give honor to God's name by demonstrating His fairness. I believe this will occur before the two witnesses receive miraculous power at the beginning of the tribulation so that each person in Israel knows they had the opportunity to escape, and this will help them take responsibility for their choice instead of blaming God. This will make their repentance easier and will be an important step in their conversion and the setting up of Israel as a model nation to serve as an example in the millennium of God's way of life.

It is not just the Church that needs to be prepared. The world must be prepared. The Church has a responsibility to get Israel and the world ready for the punishments to come by giving them a witness of the truth. Just as the Church must be made ready for

the return of Christ, so Israel and the world must be made ready for the tribulation and the Day of the Lord. It is another aspect of the two-fold commission to the Church. The Church helps the bride make herself ready by feeding the flock, and at the same time helps Israel and the world to be ready by preaching the gospel to the public.

Famine of the Word

Some refer to the scripture that there will be a famine of the word of God to explain why the gospel is not going out to the world with power at this time. Amos 8:11-12 says, " 'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord GOD, 'that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find *it*.' " Some say that these verses apply to today, and that because we are in a famine of the word we should not be trying to preach the gospel to the world at this time.

I think this view is wrong and it ignores several facts. The gospel is being preached to the world by the Church of God today. Even though it is not going out with the power it had in the later years of Mr. Armstrong's life, it is reaching more people now than it did in the early years of the work God did through Mr. Armstrong starting in 1934. Mr. Armstrong's literature and tapes are available on the Internet for those who want to look, and there is more than one Church of God organization that broadcasts on TV or radio and publishes magazines. Though these organizations do not have the power and the audience that Mr. Armstrong had, and their work may be less than perfect, the gospel is going out to the world. This is evidenced by the fact that new members are coming into the Church of God and being baptized, and though the number is small, it is significant nevertheless.

Look at Amos 8:11 again, and notice that at the time of the famine of the word, people will be seeking God's word from sea to sea, and will not find it. This indicates a desire on the part of the public to hear the truth being preached, but not being able to find it. That cannot apply to today. There are few in the public that have a desire to hear the true gospel, and if any do desire it (because they previously heard it preached by Mr. Armstrong or others who are no longer doing it), they can find websites, magazines, broadcasts, even old church literature from Mr. Armstrong, relatively easily. They do not have to search from "sea to sea" and not find it.

Actually, this verse is a confirmation that the gospel will be preached to the public with power before the end comes, else how could people know enough about it to have a desire to hear more? You have to know something exists before you will search for it "from sea to sea". Most people today have never even heard the truth at all.

All the opportunities for preaching the gospel to the world exist today that existed when Mr. Armstrong was alive. The United States is still a free country. Money is still

available, and radio or TV broadcast time can still be purchased. Magazines and books and booklets can still be written and published. In addition, we have the Internet as a vehicle for publishing the truth, which did not exist when Mr. Armstrong was alive. There are still many Church members and ministers who know what the truth is and are able to preach or to support the preaching of that truth. All that is needed is our willingness to do so. And the gospel is being preached now to the world by those who have that willingness.

When God gave Amos the prophecy that there would come a famine of the word of God, I don't think it was God's intent that we apply this prophecy by stopping the work of preaching to the world. I think God would want us to keep working as long as we are able. We should not stop working.

Jesus said in John 9:4 "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work." Jesus said that a time is coming when no one would be able to "work", and He set an example of doing God's work before that time comes. We are still able to work, so that time has not arrived yet. We need to finish the work while we still have the freedom to do so.

Finishing the Work

I think it is not enough that we be doing the work of preaching the gospel to the world. I think we need to set a goal to FINISH the Work. There is a difference.

Some who have used Matthew 10:23 to teach that we would be doing God's work of preaching the gospel right to the end have also used scriptures such as Luke 12:42-46 and Matthew 24:45-47 to show that we should always be "so doing" God's work right up to the time when Christ returns. I believe it is correct to say that we will be doing God's work right to the end, and this "so doing" of God's work can apply to preaching the gospel to the world as we are able and also feeding the flock. But I also think there is a sense in which we need to have a zeal to really FINISH the work of preaching the gospel and the warning to Israel and the world. That does not mean we quit doing it after we reach a certain point, but I think we need to have a goal in mind and a sense of what finishing God's work means. If we reach that goal, we can continue to preach the gospel to reinforce the message right up to the end, but I think we should have some sense or vision of what has to be done and to have a zeal to really complete it.

John 4:34 says, "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.' " Notice, Jesus did not say that His food was just to be DOING God's work, but to FINISH it.

When you know you have to accomplish certain things in order to finish a job, this gives a sense of urgency beyond what is required just to be "working".

To illustrate with an analogy, suppose I am working as a computer programmer and my boss assigns me a program to code, and a week later he asks me, "How is it coming?" I say, "I'm working on it." The next week he asks me, "How is it coming?" and I say, "I'm working on it." At some point, the boss is going to want to know, "When are you going to finish it?" He wants to know when it will be completed. Until I finish coding it, compile it, test it and get the bugs out, put it in the hands of the people who will use it, show them how to use it, and they are actually using it, until then it does no one any good. Just telling my boss week after week, "I'm working on it," may imply to him that I am occupying time and space, but not producing results. He wants completion.

What does finishing the work of preaching the gospel to the world and the Ezekiel warning to Israel mean? Only God knows with certainty how many people we should reach, but it is not wrong for the Church to set a goal. Any individual or organization will accomplish more if they set concrete goals. Most businesses recognize this and set concrete goals for their organization and employees. Goal setting is an important aid to success. If the Church sets concrete goals for preaching to the world, that can keep us focused and motivate us towards greater and more intelligent effort. If we reach our goals, we can continue to preach the gospel to reach more people even more thoroughly, but the first objective would be to reach our goals.

What would be a goal to set for preaching to the public?

In light of the importance of getting the true gospel and the Ezekiel warning out to Israel before the tribulation begins, I would suggest that the Church of God set a goal to get the basics of the gospel and the warning of the tribulation out to one hundred percent of all adults and teenagers old enough to make their own decisions in all those nations that will go through the tribulation, with enough impact so that they will remember what they have heard, and to finish this BEFORE the Church flees to a place of safety, the tribulation begins, and the work of the two witnesses begins. The message does not have to include all the details of all the doctrines of the Church, but should include enough basics so that those who hear will know they have been warned, and those who are willing to respond can obtain further information about the whole truth of God from books, booklets, and the Church's literature on the Web, and can obtain enough information to repent and escape the punishment.

Humanly speaking this may seem like an impossible task, but that is where faith in God comes in. All things are possible for God, and He can empower us to do His will. He can provide the resources we will need and can intervene to give us the publicity and whatever opportunities we need. But we have to be striving to do our part with whatever resources we have available today. God can do for us what we are unable to do for ourselves, but He may only do this after we have shown that we are doing as much as we possibly can with what we already have. God may withhold his strongest help until we are really trying as hard as we can. Judges 16:28-30 relates how Samson, after his eyes were put out and he was in the temple of the Philistines, prayed and asked God to give him strength, and then he pushed with all his might against the pillars of the temple, and it fell. God had to give Samson miraculous help to accomplish this, nevertheless Samson had to do his part by pushing as hard as he could, and THEN God caused the building to fall.

Setting a goal to reach everyone in Israel with the gospel and the warning can fill us with a sense of urgency and zeal to try as hard as we can to reach as many as we can.

I think we need more zeal in the Church of God for doing the work of preaching to the world. Income figures and conversations with Church members suggest to me that many members are content with a small work in this regard. I think most members in the Church do not see a real need for all Israel to hear the gospel and warning before the tribulation. I think most members understand that if the purpose of preaching the gospel is only to bring in new members, then a small work is sufficient because God can work out circumstances so that anyone He calls can be in the right place at the right time to hear the gospel. Understanding the need to warn all Israel and setting a goal to do so may help to increase our zeal. As we make greater sacrifices, God can give us more help.

My personal opinion is, if we do our part, God will indeed empower us to reach all of Israel before the tribulation begins. It is not an impossible task.

Final Summary

I know I am being repetitious, but I consider this to be such a vital point, and a summary of the whole purpose of this chapter, that I want to restate it one more time. My primary point is this. If a member of the general public hears the gospel and the Ezekiel warning from the Church and rejects it, as most do, it will be easier for that person to repent during the tribulation than someone who never hears the message until after the tribulation has begun and it is too late to escape. That is because the person who heard the message can accept responsibility for his action in rejecting the message and its consequences, while the person who never heard the message will say, "But I never had a chance because I didn't know." The primary purpose of preaching the gospel and the warning to the world at this time is not to make new members but to prepare the public for what they will go through to and make it easier for them to repent and understand God's fairness. The lesson of the Holocaust is that the suffering of the tribulation alone, without a message of repentance, will accomplish nothing toward bringing anyone to repentance. That is why the Church needs to preach the gospel to the world, not just to make new members. And if the Church is not ready in God's eyes to nurture new prospective members because of our problems and divisions, God can postpone bringing in new members, but the Church can still be preparing the public for what is to come.

Perhaps to some in the Church of God, the points I am making seem obvious. But I know from my conversations with church members that these things are not obvious to everyone, or even the majority. They are also not obvious to every leader of every part of the Church. And I do not recall hearing these things taught strongly in the Church in

the past, in Worldwide when Mr. Armstrong was alive or in any other Church of God fellowship since the apostasy.

The more people we reach with the warning message and the gospel before the tribulation begins, and the more thoroughly we reach them, the easier it will be for them to believe in the fairness and goodness of God later when they go through the tribulation, and the easier it will be for them to trust God and accept their own responsibility for what they have done, which are prerequisites for repentance. The Church can make their repentance easier or more difficult by the choices we are making now. We can also glorify God's name and reputation by demonstrating His fairness and kindness to warn everyone before He punishes them.

CHAPTER 5 - SHOULD THE CHURCH FEED THE FLOCK ONLY?

Introduction

The Church of God is in a far different situation today (this is being written in 2005) than it was in 1985 while Mr. Armstrong was alive. Once, we were united in one organization. A person who was called into the truth through the speaking and writing of Herbert W. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God did not have to study and search and meditate on which organization to send tithes to or where to attend. There was one Church, one organization, one place to attend that was faithful to the truth, one set of doctrines and practices. The work of preaching the gospel to the world was strong and increasing. Although we never did reach a majority in Israel, we had a Plain Truth magazine circulation in the multiple millions and a television coverage that covered virtually all of the United States. Today, the Church of God is divided and scattered. Even if you combined the main organizations, you would only have a small fraction of the membership, income, and power we once had. Though the gospel is being preached to the world, it is going out with only a small fraction of the impact it had twenty years ago. The various Church of God organizations are not in complete agreement on doctrine, and the relationships between various organizations are usually more accurately described as competitive rather than cooperative. There is a lot of confusion and frustration, and the Church is farther away from reaching everyone in Israel with a powerful warning message than it was even 25 or 30 years ago.

What happened?

More importantly, how should the events we have gone through in the last two decades affect the priority we assign to preaching the gospel?

Every Church of God organization is faced with a choice concerning the preaching of the gospel to the world. The choice is, what resources will be allocated to teaching and serving the membership (known as "feeding the flock") and what resources will be allocated to preaching the gospel and the warning message to Israel and the world? How will priorities be set in allocating time, effort, personnel, money, and all resources available?

I don't have exact figures available, but at various times when Mr. Armstrong was alive the preaching of the gospel to the public took up between 35% and 45% of the total budget approximately. This went mostly to television production, purchasing time on TV stations, and printing and mailing magazines and literature. Administrative costs took up a small portion (maybe 10-20%) and the rest of the money was spent on feeding

the flock (minister salaries, hall rentals, etc.). I could summarize this very approximately by saying that Mr. Armstrong allocated the budget about half and half between preaching to the public and feeding the flock.

The percentages allocated today between the two responsibilities varies enormously among the various Church of God organizations, with a few of the larger fellowships and many smaller ones spending about 15 percent or less on preaching to the public.

And along with the differences in effort, there are contentions and debate among the leaders of different parts of the Church over the issue of preaching the gospel to the world, with some organizations boasting that they do a better job than others and exhorting their members to sacrifice more for that purpose, while at least one Church of God organization has said over the Internet that this is not the time to be spending heavy resources on preaching to the public at the expense of feeding the flock.

This debate takes place against a background in which there is a widespread view among many Churches of God and their members, including those on both sides of the gospel issue, that we are in the Laodicean era, a time in which the condition described in Christ's message to Laodicea in the third chapter of Revelation predominates in the Church. This is a time when the spiritual condition of most church members can be described as "lukewarm". Christ strongly rebukes those who are in this condition.

Are we in the Laodicean era?

Mr. Armstrong taught that the seven churches of Revelation represent seven eras of God's true church. I remember that he taught that the description of each church and the message Christ gives to each church shows the predominant spiritual condition of the whole Church of God during that era. So during the Laodicean era, the predominant spiritual condition of the Church of God is that it is lukewarm. And the Church of God is defined as a spiritual body, the collective body of all those who have the Spirit of God, not an organization.

Yet while the predominant spiritual condition of the Church, the condition of the majority of the members, is that described by Christ for that era, not every individual member is in that condition. So for example, even during the Philadelphia era, some individual members can be lukewarm. This is why Christ tells those with ears to hear to listen to all of the messages to the seven churches, not just the one that applies to the era we are in. We should examine ourselves in light of all seven messages.

This was Mr. Armstrong's teaching about church eras as I remember it.

What era are we in today? I think the scattered condition of the whole Church of God, all those who are converted, and our collective weakness in preaching the gospel to the world is evidence that the majority of members are lukewarm, and that the Philadelphia era has ended and the Laodicean era has begun.

The characteristics of the era are determined by the spiritual condition of the majority of the members of the whole Church of God, and not just by an organization.

Yet there can still be a remnant of members in the Philadelphia condition, not the majority, but small in number, even during the Laodicean era, and there is still time I think for those Laodiceans who are willing to repent to become zealous and be among those God counts as Philadelphia. And I believe God will use those Philadelphians to finish the work of preaching the gospel and the Ezekiel warning to Israel before the tribulation begins.

But time is running short.

Mr. Armstrong taught, and many Church of God members agree, that the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 represent seven eras in the Church of God through the centuries from the first century till the return of Christ. I believe that these chapters in Revelation are indeed prophetic, and that these churches represent seven eras in the history of the true Church. I believe the Church was in the Philadelphia era during most of the years under Mr. Armstrong's leadership, but is in the Laodicean era now.

Some Churches of God claim they are remnants of the Philadelphia era while other Churches are Laodicean, but I think most members are in agreement that the majority of the Church of God as a whole, including most of its organizations and scattered members, collectively speaking, is in a divided and weakened state compared to the unity and power we had when we were united under Mr. Armstrong's leadership.

It is in this overall context that questions arise about the priority of preaching the gospel to the world at this time. Should the Church expend major effort and money in preaching to the public when the need for feeding the flock seems greater than ever before? Is this the time to preach to the public when the Church itself is in such disarray? Is preaching to the public likely to bear fruit in new members being brought into the Church when God sees that the majority of the membership is not setting a good example for new members to learn from? Can we properly nourish new members when we ourselves are so confused and divided? Would it not make more sense to first get our own house in order by putting the major effort into feeding the flock, and then afterwards, when the spiritual condition of the Church has improved, take our message to the public once again?

In other words, should the ministry of the Church of God focus exclusively or primarily on feeding the flock in order to improve the spiritual condition of the membership at this time, even if it means postponing or foregoing preaching the gospel to the public in a powerful way?

Along with the above considerations, many members and ministers in the Church of God feel, and hope, that the scattered and divided condition of the Church we see today is temporary, that when God's time comes He will bring us together again in unity and we can do a final work of preaching to the public at that time, but until that occurs we should do everything we can, not to preach a message to the public, but to feed the flock to build a spirit of unity and provide doctrinal consistency that will allow us to be brought together again.

To sum up, should we only feed the flock at this time and give that responsibility the highest priority, even at the expense of preaching to the public?

This is the issue I explore in this chapter.

A Brief History of the Scattering of the Church

God used Herbert W. Armstrong to begin a radio broadcast around January 1934. This was the beginning of what became the Worldwide Church of God. During the remainder of Mr. Armstrong's life, God revealed more and more new truth to Mr. Armstrong through the pages of the Bible, and Mr. Armstrong taught that truth to the public and the Church. Because he was willing to believe what God says in the Bible more than the traditions of established churches, his teachings became very different from the traditional beliefs of mainstream Christianity. The Church and the work of preaching the gospel to the world grew steadily and the truth reached millions. Mr. Armstrong died in January 1986. Shortly prior to his death, he named Joseph Tkach to succeed him as pastor general. Prior to naming Mr. Tkach, in a sermon message to the members of the Worldwide Church of God, Mr. Armstrong said that if he should die, God would provide a new pastor general and we should follow that pastor general if we want to make it into the Kingdom of God. Mr. Armstrong had always taught and practiced the principle of being willing to be corrected by the Bible and to learn new knowledge from the Bible even if that correction or new knowledge was contrary to Church tradition and doctrine up to that time. Many times I heard Mr. Armstrong on radio say, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible." Mr. Armstrong practiced what he preached -- he believed the Bible first even when it meant he had to admit he was wrong. But by doing so, he was able to learn much and God was able to teach Mr. Armstrong many things from the Bible, truths that Mr. Armstrong in turn taught to the Church.

After I came into the Church in 1982, which was after Mr. Armstrong had to re-establish control after certain individuals refused to follow Mr. Armstrong's leadership and tried to promote their own doctrinal ideas in the Church, I heard Mr. Armstrong emphasize that God puts all doctrine into the Church through the apostle. Even though we are to believe and obey the Bible, there should not be confusion and contention in the Church with every member and minister arguing in favor of their own personal interpretation of the Bible. God commands that we all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among us (1 Corinthians 1:10). The only way that that can occur is if there is government in the Church, and Mr. Armstrong had to emphasize that as apostle he had the authority to determine, based on the Bible, what the official doctrines of the Church would be, and individuals whether in the ministry or not should not take it upon themselves to contradict those doctrines and try to teach their own personal opinions as doctrine in the Church.

At the time of Mr. Armstrong's death there was a strong culture in the Church that said in effect, we need to be "teachable", meaning (as I interpreted it) we need to respect the teachings of the Church and its leadership and we need to be willing to learn new doctrine from the Bible and from the Church. I always understood this to mean that when the Church taught something new from the Bible, we are to check the scriptures ourselves with an open mind and not be prejudiced against the idea just because it was new. I also understood that this does not override the primary principle of believing and obeying the Bible first. That is my interpretation of the principle, but others may have interpreted it differently. My point is, it was not considered extremely unusual for the leadership of the Church to introduce new ideas and teachings, or to correct past mistakes in doctrine or practice, provided the new teaching was according to the Bible. Mr. Armstrong had been doing this for decades. This is the culture that existed. I can contrast that with the culture in the Catholic Church in which I was raised. There is not such a culture of willingness to change in that church. But in Worldwide, there was. I do not know how it is in Protestant churches.

Mr. Tkach, along with several other influential men who were close to him, began to introduce doctrinal changes. I do not recall any significant changes in the first year, but it was about a year I think after Mr. Tkach became the pastor general that he made the change in the policy on makeup. After that, the changes continued. The changes were relatively small at first, but became bigger and occurred at a faster and faster rate over the next decade. Each change was accompanied by an explanation that quoted scriptures and said that the new teaching is what the Bible really says and that we were in error before. Bible scriptures were used heavily to try to support the changes.

There was a pattern to the changes. The changes were all in the direction of reversing the things Mr. Armstrong taught that differed from traditional Christianity, and going in the direction of the traditional Protestant mainstream churches.

By around 1989 and 1990 the first ministers and members began to leave and form new organizations that rejected the doctrinal changes being made by Mr. Tkach and instead retained the teachings of Mr. Armstrong. This process continued. One of the last organizations to form composed of ministers and members leaving Worldwide over the changes was United Church of God, which formed in 1995.

By my estimate, by around the fall of 1996 the doctrinal changes in Worldwide were complete, or nearly so. After that, some changes continued, but at a slower pace. There was a reason for this. There wasn't much else that was left to change! In about one decade, virtually everything Mr. Armstrong had taught had been reversed! Mr. Tkach and other leaders in Worldwide had changed virtually all of the teachings of the Worldwide Church of God completely to traditional mainstream Protestant Christianity.

I am relating this by stating it as a series of statements, but that doesn't begin to capture the enormity of what occurred and the impact it had on the members.

It was an amazing thing!

Mr. Armstrong was honest with the Bible. He didn't try to put his own ideas into the Bible or try to twist the scriptures to fit his ideas, then search for and find any scriptures that would support his own opinions. He was not perfect and he made mistakes, but overall his thinking was honest and accurate. Though Mr. Armstrong was by no means infallible, nor did he claim to be, his teachings overall were accurate and right. The explanations that Worldwide used to justify the changes were not correct. The organization went from truth to error. I was in Worldwide during almost all of this time, and I studied their explanations and their changes. They do not hold up. Before I came into the Church in 1982 I studied Mr. Armstrong's teachings and with an open mind I proved for myself from the Bible that they were true. When Worldwide began changing those doctrines after his death, I studied those changes and their explanations with an open mind, and proved from the Bible, for the second time, that Mr. Armstrong was right and that traditional mainstream Christianity is wrong.

The Church membership and ministry reacted in a variety of ways. Some accepted and embraced the changes, even staying with Worldwide to this day. Some accepted the changes, then left Worldwide to join mainstream Protestant churches. Some left and stayed home. Some left and formed new Churches of God very early in this process before the biggest changes came, and some waited and left towards the end of the changes. Some rejected the new doctrines without considering if they might be right, and some examined them with an open mind, and then rejected them after proving them false.

Some who rejected the changes did not immediately leave Worldwide when the changes were made. They stayed in Worldwide for a time, perhaps out of respect for government and perhaps hoping that at some point the changes would be reversed, but eventually left later. It may be that there are still a very few in Worldwide who do not agree with the changes, I do not know. I stayed in Worldwide through 1995, not because I agreed with the changes, but because I had thought that perhaps the situation in Worldwide might be corrected and reversed. I was in error about that, but it took time for me to sort things out in my mind.

Joseph Tkach died in the fall of 1995 and his son, Joseph Tkach Jr. became the leader. I noticed something in the letter Mr. Tkach sent out when he was ill naming his son as his successor that struck me as unusual at the time. If I remember the letter correctly, Mr. Tkach never said that God had appointed his son Joseph Tkach Jr. to the position, or that God led the decision, only that God would want him to make provision for someone to replace him when he died. That surprised me at the time.

When Mr. Armstrong named Mr. Tkach as his successor in a letter to the brethren and co-workers dated January 10, 1986, Mr. Armstrong specifically stated that God led the decision to name Joseph Tkach as the one to succeed Mr. Armstrong as Pastor General.

But I found no such wording or suggestion that this was God's decision in the letter that named Joseph Tkach Jr. to succeed his father as leader of Worldwide. To my mind at the time this suggested to me that, if there was any chance at all that from God's point of view the legal authority in the government of God in the Church that passed from Mr.

Armstrong to Mr. Tkach was still in force despite the doctrinal changes, that authority ended with the death of Mr. Tkach and was not passed on to his son.

Of all those who left Worldwide for whatever their reasons were, some left and joined with others who left before them and had already incorporated new Church of God organizations, and some left and helped raise up new organizations.

Families were divided. Friendships were broken up. Congregations were scattered.

Today, I would count about four or five main groups of those that came out of Worldwide after 1986 and wanted to keep Mr. Armstrong's teachings to one degree or another, and there are many smaller groups, maybe hundreds. The four or five main organizations agree with most of Mr. Armstrong's doctrines, but all of them do not agree on everything, and they do not agree on every doctrine with each other, and these disagreements are part of what keeps some of those churches divided and separate. The collective ministry of the Church is divided, and thus the members are also divided. All of these organizations are far smaller and less effective in preaching the gospel than Worldwide in the last days of Mr. Armstrong. We have never recovered the size and power we had then, or even come close.

Another result of all this is a certain level of confusion, disappointment, discouragement, and frustration among many members over the fact that the ministry is divided and the Church of God is divided into what seem to some to be competing camps.

That is what has happened, and that is the historical background of the state of the Church today.

But all this only raises more questions.

Why did this happen? How did this happen?

What should the Church of God do now?

Finding the Solution

I ask again, how and why did this happen? Could it have been avoided, and if so, how?

What should the Church of God do now? Can the damage be repaired, and if so, how?

Can the Church of God be reunited? Can we become spiritually strong again?

What is the cause of the Church's scattered and weakened condition, and what is the solution?

How do we look for a solution? The first step should be to understand the cause. But that itself is not simple. There can be many causes. There may be a whole chain of events with each event leading to the next, a whole chain of "causes". There might be an "immediate" direct cause that is recent, and yet another "root" cause farther back in time that set in motion a chain of events leading to the immediate recent cause. Yet, though analyzing the causes is not simple, it is necessary for finding a solution. If we fail to identify and address the root cause that caused everything else, we may end up just treating the symptom and not the real disease. We may come up with a "solution" but it won't really solve anything. We would be like a doctor, prescribing medication to kill pain without healing the illness that is causing the pain, and without removing the cause of the illness.

How do we identify the root cause?

I have heard of many causes and solutions for the existing problems. Many of these suggested causes and solutions have much truth in them. But it is necessary to fit them properly together and in order and not confuse cause with effect.

I think one of the best and most insightful teachings about the cause of the scattering has been taught by John Ritenbaugh of Church of the Great God. He has taught that God has scattered the Church of God because of our Laodiceanism. This would fit the pattern we see in the Bible, where Israel was punished by God and taken into captivity and scattered because of their sins and because they had drifted from God. This would also be consistent with Christ's message to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:14-22 where He says "I will vomit you out of My mouth" (verse 16). Even while Mr. Armstrong was alive, there are indications he could see Laodiceanism developing. Many times he indicated that many in the Church just didn't "get it". I am convinced that Laodiceanism is one of the main causes of the scattering. I do not think it is the only cause, and I do not think that Laodiceanism is the only reason God allowed the Church to be scattered, but I believe it is one of the reasons. But even this raises questions in my mind, the primary one being, what caused us to become Laodicean in the first place?

Unless we can identify the ROOT cause, the FIRST link in a chain of events, we will not find the right solution to the problem. If it is God's judgment that allowed a chain of events that led us through apostasy and eventual scattering, and if that judgment was triggered by our growing Laodiceanism, then we must ask, what caused us to become Laodicean?

It was not false doctrine that triggered Laodiceanism. False doctrine played a role in the scattering. It is a link in the chain of events. But it is not the root cause. We must find the root cause, the first link in the chain, in order to learn how it could have been prevented and to know what needs to be done now.

When we find the cause that led us to become Laodicean, each of us as an individual can work to remove that cause from our own lives. Each of us must work on ourselves. When we find the cause of Laodiceanism, and remove it from our lives individually so that we are no longer counted by God as Laodicean, God can then remove His

corrective judgment and give spiritual strength and power back to his people. If the whole Church does this, God can reunite and strengthen the whole Church, but if only some individuals do it, God can help, bless, and empower those individuals to serve God more effectively. In any case, none of us can work out someone else's problem, though there are things we can do to help, encourage, and instruct each other, but ultimately we can each of us only change ourselves. But that is what we must do, with God's help.

Following the Chain of Events Backward

It may be relatively easy to look at the more recent direct causes of the scattered, weakened condition of the Church. I hope this doesn't offend ministers too much, but the Church is scattered today because the ministry is divided. This isn't the root cause, but it is the immediate cause. When members and ministers began to leave Worldwide, the ministers were still leading the way. Ministers did not agree on how to handle the changes Mr. Tkach was introducing into the Church. They didn't react the same way. Even setting aside consideration of those ministers that went along with the changes, those that opposed the changes had different opinions about how they should react. They didn't leave at the same time. They didn't agree with each other on a number of doctrines, such as government in the Church, changing Mr. Armstrong's doctrines, and preaching the gospel to the world. Some ministers left early in the process, some late. Some joined themselves to leaders who had already left before them to raise up new churches, and some went on their own. Some quit, and some waited till they were fired.

I don't question anyone's sincerity. I would give any minister the benefit of the doubt and assume he carefully considered the matter, prayed about it, studied it, meditated on it, probably fasted about it, then went forward in faith, trusting God, and doing what, in the minister's best judgment, was God's will. I can't read anyone's mind, and realistically I know this may not be the case with every minister, but I would assume this was the situation with most of them.

Part of the problem was that, with Mr. Armstrong the strong leader gone, there was no one minister with the prestige, the standing, and the authority in the eyes of the other ministers to keep everyone united and on the same page.

And the cause of all this was false doctrine.

If Worldwide had correctly followed the Bible and had not introduced error, the ministers would have had no need to leave Worldwide and the Church would not be scattered today.

So this brings us to the next link. If false doctrine caused the scattering of the ministry and the members, what caused false doctrine to come into the Church?

When Mr. Armstrong named Mr. Tkach as his successor, I am sure he never dreamed that Mr. Tkach would end up reversing nearly all of his teachings that made Worldwide different from traditional Christianity. Mr. Armstrong trusted Christ to lead the decision. He named Mr. Tkach believing that Christ had appointed Mr. Tkach to succeed him as pastor general. Did He?

According to Ephesians 1:22, Christ is head over all things to the Church. There are many other scriptures that show that God has authority over all other authorities, principalities, and powers, not only in the Church but outside the Church. He determines who the kings, presidents, and prime ministers of nations will be (Romans 13:1, Daniel 4:17, Matthew 28:18), and even more so does He determine who holds positions of authority in the Church of God (1 Corinthians 12:18, 28). So yes, I believe God appointed Mr. Tkach to the position of pastor general of the Worldwide Church of God, not for the reasons Mr. Armstrong thought, but it was God's will nevertheless.

Did God know the direction Mr. Tkach would take the Church? I believe He knew exactly the direction Mr. Tkach would go. Did God scatter and divide the Church of God? Some might say that Satan scattered the Church. Did Satan scatter the Church? My response would be to ask, who afflicted Job, God or Satan? I think the best way to answer is, both did. It was Satan who was the most direct cause of Job's suffering in the sense that it was Satan who directly caused the wind to knock down a building killing Job's sons and it was Satan who directly caused boils to appear on Job's flesh. But God afflicted Job because it was God's decision and initiative to set in motion the chain of events in which Satan was allowed, and provoked, to afflict Job. Even the whole conversation between God and Satan was God's idea from the beginning, not Satan's. God afflicted Job because God is in control, but God used Satan as a tool to do it (Job 1:8-18, 2:3-7).

Likewise, I believe it was God who made the decision to put into power and influence in the Worldwide Church of God individuals that He knew would make doctrinal mistakes and introduce error into the Church. I believe these men did not have a solid understanding of the Bible, though they may have thought they did. I do not accuse these individuals of deliberately trying to do things that were wrong. I do not know their hearts, and they may have been sincerely trying to do what they thought was right. Nevertheless, their doctrines were in error, and that error led to the result we see today. Satan can play a part in deceiving human beings and leading them into error, but he can only do what God allows him to do. It was God who set in motion the events that led to doctrinal changes that would scatter the Church of God. Simply put, it was God's decision to allow the Church of God to be scattered.

Why?

I do not believe that there is necessarily only one reason God has done this. I know it has served as a test for many individuals. God can use this to force people to make decisions to see where their hearts are. I have often thought that our lives in the Church are like going to school. Mr. Armstrong was the lecture, the Bible was our textbook, and the Church was our homework. Mr. Tkach was the mid-term exam to see how well we learned the lessons Mr. Armstrong taught us from the Bible. The changes in

doctrine and the subsequent scattering forced all of us to make choices that indicated how well we have learned and internalized the spiritual principles and way of life God wants us to learn.

God has allowed a situation to develop in which everyone can basically do what he wants. Does someone want to go to a church that is ruled by the ministers who vote to select the leadership? God lets them do it. Someone wants to go to a church that has one leader, but believes that the time for preaching the gospel is over? Such a church is available. Someone else wants to go to a local Protestant church because they have great music? God doesn't stop them. God is testing us with questions about the Church, about the gospel, about government, about our personal priorities, and we are marking our answers on the exam paper, not with a number 2 pencil, but with our feet and our checkbooks.

What is most important to us? Fellowship? Preaching the gospel? Music? Short driving distances? Friends and relatives? God wants to know. So He tests us with choices. And we have to make the choices. Even if we stay home, that is a choice.

It has become evident that some ministers and members in Worldwide while Mr. Armstrong was alive were following the pattern that Mr. Armstrong enforced, but they didn't completely agree with it. Some were "going along" but not agreeing. They had never proved the truths Mr. Armstrong taught from the Bible and deep down they didn't have real faith in what God said in the Bible. They were just going with the flow. Others may have agreed with Mr. Armstrong because they heard what he taught and wanted to believe it, but many of these also never really proved from the Bible that the doctrines Mr. Armstrong taught were true. They accepted what he said without real proof. They assumed it was true because they wanted to believe it.

I think that God did not want that to continue. He wants a Church organization, even if it is small, that will follow God's basic pattern and way of life with everyone agreeing with it in their hearts, not just "going along" because it is enforced. I also think God wants members to prove the truth from the Bible, not just accept the teachings of a leader without proving those teachings. So by letting the Church be scattered, God has created the opportunity for everyone to go someplace where they can agree with the pattern. God has given those that never agreed with the pattern a way out. It's not God's way to force people. But we are still being judged and are accountable for our decisions. God sees where we stand by where we go. I think that those who choose the pattern and way of life that has born good fruit under Mr. Armstrong are making the right choice and passing a test. By "pattern" I am not referring to every detail of doctrine, but I am referring to such major principles as striving to believe and obey everything God says in the Bible, proving all things from the Bible, respecting God's government from the top down, zeal for preaching the gospel to the world, etc.

Another possible reason why God allowed the scattering is that a certain percentage of the apparent "membership" of the Church may have been made up of unconverted people, or "tares" as described in the Bible, and when this percentage began to grow large, God allowed the Church to be scattered, thus separating many of the unconverted tares from the converted members. This may be another reason God allowed this, to

reduce the number of tares among those that are converted. Also, God may have allowed this to create a change in circumstances that may have been needed for certain individuals to change their environment and to put them in a new environment where they can be better fed and nurtured. For example, the scattering may have served to free some members from abusive ministers. By "abusive", I am referring to cases where a few ministers may have exceeded their authority by trying to micro-manage people's personal lives or by making unreasonable demands on members' time and service. God may have arranged for various members to come into better circumstances where they can best learn the lessons they need to learn and develop in a balanced way as Christians.

I think God may be separating those who believe the Bible from those who do not. I don't think this process is complete yet.

I also think that the trial of these events has forced many to draw closer to God and to examine themselves and their beliefs more seriously and intensely, and that can be a benefit. For example, I talked to one young person who went through these things who had grown up in the Church and took its teachings for granted. The doctrinal changes forced him to examine his beliefs more closely and seriously, and he ended up proving the truths he had previously assumed. I have no doubt he came through this experience spiritually stronger.

I think there may be many other reasons why God allowed this.

But I do agree with John Ritenbaugh that one of the MAJOR reasons God allowed the Church to be scattered was to correct and rebuke us for our collective Laodiceanism. Not necessarily everyone had become Laodicean, but many had.

And if this is true, our response should be to accept God's judgment, to examine ourselves and repent, and no longer be Laodicean. If we are being punished for our Laodiceanism, God wants the punishment to have effect. We have to change.

But how? I don't think just saying, "I am lukewarm, so I will be lukewarm no longer", is sufficient. Nor do I think that an intensified focus on the doctrines of the Church is necessarily going to solve the problem. How and why did we become Laodicean? We have to look at that. If the cause was that we were not focused on true doctrine, maybe a focus on true doctrine is the solution, but if a lack of focus on true doctrine was not the cause, a focus on true doctrine now will not be the solution either.

We have to go back to the first principle of solving a problem. We have to find the cause of the problem before prescribing a solution. What has been the cause of Laodiceanism?

Finding the Root Cause of Laodiceanism -- False Doctrine?

Was false doctrine the cause of Laodiceanism?

First of all, when did Laodiceanism become the predominant condition in the Church? We know that the false doctrine that triggered the scattering of the Church came into the Church after Mr. Armstrong died. Was this the cause of Laodiceanism, or the effect? If we say that it was God's judgment to scatter the Church because we had become Laodicean, and that scattering took place due to doctrinal changes introduced by the man Christ chose or allowed to succeed Mr. Armstrong as pastor general, then God's judgment must have occurred at or prior to the death of Mr. Armstrong, not afterwards. So we must have become Laodicean, lukewarm, self-satisfied, thinking we were in need of nothing, while Mr. Armstrong was alive, not after he died. This can be supported by statements Mr. Armstrong made about the condition of the Church while he was alive. He could see that too many of us just didn't "get it". He could see Laodiceanism developing long before 1986.

Did false doctrine cause Laodiceanism? No. False doctrine is one of the effects, not the root cause. Whatever caused Laodiceanism began while Mr. Armstrong was alive, and when he was alive he maintained control over doctrine, and except for a few cases where certain individuals were allowed to bring some false doctrine in for a short period of time, Mr. Armstrong maintained control over the body of doctrine taught by the Church from 1934 to his death in 1986. The overall body of doctrine in the Church of God during Mr. Armstrong's ministry was sound.

If this is true, that false doctrine is not the root cause of Laodiceanism, then focusing on the true doctrines now, of and by itself, will not solve the problem. Consider how strongly and thoroughly the true body of doctrine was taught to the Church while Mr. Armstrong was alive. I cannot speak from experience about what it was like for a member inside the Church before 1982. I read the Plain Truth magazine and requested and read all the major literature starting in 1968. After being baptized early 1982 I listened to many of Mr. Armstrong's tapes in the tape library dated from about 1979 forward, and I talked with members who were in the Church a long time. But I know from experience that from 1982 to 1986, the whole body of doctrine given to us through Mr. Armstrong was taught VERY thoroughly and strongly. We had the Plain Truth Magazine, the Good News magazine, the Bible Correspondence Course, all the books, all the booklets and reprint articles (literally hundreds if you could find a complete list). I could listen to hundreds of tapes from the tape library. We had twice-a-month Bible studies. We had the sermons and sermonettes given every Sabbath, on the holy days, and every day during the Feast of Tabernacles. We also had the Worldwide News and Mr. Armstrong's letters. The sheer volume of teaching material was so great that it was almost impossible for a person with a full-time job to keep up with it. And all of it (or about 99%) was consistent with Mr. Armstrong's teachings. It was nearly all sound doctrine, well written, well spoken. In addition, each church pastor was able to devote

full-time to feeding the flock unencumbered by any responsibility for preaching to the public. Over all, we were well fed, in my opinion, as far as doctrine is concerned.

I might add that in spite of the pastor's heavy workload (two congregations with a combined attendance between 500 and 700 people was ministered to by a pastor and associate pastor, both employed full-time, and several local elders), the pastor was always available to me for questions and counseling. I never felt he was too busy to serve my needs.

Yet with all that sound instruction, it did not prevent or cure Laodiceanism.

That is a reason why I feel that a heavy dose of instruction in the body of true doctrinal knowledge is not the answer to the Church's problems today.

It was Laodiceanism that led to false doctrine, not the other way around. Laodiceanism came first, then God's judgment, then false doctrine, then the scattering. Just focusing all resources on true doctrine is not the solution to the Church's problem.

Was Preaching the Gospel to the Public a Cause of Laodiceanism?

I have heard it implied that an over-emphasis on preaching the gospel to the public may have been a contributing cause of Laodiceanism. If this were true, then NOT preaching the gospel to the public might be a solution. But I have trouble understanding this line of reasoning.

First of all, preaching the gospel to the public is a responsibility God has given the Church. It is a commission for the Church of God (Matthew 28:18-20). For proof of this, see the section on the commission of the Church towards the end of this chapter.

Why would God command the Church to preach the gospel to the world if preaching the gospel to the world would lead to Laodiceanism? Why would obeying God's commission to preach the gospel to the world lead to Laodiceanism? I don't think it would.

It seems illogical to me that OBEYING a command of God would lead to Laodiceanism. In looking for a cause of Laodiceanism, I think it would make more sense to look for something we did that God told us not to do, or something we failed to do that God told us we should do. We should look for some kind of disobedience to God's instructions as a cause of Laodiceanism, not obedience. Why would God command us to do something that would lead us into Laodiceanism?

Secondly, though Mr. Armstrong placed heavy emphasis on preaching the gospel to the world, the Church was well-nourished during this time. There was an abundance of

instruction for church members in doctrine and Christian living, and there were hundreds of full-time pastors and assistant pastors who were 100% dedicated to feeding their flocks and did not have to expend any time or effort preaching to the public. The Church did not suffer from lack of instruction and care because of Mr. Armstrong's efforts to preach to the public. At least this seemed to be true in the last years of Mr. Armstrong's life.

Thirdly, what were the fruits of Mr. Armstrong's policy of placing a high priority on preaching the gospel to the world? The fruits are, we wouldn't be here otherwise. I never would have heard the truth and come into the Church if it wasn't for Mr. Armstrong's zeal to preach to the public.

There is another factor that I never considered until recently. When was the Worldwide Church of God strongly Philadelphian? Was it not in the late 1930's, the 1940's, the 1950's, and the early 1960's? Was the Church Laodicean before 1965? Yet if you look at the issue of preaching to the public versus feeding the flock, weren't these the years when there was the LEAST feeding of the flock as compared to preaching to the public? I wasn't in the Church at that time, so I can only speak from what I have read and heard, not from experience, but wasn't this a time when radio listeners who were ready for baptism had to wait a long time for someone to come around and baptize them? And after baptism, didn't they have to wait even longer for a pastor to be trained and hired so they could attend church services? So at the very time when God was blessing the Church with growth and doors wide open, a time when it seemed the Church was Philadelphian if it ever was, that was the very time when there was a shortage of trained ministers and of congregations members could attend. Also, there was not as much literature available then because much of it was still being written.

It doesn't make sense, either from history, or logic, or from Scripture, that zeal to obey God by preaching to the public would be a cause of Laodiceanism, or that putting ALL resources into feeding the flock and virtually nothing into preaching to the public today is therefore a solution to the Church's Laodicean condition.

There has to be a balance. Preaching to the world does not diminish the effectiveness of feeding the flock. We have to do both. Jesus Christ did both. He preached the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the crowds and he personally taught and fed his disciples. Paul did both. Mr. Armstrong did both.

Preaching to the world is commanded by God: "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore 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; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.' Amen." (Matthew 28:18-20). See also Luke 24:46-47. You cannot make disciples of all nations without preaching to them.

In searching for a cause or causes of Laodiceanism, rather than looking for a case of obedience to God's commands (preaching to the public), we should look for a case of disobedience as a cause of the problem.

What About Tares?

Jesus gave the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). Jesus explained that the tares are sown by the devil (Matthew 13:36-43). Although Scripture does not directly tie this in with those that attend with us in church services, this parable together with other examples in the New Testament Church and our own experiences in the recent history of the Church indicate that not everyone who is baptized and attends with us is converted. There is an implication that can be drawn, though it is not stated, that Satan may cause some unconverted people to come into the Church of God and be among us, and that God will allow this to some extent. This certainly seems to be what happened in recent decades.

How does it serve Satan's purpose to bring unconverted people into the Church? One reason is that some who do not have a solid understanding of scripture may rise to positions of authority that can be used to try to lead true converted members into error. I think what happened in the Church from 1986 through 1996 may be an example of this. But also, some tares can serve as bad examples to influence converted members in a wrong direction. Some tares can weaken the true Church by their example and influence. Or can they?

What is the answer to the problem of tares? Should the ministry try to do a better job of screening them out? Should members do a better job of learning who they are and avoiding them? I think if we use what Jesus said in the parable of the tares as a guide, this is NOT the answer. In the parable, the servants asked the owner of the field if they should pull out the tares (in other words, identify them and put them out or screen them out or avoid them in the Church), and the owner said, no, because they might uproot the wheat with them (Matthew 13:28-29). Although with actual plants the roots may be intertwined, another reason is that mistakes could be made, since the tares can look very similar to the wheat. In the Church this may mean that we cannot judge people's hearts as God can, and we cannot always know who is a tare and who is not, who is converted and who is not. If we try to avoid or screen out all the tares, we may mistakenly hurt those who are converted members with problems, but who are growing. But somehow there must be a defense against the bad example of some tares.

Can the bad example of tares cause Laodiceanism?

A characteristic of Laodiceanism is that the person in this condition is self-satisfied. They think they are in good shape spiritually: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17). Could this result from looking at the bad examples of some tares in the Church? Could we be setting ourselves up to have an overly-positive evaluation of ourselves by comparing ourselves with other "members" of the Church, who unknown to us may not really be converted anyway?

Comparing Ourselves Among Ourselves

Jesus commanded "Judge not..." (Matthew 7:1-5, Luke 6:37). The apostle Paul wrote, "...But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). Jesus Christ set the perfect example for us, and we should compare ourselves with Him, not measure ourselves by comparing ourselves with other members in the Church. But that is what many of us have done.

I know this from my personal life. I know that I have spiritually weakened myself and allowed myself to get into an overly self-satisfied attitude about myself because I compared myself with other church members. Later, many of these members that I was judging in my mind, evaluating, consciously or unconsciously comparing myself with, and measuring myself against, went along with the apostasy. They may never have been converted, yet I weakened myself by comparing myself with them and thinking I was all right with God when actually I wasn't. How stupid of me! I was evaluating myself by comparing myself with other members of the Church instead of comparing myself with Jesus Christ. No wonder my evaluation of myself was faulty.

I wonder how many have fallen into the same trap.

The defense against being influenced by the bad example of tares is to obey Christ's command to not be judging and evaluating our neighbors. We won't be influenced as much by the bad examples of others if we aren't thinking about those examples. To put it another way, to the extent we are influenced by the examples of others that we dwell on, meditate on, turn over in our minds, we should be thinking about, meditating on, turning over in our minds the example of Jesus Christ. Then we will be influenced to follow that perfect example, not the bad examples (or what we may perceive in our self-righteousness and pride to be bad examples, we may not have all the facts and may jump to wrong conclusions) of other members, who are human and imperfect like us.

It is not just the tares we should not compare ourselves with. Even converted members, because we are still human, are not perfect and have faults. Even comparing ourselves with other converted members can get us into trouble and give us a higher opinion of ourselves than we should have. Our human nature tends to notice the faults in others that are different from our own faults because we don't understand them. Our own faults we understand, and we tend to be sympathetic to those who are like us, but notice the faults of those who are different from us.

Also, if we compare ourselves with Christ rather than with other brethren, it is unlikely that we will come out of it thinking we are spiritually rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing. Rather, when we compare ourselves with Christ, we are likely to see more accurately how very far we fall short of God's nature and how far we still need to go to live up to God's standard.

Note that in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, it is the Pharisee that compares himself with others, but the publican does not, and it is the one who does not compare himself with others who is justified with God (Luke 18:9-14).

No one is likely to see themselves as spiritually rich, increased with goods, and in need of nothing if they honestly compare themselves with Jesus Christ.

If God allows Satan to bring tares into the Church, and Satan does this to try to weaken us by the bad example of some of them, obedience to God's command to avoid judging others and comparing ourselves with others will give us a measure of defense that can protect us from the Laodicean attitude of self-satisfaction.

When and How to Judge

Because of conversations I have had with brethren about judging, I have thought about it quite a bit. I don't claim to know everything about it, and there is much I need to learn. Nevertheless I want to share some of the things I have thought about it.

Judging is not always wrong. Christ says, "Judge not" (Matthew 7:1-2) in the sermon on the mount because there is in human nature a tendency to want to be judging others all the time, evaluating them in terms that gratify our carnal desire to think well of ourselves. He is correcting a common problem. But in another place He says, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). We know that judging is not always wrong, that is, it is not inherently wrong, because God himself judges, and we will be judging the world in the Kingdom of God with Christ. God appointed men to be judges in ancient Israel, and even in the Church there is a time to judge. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:3, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed", so it was lawful for Paul to judge this case. And in 1 Corinthians 6:5 he rebukes the Corinthians for NOT judging: "I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?"

We need to know when it is right to judge and when we should refrain from judging, even before we get to the case of how to judge. The question then is, when are we authorized to judge a matter or another person?

I will state what I think is a good rule of thumb, then give an example from the life of Christ of how Jesus himself acted, then give examples of how it might apply in the Church today. As I said before, I am still learning about this subject, and I do not claim that I am an expert on it. But I submit this for consideration.

We should judge those matters or people we need to judge in order to make a decision God has given us the responsibility for making, or to carry out any responsibility we have from God. In other words, to the extent it is our business and our responsibility in

God's sight, we judge as we need to in order to make a decision, but if it is not our business, we should not judge.

The example from the life of Jesus Christ I have in mind which illustrates this is from Luke 12:13-21: "Then one from the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' But He said to him, 'Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?' And He said to them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.' Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?" So he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry.' " But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.' "

Jesus was asked to judge an inheritance question between brothers. Did Jesus need to judge this question in order to make a decision God had given Him the responsibility to make at that time? No. It wasn't a matter of ability or qualification. Jesus had a more perfect understanding of the application of God's statutes and judgments concerning inheritance than the scribes and priests, just as He had a better understanding of all of God's laws. He could have given a right decision in this case. But that wasn't His job at that time. The priests and the judges who sat in Moses' seat had that job and therefore the authority to decide that kind of issue, and Jesus did not usurp their job in that matter (Matthew 23:1-3). The Father sent Jesus not to judge Israel and to rule at that time, but to teach.

Did Jesus judge in this case? Yes, He did, but He judged according to His responsibility that God had given Him for that time. His job was to teach, and as a teacher he had to make the decisions every teacher has to make, which is: what I am going to teach now, what lessons are most needed, and how will I teach those lessons? To carry out the work of a teacher that God had assigned to Him, Jesus had to make the decision, what lesson should I teach right now? Along that line and in order to make that decision, He judged the man that asked Him to tell his brother to divide the inheritance. And in judging, Jesus judged that the man was too focused on material possessions and needed a lesson about covetousness. Then Jesus made the decision to teach that lesson and gave the parable.

Jesus judged the man because He needed to judge him to make a decision about what lesson to teach. He had to make that decision because teaching was a responsibility God had given Him. But he did not judge whether the man was right or wrong on the inheritance question because that wasn't Jesus' job or responsibility at that time.

The same kind of thing can apply in the Church. As a lay member, I do not feel I have a right to be judging or "evaluating" all the other members and everything they do. I do not want to get in the habit of evaluating and dwelling on what others do or say. I have a full-time job working on myself. But for a pastor, it is different. His job is to teach

the congregation. Every week he has to make a decision about what to speak on. He has to make those decisions because God has given him the responsibility to teach. And in order to make those decisions, he needs to judge the spiritual condition of his congregation and its members. When he counsels someone for baptism, he has to judge if the person has repented. When he assigns responsibilities, he has to judge who is qualified for those responsibilities. But he does not have the same right to judge other ministers in other areas, or other members in other areas because that is not his responsibility, and usually there are no decisions involved that he has to make that require him to judge outside his area.

As a lay member, do I have a right to judge particular individuals and their character and try to evaluate if they are truly converted or not? I don't think I do. Suppose I know a woman in the Church who has been baptized and in the Church a long time, but never seems to want to talk about spiritual things, rather, prefers to talk about physical things like food, various activities at certain Feast sites, her job, etc. Do I have the right or the authority in God's sight to evaluate her in my mind and say to myself, "I think maybe she's not really converted"? No, I don't think I should do that. God knows whether she has His Spirit or not and I don't need to know. However, supposing I was dating her and was seriously considering if she was the right person to marry? Now that's different. God commands that we only marry "in the Lord" and that we be not unequally yoked with unbelievers (1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 6:14). If I marry, I have a responsibility to only marry someone converted. This responsibility is given by God. If this is a decision I have to make, I not only have the right to judge if this individual is converted, I have a responsibility to do so. I should earnestly pray to God to give me the wisdom and discernment to see anything in this individual that would indicate either that the person is not converted or any other incompatibility that would cause an unhappy marriage. I would be judging and evaluating the character and spiritual condition of another person, which normally I should not do, but it would be lawful in this case because I am required to do it in order to make a decision God has given me the responsibility for making.

Suppose I notice a man in the Church who has ability, but doesn't seem to get involved much in doing any kind of service or work in the Church. He doesn't volunteer, won't be a member of club even though he can speak well, never gives rides or helps people move or even helps set up chairs or run the sound equipment. Do I have a right to evaluate him in my mind and speculate that he must be lazy? I might be tempted to think that, but I think it would be wrong for me to entertain those thoughts. Not only is it not my prerogative to evaluate this man's character, but I cannot possibly know all the facts in his life, what demands are made on his time, how tired he may feel, what physical or mental trials he may be going through, or how it feels to walk in his shoes. But now, suppose I owned a business and needed to hire someone, and this man came to me for a job. Now I have to make a decision. I cannot afford to hire someone lazy, and to make a decision to hire this man or not I have every right to consider every fact I am aware of about the man and anything about him that could affect my decision. I would judge him in order to judge if he would make a good employee for my business, and I would ask God for wisdom to help me do so. Because I have a decision to make, this person's character and behavior patterns become my business. What was once "not my business" has literally become "my business".

Does a lay member have a right to evaluate and judge the leadership of the Church? I am sure many ministers would say no, but sometimes it is necessary for a member to judge the leadership in order to judge where God is working. God commands that we pay our tithes, but God doesn't tell us the name to write on the check or the address to write on the envelope. A member cannot obey the tithing law without making that decision, and sometimes it is necessary to judge the leadership in order to make a decision God has given us the responsibility for making.

If we have no responsibility that requires that we judge, then we should not judge and evaluate others, but rather use our "thinking time" to think about the teachings and example of Christ and compare our own lives, words, actions, and thoughts with that perfect standard, and also with the standard of all of God's law and way of life in the Bible. Only when we need to judge others to fulfill a responsibility should we judge others. Each of us has a full-time job examining ourselves and comparing ourselves with God's standard to see where we each fall short and then working on our own selves.

God instructs us to judge our own selves (1 Corinthians 11:31-32, 2 Corinthians 13:5). Why? Because God has given us the responsibility of putting sin out of our lives, and do to this we have to be able to see where we fall short (Matthew 5:48, Matthew 4:1).

Why was it right for Samuel, David, and Moses to judge? Because they had to make certain judgments to carry out the decision making responsibilities God had given them. Why will we judge angels in the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:3)? Because God will give us that responsibility. Why are we to judge ourselves? Because we are commanded to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). We have a full-time job to judge ourselves and examine ourselves in order to discern where we fall short, so we can learn to follow God's way of life more perfectly. But we don't have that same responsibility to judge others.

And if I judge or evaluate another person or a matter that I have no right to judge, not only am I judging something that is not my business, but it is unlikely that I will judge correctly. This is because, to judge someone correctly, we need wisdom and discernment from God (James 1:5, James 1:17, 1 Kings 3:5-12, 2 Chronicles 1:7-12, 1 Corinthians 2:10-12, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). God gives us the spiritual gifts we need to carry out the responsibilities He gives us. But He does not necessarily give us the wisdom to judge someone else's responsibility. If I am judging something I have to judge to carry out a responsibility God has given me, I can go to God in prayer and ask for wisdom to judge correctly, but I cannot do that if I am unlawfully looking at the faults of others contrary to God's will. God gives each Christian the gifts that match his or her responsibilities in the body of Christ. God gave Solomon wisdom in judgment, but He gave him wisdom because Solomon had a responsibility to judge Israel (1 Kings 3:16-28, especially verse 28).

But if we have a valid reason to judge another person or their actions, how should we judge?

We should judge according to God's law, but also according to God's mercy, and we should judge as we want to be judged (Matthew 7:1-2, James 2:13).

Often times I have gotten "burnt" because I have allowed myself to dwell on someone else's fault and turn it over in my mind, and then God corrected me, painfully, by arranging circumstances to show me that I had exactly the same fault, and then causing me to suffer for that fault. I think I am finally beginning to learn to be afraid to do this, but I still have a ways to go. I hope I am learning to not judge matters that are not my business, and to judge mercifully, as I want to be judged, those matters that are my business. If I am not learning this, I may have a lot more suffering to go through. But even so, I still hope God will be merciful with me. So I better be merciful with others.

We need to learn when to judge or evaluate and when not to. But when we judge, we should also learn to judge with mercy, assuming we want to be judged with mercy. The danger is, we too easily forget this at the moment of judging. We forget to consider that we may have the same or a similar fault as the one we are judging. So we judge harshly. Then God brings our own judgment back on us.

Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matthew 7:1-2).

There may be a lesson about judging with mercy from the life of King David. This may illustrate the principle Jesus taught when He said we would be judged as we judge others. When Nathan the prophet spoke to him about his sin concerning Uriah the Hittite, Nathan spoke of a rich man who took a poor man's lamb: "Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: 'There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich *man* had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor *man* had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.' So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.' Then Nathan said to David, 'You *are* the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if *that had been* too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife *to be* your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give *them* to your

neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did *it* secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun" ' ' (2 Samuel 12:1-12).

In another translation, David said that the rich man deserved to die, not that he would actually be put to death.

Notice David's judgment of the rich man, that he should restore fourfold for what he had taken.

Did God render David's judgment back upon him? What had David taken? He took Uriah's life. What was David's judgment? Restore fourfold.

I was curious after reading this. Nathan prophesied that the sword would not depart from David's house, and that David's first child by Bathsheba would die (2 Samuel 12:14). I did a study to see how many people close to David in his own house died in the trials and violence that followed. Maybe this is just a coincidence. You can judge for yourself if you think I am reading too much into this. But I counted four, including Bathsheba's son:

- 1) Bathsheba's and David's son died -- 2 Samuel 12:15-18
- 2) David's son Amnon was killed by Absalom
-- 2 Samuel 13:28-29
- 3) Ahithophel, David's close counselor, joined Absalom's rebellion and hanged himself when he saw his advice for Absalom's success was defeated -- 2 Samuel 17:23, 1 Chronicles 27:33, 2 Samuel 15:12, possibly Psalm 55:12-21
- 4) Absalom was killed by Joab -- 2 Samuel 18:14-15

I do not say David was wrong in judging that the rich man should restore the poor man's lamb fourfold. The judgment may have been correct (I have not looked up the judgments that apply) and perhaps David had no alternative but to render that judgment. Nevertheless, this may also illustrate Jesus' statement that with what judgment we judge, we will be judged.

Another point is that if we are judging a decision that another person makes in his or her life, we have to keep in mind that we may not have all the facts that the other person has upon which to base the decision. And in a matter of using wisdom, it seems to me that God is far more likely to give wisdom to the person who has the responsibility to make the decision so that the decision will be correct than to a bystander who is looking at the person and evaluating him and his decision, but who has no direct responsibility in the matter.

Along this line, am I judging matters "not my business" even in the things I say in this book? Am I judging the Church in the things I am writing outside of my area of responsibility? Following my own logic, what responsibilities or what decisions has God given me the responsibility for making that would make it lawful for me to judge and evaluate Church of God organizations in regards to the things I am writing, such as changing doctrine, government in the Church, and preaching the gospel? Do I have the

right to evaluate, think about, turn over in my mind, how well or how poorly various church leaders and evangelists are doing in fulfilling Christ's commission to the Church?

God commands me to tithe, but He doesn't tell me what name to write on a check and what address on an envelope. I have to decide what to do with God's tithe. God wants me to attend Sabbath services if possible, and I have to decide where I can attend. In the present scattered condition of the Church of God, I have to look for and if possible find faithful ministers who can serve my spiritual needs and whom I can support with my tithes, offerings, and prayers so that the gospel and the Ezekiel warning may be preached to the public as effectively as possible. I also need to work on myself, and if Laodiceanism is a cause of the scattering of the Church, and if I personally have been guilty of becoming Laodicean to any degree, I need to identify causes and remedies. All these responsibilities and others combine to make it necessary for me and other members in the Church to think about, evaluate, judge, and try to understand what has happened in the Church, what are the problems and the solutions, where God is working now, and how each of us can best contribute to the work God wants us to do. God has also commissioned the Church to make disciples of all nations, and preaching the gospel to the world is an effective way of fulfilling that commission. This is not just for the apostles. Christ also sent out the seventy, two by two, to preach to the public (Luke 10:1-12). The scattered Church preached the gospel everywhere after the stoning of Stephen while the apostles stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4). Based on these scriptures and other evidence I have shown I believe that as a Church member I have a responsibility to support the preaching of the gospel. This book is one way I am trying to support it. I am trying to support it by suggesting reasons why it is still important that we preach to the public, in hopes of helping to motivate and persuade those who are not sure about this, and in hopes of encouraging the zeal and sacrifices of those who agree that the gospel should be preached but may not be sure why. I am also trying to support it by suggesting things the Church of God can do to preach the gospel and the Ezekiel warning more effectively.

But I am NOT trying to judge persons as far as their character is concerned. I am willing to give anyone the benefit of the doubt to say that they may be very sincere and may be doing the best they can with what they have been given. Anyone can make an honest mistake if God does not grant them the understanding, and those that commit errors in decision making may be sincerely doing what they think is right under the circumstances. God is the one who judges the heart in these cases. I try to have this attitude not only because I think it is the right way of looking at things but also because that is how I hope God will judge me.

But if I can offer suggestions that may help, I will try.

The Cause of the Church's Scattered Condition, and the Solution

I suppose as I write this that I will sound arrogant and presumptuous to some, as I suggest what I think the root problems are and the solutions. Who am I to know these things more than others? I don't want to come across that way. I am not trying to appear modest when I say I do not think I know all the answers. And I really am looking for feedback and correction where I may be wrong. But what I am doing is suggesting possibilities for the reader's evaluation. These are things that I have thought about in the context of everything I have read in the Bible and church literature over the years, all the sermons and conversations I have listened to, and everything I have experienced in the Church and in my life. There are a great many things I do not know and am confused about, but what I am writing in this chapter makes sense to me. This is food for thought. Anyone can consider my reasons, and if I am wrong they can judge for themselves according to the Bible and their experiences. If I am wrong, the reader can separate the wheat from the chaff in the things I write with God's Word as his or her guide.

It makes sense to me that God has allowed heresy in the Church to scatter the Church, to test us and to put us through trials that will correct us and motivate us to examine ourselves and take our spiritual problems and shortcomings more seriously. It makes sense to me that God has done this, ultimately for our own good, because we have become Laodicean. It makes sense to me that the response God wants me to make to his corrective punishment is to identify the cause of any Laodicean attitude in my life, either now or in the past, and to get rid of it, and to get rid of it I need to try to know what it is.

As near as I can tell, from examining my own patterns of wrong thinking, as well as what the Bible says, to the extent I have fallen into the attitude of thinking I am spiritually rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, it is because I have compared myself with other members of the Church in a judgmental attitude. When I do that, I see a tendency in myself to begin thinking I am better than others, and that makes me tend to be self-satisfied. I am speculating that the same pattern I have observed in myself may have occurred with many others. I am concluding that there is a strong possibility that our collective failure to obey God's command to "judge not" is a strong cause of Laodiceanism, and therefore one of the root causes of the scattered condition of the Church of God today.

If I am correct, then part of the solution is for each member of the Church who has a problem with judging others to work on themselves. I know I still have that problem, in fact, I probably only see the tip of the iceberg in myself, but I am sure if I make the effort God will show me more and more of my problem and help me to overcome and change.

One point I haven't mentioned. I have already noted that the Worldwide Church of God seemed spiritually strong, not Laodicean, in the early years when people needed to wait a long time by themselves before a congregation could be established in their area. It was after congregations were established everywhere that the attitudes of Laodiceanism began to grow. This may suggest that when members of the Church were alone they didn't have anyone to judge and compare themselves with so much because they only saw other brethren at the Feast of Tabernacles. But when everyone began to attend services with brethren every week and congregations grew large, members began to look at other members too much and did not look enough to Christ for the standard. We need to assemble together as God instructs whenever possible, but when we come together we should not come with an attitude that wants to judge and evaluate other members.

To sum up if I am right, the chain of events from cause to effect, is: while Mr. Armstrong was alive, we began to judge and evaluate other members of the Church and to compare ourselves with each other more than we should, even when evaluating and judging others was not necessary for decisions we had to make or responsibilities that we held. By comparing ourselves with others in the Church, some of whom were unconverted tares, we were able to see ourselves favorably, and became self-satisfied, thinking we were in need of nothing. This gradually led to a condition of Laodiceanism in most of the Church while Mr. Armstrong was alive. In response to our lukewarmness about our own shortcomings, God made the judgment to correct the Church by scattering it, just as He scattered ancient Israel for their sins. God carried out His judgment by leading Mr. Armstrong to name a man as his successor that God knew was not firmly grounded in the doctrines Mr. Armstrong taught and would lead the organization to overturn nearly all of Mr. Armstrong's major doctrines. This was done gradually, and because of the gradual nature of the changes and because there was no strong leader like Mr. Armstrong, the ministry was divided in their response and the members were scattered with them.

The solution is not to devote total resources to the teachings of Mr. Armstrong's doctrines to the exclusion of preaching the gospel to the world, because neither the preaching of the gospel nor a lack of true doctrine was the root cause the Laodiceanism in the first place. If one of the causes was judging, then that is something we have to work on. If we learn to stop focusing on the faults of others, and instead to focus on the example of Christ and how we fall short of it, God will see our spiritual progress and will bless us and give us more power when the time is right.

As far as the need to regather those who have been scattered (Ezekiel 34:1-10), I think the best way to regather them is the same way they were gathered in the first place. Mr. Armstrong preached to the public and said, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible." In other words, the truth was preached to the public from the Bible, the Word of God. That is the way to gather the lost sheep. Those who belong to Christ and those that the Father is drawing to Christ will recognize Christ's voice in that kind of preaching, if it is done honestly, just as they did the first time when they heard it from Mr. Armstrong (John 10:1-16).

Focusing on the Bible

Possibly, another contributing cause of Laodiceanism may be a neglect of personal Bible study and reading, or an unwillingness to believe the Bible first. I am not talking about studying church literature, correspondence courses, listening to sermon tapes, or attending Bible studies. I am talking about individual personal Bible study and reading in an attitude of being willing to believe what God says.

It may be that with the abundance of church literature, tapes, and activities, members became so wrapped up in the busy-ness of keeping up with everything in the Church that they neglected personal Bible study. Yet personal Bible study and reading is absolutely vital for drawing close to God.

Mr. Armstrong equated the Bible with Jesus Christ in a sense. He said that just as Jesus Christ is the Word of God in person (John 1:1-5, 14), so the Bible is the Word of God in print, the same Word. Jesus Christ must be our foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). If Jesus is the Word of God in person and the Bible the Word of God in print, the same Word, and if that Word must be our foundation, this seems to indicate that the Bible must be the foundation for what we believe.

God expects us to strive to live by every word of God (Luke 4:4, Matthew 4:1-4, Deuteronomy 8:2-3). But how many members have even read every word of God by reading the Bible from cover to cover? We have been sometimes admonished by ministers to read or study the Bible at least a half hour a day. But how much time do we spend each day watching TV and movies and this world's entertainment?

If we measured the number of minutes each day, on average, that we spend with the Bible and with TV or movies, which would be greater? Do we spend more time watching TV or movies than studying the Bible, praying to God, and seeking to learn and prove the truths of God?

Also, I wonder how much time we spend watching TV and movies on average today compared with the average time spent with TV and movies between 1934 and 1965 when the Philadelphia condition was clearly dominant in God's Work.

How would Jesus Christ divide His time between TV and the Bible if he were a human being on the earth today? Would He spend more time with TV or movies than with the Bible and in prayer and in meditating about the things of God? Suppose God, who sees all things, in evaluating and judging the Church of God as a whole, simply computed the average time spent in private Bible study, prayer, and seeking God by all the members and the average time spent with television and movies by all the members, and compared the two averages? Which would be greater? Does the average church member spend a half hour a day reading the Bible, or less? Does the average church member spend a half hour a day watching TV, video tapes, and DVDs, or more? Consider that we are a people who know that God is offering all humanity life as His Sons for all eternity, and that as first fruits we are chosen each as only one in a million

people on earth to receive the greatest rewards and positions for all eternity among all the Sons of God, and do we love TV more than the Bible? How does God view that?

Also, if we are to compare ourselves and measure ourselves with the perfect example of Jesus Christ, we need to spend time with the Word of God to learn more about Jesus Christ, His teachings, and how He thinks and acts, so we can follow His instructions and example more perfectly. If we do this, we will find plenty of areas in which we fall short, and this will protect us from thinking that we are spiritually "rich and in need of nothing".

Spending more time with the Bible and with the things of God than with TV and movies might help to protect us from Laodiceanism.

Romans 10:17 says "So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." When this was written, the Bible was not generally available, so the only way those being called could hear God's word preached was by the spoken word when the scriptures were read or when the apostles related directly what Jesus taught them in person. Today, we have that same teaching available to us in the Bible and the Bible is accessible to anyone. Anyone who reads the Bible can exercise faith by making the decision to believe God, but you can't make the decision to believe God if you don't know what God says.

So not giving priority to Bible study, and not putting the Bible first as a source of our beliefs, may be a major contributing cause of the development of Laodiceanism. Considering that the Laodicean suffers from self-satisfaction, and the Bible corrects us where we are wrong, spending time with the Bible in a humble, submissive, teachable, and believing attitude, letting the Bible correct us where we are wrong, can help to protect us from Laodiceanism. And if neglect of Bible study has been a cause of Laodiceanism, part of the solution to the scattered condition of the Church is for members to spend more time reading and studying the Bible with a heart and mind that is willing to believe and strive to obey what God says.

From a practical point of view, many of those who went along with the false teachings during the apostasy may have done so because they did not spend the time with the Bible that they needed to spend, or did not approach the Bible in an attitude of being willing to believe God first. Others may have given higher priority to the teachings of the ministry in the Church than to what God says in the Bible. Some may have made an idol out of the Church in doing so. And if God scattered the Church because too many members were making an idol out of the Church and having the kind of faith in the Church and its leaders that we should only have in God and His Word, the Bible, then that would very closely fit the examples in the Old Testament where God scattered Israel because of their idolatry.

I think that some members may have been deceived by false teaching because they had made an idol of the Church and its leaders, relying on the Church for what they believed instead of the Bible, and that weakened their faith in God and His Word. They then had no defense against Satan's deceptions.

Focusing on the Bible and spending more time learning what the Bible says may be even more important as a protection against deception in the future. Understanding the Bible can be a protection against false prophets and their deceptions, which are prophesied to increase as we near the end of the age (Matthew 24:24-25).

If someone claims to be a prophet of God, how can we know if that person is telling the truth or not? By "prophet" I do not mean anyone who teaches God's truth from the Bible as do pastors and evangelists. And I do not mean someone whom God helps to understand the Bible as God helps all those who are converted. I mean someone who receives direct revelation from God in the form of a dream or a vision (Numbers 12:6, Daniel 7:1, Ezekiel 1:1-3), or an audible voice (1 Samuel 3:2-11), face-to-face as with Moses (Numbers 12:6-8), or some other miraculous means of direct communication apart from the Bible. If someone makes such a claim, that God has directly communicated with him, how can we know if he is telling the truth or if he is lying or deceived?

The Bible gives several criteria. For someone who claims to be a true prophet of God, if he gives predictions about the future which he claims are from God, those predictions must come to pass (Deuteronomy 18:22). More importantly, his teachings must be consistent with the Bible. According to Deuteronomy 13:1-4, God may allow even false prophets to predict the future and work signs and wonders to test us, but our faith must be in God and His Word. God will not contradict Himself by giving a message to His prophet that contradicts what God has said in the Bible. But to use this criteria, you must know what the Bible says, and this comes through reading and study over time.

Also, Jesus said, in reference to prophets, that you will know them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20). A prophet's "fruits" would certainly include his teachings. Any doctrine that contradicts what God says in the Bible is certainly a bad fruit, and a prophet that teaches wrong doctrines is bearing bad fruit. There can be other fruits as well, including a man's track record in the Church of God. Two criteria I would look at when examining a man's track record is his understanding and support of hierarchical government in the Church and his zeal and effectiveness in preaching the truth of God to the public. If a man has sided with a system of the voting of men against top-down government under Christ, I don't think that is a good fruit. Also, if a man takes a stand against preaching the gospel to the public, that is not a good fruit either.

In evaluating a man's fruits, I do not place much credibility in allegations spread through rumor or gossip about his personal faults, which are unreliable, but on things that are officially and publicly known, such as his teachings as recorded in print and in taped sermons and the record of his organizational affiliations over the last several decades.

My main point here is, we need to be well grounded in the Bible to be protected from the deceptions of false prophets.

How Could Trained and Experienced Ministers Be Deceived?

This may be a side issue because it has more to do with those who stayed in Worldwide, but I think it may be worth a comment. Many ministers that faithfully taught God's truth for years astonished faithful members by fully going along with the doctrinal changes. Members naturally wondered, how could a minister who has done such a good job of teaching the truth for so many years so easily fall into error and become deceived? You can't say they haven't studied their Bibles!

I am sure that part of the problem may be that many ministers began their ministry when they were sent out as very young men to pastor churches right after graduating from Ambassador College, and that during their time in college they never found the time to really prove the basic doctrines of the Church from the Bible independently and impartially. Proving something means more than just looking at one side of an argument. You have to do independent, objective research on both sides of an issue to really prove it one way or another. If you look at Mr. Armstrong's example in his autobiography, you will find that it took him six months of day and night study to prove that evolution is false, that the Bible is God's word, and that the seventh day is the Sabbath. How many Ambassador College students took the time, or had the time, to do this? In my own case it took about 2,000 hours spread over about 9 years just to prove that the Bible is God's Word, and then almost another year to prove the major doctrines, even with the help of Mr. Armstrong's teachings. I think I was much slower than most would be, but it illustrates a point. To really prove something takes time. It also takes a willingness to be impartial, to accept the truth wherever it leads. How many students at A.C. who became ministers had both the time and the impartiality while at A.C. to prove the truth soundly? I think that some did really did prove the truth, but probably not all. Then, some not being grounded in the truth, they were deceived or they yielded to pressure to teach the changes. This may parallel the situation with the membership, where some members took the time to prove the truth and some just accepted what Mr. Armstrong taught without proof, but with the additional factor in the case of A.C. students of the pressure to conform at A.C.

Another possibility is that some ministers may never have been truly called and converted by God, and even though they understood the Bible well enough to teach it and they taught the doctrines to their congregations as they were taught themselves, they did not have the depth of understanding and faith they needed to see through the error that was later taught from headquarters. Though they may have been very sincere, they did not have the depth of understanding of the Bible because God did not give them that depth of understanding.

I think there may be another possibility that might apply in some cases to even some ministers who did do a thorough job of proving the truth and did at one time have a depth of understanding. Again this is speculation, food for thought.

How should a minister in the Church handle a situation where he is instructed to teach something, perhaps a minor point of doctrine, that he does not agree with? I am not just talking about the doctrinal changes that occurred after Mr. Armstrong died. I am also talking about a hypothetical situation that could have occurred even while Mr. Armstrong was alive, even in small points or details of doctrines. Should the minister teach the doctrine out of respect for and submission to government in the Church, even if he thinks it is wrong according to the Bible? Should he assume that it is okay to teach it, since it is only a small point, and because the Church's doctrines are 99% correct on everything else and he wants to obey government and support the doctrines of the Church?

Mr. Armstrong gave an account in a sermon and/or his autobiography about a man looking for work as a minister who told Mr. Armstrong he would preach whatever he was paid to preach. If I remember, Mr. Armstrong said he lost respect for the man who said this.

In thinking about this, I began to think more about the pressures many ministers may have felt in Worldwide over the years to teach things, even relatively minor points of doctrine, that they didn't "understand" ("not understanding" something can be a euphemism for "not agreeing" with something). How did they react? Did some of them teach and expound on doctrines they didn't really believe just on the principle of submitting to government in the Church?

I am not talking about situations where a minister just reads an announcement or a letter from headquarters without comment, or a minister who, in answering a question from a member about the teaching of the Church, replies "the Church teaches that..." and simply reports factually what the official position of the Church is. I am talking about situations where a minister might actively teach and expound on a doctrine just as if he believes it when he really doesn't.

I never talked to any minister in depth about this. I personally do not know of any cases where a minister taught a doctrine he didn't believe because of pressure from headquarters. But I imagine it could happen. If I were in that situation, I would be afraid myself of saying something I didn't think was true, even if the Church told me to, because I would be afraid that would make me guilty of false witness in God's eyes. We are being trained for eternity in the Kingdom of God, and even a little bit of compromise can grow over a long time into something big. I would think that a better approach would be for a minister to just state as a fact what the official teaching of the Church is ("the Church teaches that...") without expounding on or endorsing things he doesn't yet agree with, or else avoid the particular doctrine altogether. If any ministers have compromised with what they believed in this way, I have wondered if perhaps, to teach a lesson, God permitted some ministers who have compromised by actively teaching, endorsing, and promoting things they didn't believe, to become victims themselves of a larger deception from Satan by taking away from them the spiritual discernment to see the erroneous reasoning behind wrong doctrines. Then they could easily go along with false doctrines. If this is the case with any minister, it may be that God will allow him to wake up later after suffering the consequences for a while.

Letting someone learn lessons by experiencing the consequences of their actions has precedence in the Bible.

Jacob lied to his father Isaac by claiming he was Esau in order to obtain the blessing (Genesis 27:19). After this, was Jacob ever a victim of other people's deceptions? Is it possible that God allowed him to suffer the consequences of deception to teach him lessons he needed to learn on that subject? He was deceived about his wife (Genesis 29:21-25). This caused contentions and rivalry in his family when he ended up with four wives. To some, having four wives might seem like a blessing, but I think a man would be happiest with one wife as God intended. Apparently this was not the only deception Jacob suffered at the hands of Laban (Genesis 31:7). Later, Joseph's brothers deceived Jacob by making him think that Joseph was dead, thus causing Jacob great and unnecessary suffering for years because he mourned for Joseph, who in fact was still alive (Genesis 37:31-35).

The lesson I get from this is, if I want God to protect me from other people's or Satan's deceptions, I must be careful that I only tell the truth to other people and not say what I don't believe. What I sow I can expect to reap. This lesson is even more important in view of the prophesied events to occur that would deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect (Matthew 24:24).

I don't have to answer every question someone asks me. I can keep silent on matters that I regard as confidential, but if I say something I need to strive to make sure it is the truth. We all make honest mistakes, I am not talking about that, but I better not deliberately say what I don't believe.

I have read of an instruction that a supervisor of ministers in a church gave to the ministers telling them they should teach all the doctrines of the Church trusting in faith that God has guided the leadership of the Church. As a former Catholic, I can say that this is a pretty good description of the Catholic way of thinking. But this omits the possibility, which was so powerfully illustrated in our former association, that the leadership may not correctly follow where God, in the Bible, leads.

Papal infallibility is a doctrine of the Catholic Church, not the Church of God. God allows ministers and evangelists to make mistakes. God allowed Mr. Armstrong to make mistakes.

As a member of the Church, I will believe the Bible first. If the Church teaches something that to me seems contrary to the Bible, I can talk about it with a minister and try to get it resolved. I will try to have an open mind and realize that I could be making a mistake, and I will consider what the Church teaches me to show me my error. But even after that, if I cannot resolve it with the Church, if it seems to me that the Bible teaches something different than what the Church is teaching, then I will believe the Bible first. Does this mean I should cause division by openly criticizing the Church's position and promoting my own belief among the membership on that point of doctrine? No. I can simply decline to discuss my views on that point of doctrine with other members, except when I talk with a minister.

A member can avoid talking about matters in which he disagrees with the Church and thereby avoid causing division and confusion. The Bible commands that we all speak the same thing (1 Corinthians 1:10). With a minister it is harder because his job is to teach and he is asked questions that he must answer, so he can't always duck certain issues like a lay member can. But if a minister cannot agree with the Church on a point of doctrine because he believes that the Bible teaches something different, he does not have to speak about that doctrine in his sermons. And if he is told by headquarters that he must teach it, he can decline on the principle of obeying God rather than man (Acts 5:29). And in answering a question from a member who wants to know what the Church teaches on a particular doctrine, a minister can simply report the official position of the Church without representing that he agrees with it. He can reply "the Church teaches that..." If asked his personal understanding of the issue, he can decline to discuss it, saying that his job is to explain what the official teaching of the Church is, not his own opinion where it differs. I don't see anything wrong with a member knowing that his pastor does not agree with the Church on everything. Personally, I would feel more trust and respect towards a pastor who admits he does not agree with and understand every position of the Church, does not say things he doesn't believe, yet declines to contradict the Church, than a pastor who actively teaches and expounds on anything that headquarters tells him to because he wants to submit to government in the Church. The need to submit to government does not override the ninth commandment or the principle that we trust God and His Word, the Bible, first. Trusting the Church is not trusting God.

In the above paragraphs, I am talking about relatively minor issues, not major principles of faith or vital doctrines. Obviously, with the major principles that our faith is based on, there is a time to take a stand by teaching the truth and by leaving an organization if necessary. If headquarters of a church departs from God in major principles, then probably a minister or a member would not want to any longer be part of and supportive of that organization.

Will the Whole Church of God Reunite?

Some in the Church of God may feel that the Church should wait until God reunites us before we can, or should, do a great work of preaching the gospel to the world. But should we wait for a great regathering of the scattered Church? Can we even be sure that this will even happen before Christ returns?

If the seven churches in Revelation are seven eras of the Church, and I believe they are, then these messages are prophetic and they indicate that the last era will be Laodicean probably right up to the tribulation. Yet Philadelphia is promised protection. This suggests that while the dominant characteristic of the era will remain Laodicean, at some point before the tribulation there will be a smaller group that is Philadelphian.

I don't see any indication in the Bible that the Laodicean condition will disappear, that the majority of Laodiceans will repent before the tribulation. I don't think the Laodicean condition is one that leads to unity and I don't think Christ will be gathering those He is vomiting out of His mouth. Most of those who are in this condition will repent IN the tribulation, and they will be regathered in the resurrection.

I do not think there will be unity between Philadelphia and Laodicea. There probably will not be unity even with the Laodiceans among themselves. But I think a regathering and reuniting of those God judges as not Laodicean, but Philadelphian, is possible and even probable.

I think there is time for many to repent, and God may reunite those, but I do not see how this could happen with the majority and still be consistent with the prophecy of the messages to the Churches.

I think some hope that God will empower one or more of His faithful leaders in the Church of God with the power to perform public miracles and great signs that will make it obvious whom God is working through, to reunite the Church before the tribulation and the special work of the two witnesses. He may well do that, especially to help empower the message of the Church of God and help the world know who is speaking the truth. But there are reasons why He may not. God may prefer to test members of the Church on our faithfulness to His Word, the Bible, apart from the evidence of miracles. God may not use miracles if this tends to point us to a human person more than to the Bible, and God may not use a method that would be so strong that it would tend to gather the Laodiceans with the Philadelphians. Rather, God may judge each of us individually and give discernment to and work out circumstances for those that believe and obey the Bible first, to gather them together to finish the work and go to a place of safety, while the Laodiceans remain scattered right up to the tribulation. We are being tested on our faith and obedience to God and His Word, the Bible, not in allegiance to a human who would work miracles. Even when we choose a human leader to support, it should be because that leader is faithful to the Bible and because of good fruits being shown in doing God's work, not because he is able to work miracles (Deuteronomy 13:1-3, Matthew 7:15-20). Nevertheless, it may be that God will give miracle-working power to a man in the Church, or to several people, as a way of getting public attention so we can get our message proclaimed more powerfully, but even if that happens, it will not ensure that the whole Church would be reunited around those that perform miracles. As one reader of this book pointed out to me, miracles do not convince those whose hearts are hardened, just as Pharaoh was not convinced by the miracles done at the hand of Moses, and the majority of Jews were not persuaded by the miracles of Jesus Christ. In any case, I don't think the Laodiceans will be persuaded to gather with the Philadelphians.

So I do not think we should wait for all scattered fellowships and brethren in the Church to be regathered before doing the Father's will (Matthew 24:14) and Christ's commission (Matthew 28:19-20) to preach the gospel to all nations. We should do it now and with zeal, while freedom of speech still exists in the democracies that allow us to do it. It may be that those who wait may not participate at all.

When David was fleeing from Saul, David was in a sense separated from the rest of Israel, yet when an opportunity came to defend Israel from the Philistines, which was God's "work" at that time, David did not follow the advice of his men who said, "Look, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" Rather, he sought God's will and attacked the Philistines (1 Samuel 23:1-5). I think there are parallels between fighting the Philistines, which was God's work in that day, with preaching the gospel to the world today. David's men questioned David's desire to fight the Philistines because they were fleeing from Saul, and this line of reasoning reminds me of those who say "the Church is divided, so this isn't the time to preach the gospel to the world." Yes, the Church is not setting a good example, but that is no reason to withhold information that the public needs to hear.

In the examples in the Bible and in history where there has been a scattering of God's people, whether of Israel, or Judah, or the early Church of God, I do not see a regathering of the entire group, but only a part of the original whole. Some things have to wait for the return of Christ.

I do not advocate preaching the gospel as a way to achieve unity. I do not think preaching the gospel, by itself, would achieve unity. It would take preaching the gospel to the world with zeal, studying, believing, and obeying the Bible with zeal, and drawing closer to God with zeal in order to please God, and when God is pleased with us He will give us whatever unity He desires at the right time. Unity is not always God's priority (Luke 12:51-53), and may not be His priority at this time. Our objective should not be unity among ourselves while we still have problems in our relationship with God. Our objective should be to believe and obey what God says in the Bible, and to do His will and finish His work (John 4:34-35).

We should seek to live the way of life that leads to unity with God, and then trust God to give us the unity with each other in a way and at a time that He sees fit.

Will Focusing Exclusively on Feeding the Flock Heal the Church?

Should the ministry now focus exclusively on feeding the flock in order to heal the Church, and not preach the gospel to the world until the Church is healed?

I have already tried to show that spending all resources to feed the flock and none to preach to the public will not heal the Church because it does not address the root cause of the scattering. It will never bring a healing. It is the wrong medicine. You can feed the flock with this "prescription" from now until the entire current generation in the Church of God passes away, and it will not effect a cure.

You cannot disregard a command of God, to preach the gospel to the world, and expect a good result from that. You cannot use human reasoning to say, "This isn't the time to preach the gospel to the world", when God has already commanded the Church to do so. We might as well stop keeping the Sabbath. If we are to reason around God's instructions regarding preaching the gospel to the world, why not do the same with the Sabbath? If we say, "Circumstances change, and we have to adapt, and this is not the time to preach to the public", why not say, "Circumstances change, and we have to adapt, and this is not the time to keep the Sabbath"? The same God commanded both.

We should not blame the problem on something we were doing that is right and then stop doing it. It was right to preach the gospel just as it is right to keep the Ten Commandments, because the same God that gave us the Ten Commandments also gave us the commission to preach the gospel to the world.

Feeding the flock only, without public preaching, is actually feeding the flock a faulty diet, one that is likely to make the flock more sick, not healthier. It is setting a bad example for the members, suggesting we can reason around God's commands. It also teaches an inward focus. It might not seem that way to some ministers. From a minister's point of view, his personal focus may be outward towards the flock. Individual members may have an outward focus towards helping other members, IF the opportunity is there to serve others in a small local congregation. But what is the Church as a body focused on? Helping itself? That is inward. From an organizational point of view, the focus of the Church would be inward. It is feeding itself only. This is important because we have a group identity. To the extent that members identify with the group, the organization, they are identifying with an entity that is only focused on helping itself, not reaching out to those outside the group. But outgoing love must be at all levels, not just the individual level, but at the group level also. The Church of God must have a focus outside of itself.

Look at the example God the Father and Jesus Christ set. God and the Word are two persons. You could say they are a group. Is that group focused inward or outward? Did God say, "My love for the Word comes first, I'm not going to sacrifice Him for a humanity that is my enemy"? No. They both focused outwardly. They did not focus just on each other, but they extended their focus to others outside the family of God, to the whole world, to even their enemies. God SACRIFICED His own Son for His enemies (Romans 5:6-8). That is an outward focus at the group level, an outgoing concern towards the unconverted we should emulate.

I have heard some offertory messages by those who apparently feel that this is not the time to preach to the public. In one example, the speaker seemed to be saying, not that by contributing you will help others, but by contributing you are investing in yourself. The emphasis can be on the benefit members will receive by giving. This may be an example of the "giving to get" philosophy. One can talk about how God will bless those who give. But if a Church of God fellowship is not preaching to the public, speakers in that group who give offertory messages on holy days might not appeal to the motive of love by showing how contributions will help the lives of others because that is not the organizational focus. The organizational focus is inward, benefiting the group only, not

others. The outward focus to help other human beings outside the group may be missing.

To be properly fed, the flock needs more than instruction in God's way of love. They need an opportunity to put it into practice to serve others. We learn by doing. In some situations, this opportunity may exist locally when a member finds a way he can help and serve another member, but that is not always the case for every person, especially in the scattered condition of the Church when many congregations are very small. It can easily be true that in an area where there are only a handful of members, there may not be anyone with a need that a particular member can help with. But preaching the gospel to the world is something everyone can participate in. Anyone with any money at all can make sacrifices on a daily basis, even giving up little things during the day, to be able to contribute a little more. Even if the total amount is small, it can represent a big sacrifice for someone, and God values that sacrifice and can multiply its effect to help others (Mark 12:41-44, John 6:5-13). Those who purchase less expensive clothes, or forgo purchasing a car and take a bus to work, or eat in restaurants less often, or live in a smaller apartment rather than a large home, in order to provide more to help get the message to those who need it, if the motivation is really to help others, are really practicing the give way of life and expressing love towards neighbor every moment of the day. When such a commitment and sacrifice affect the quality and variety of the food we eat, the home we live in, the clothes we wear, it affects us almost every waking moment of the day. How much time do we spend in our home? How often do we eat? That is why I say that making sacrifices in these areas in support of God's message to the world is a continuous expression of the principle of outgoing concern and directly involves every member every day. Also, any member, even if there happens to be no local members going through a trial needing prayers, can practice love by fervently praying for God to bless the preaching of the gospel to the world and to provide more laborers for the harvest, as Jesus instructs us to pray (Matthew 9:36-38, John 4:34-35).

And yet, because the supporting of the gospel by the members requires a measure of self-denial, but not a lot of time, it does not interfere with the need of the members to concentrate on Bible study, personal repentance, drawing closer to God, and overcoming.

I have heard the argument that preaching the gospel to the world was something that Mr. Armstrong did, but the members were not able to directly participate in and therefore had minimal involvement in. According to this view, members did not see themselves as important to the preaching of the gospel to the world. But to say or think that members are not important to the preaching of the gospel to the world is wrong not only for the reasons I mentioned above about the daily sacrifices that are needed to support the preaching of the gospel, but because of the importance of what the members did in comparison with what Mr. Armstrong did. Actually, except in personally meeting with world leaders or in conducting public lectures, Mr. Armstrong did not take the gospel to anyone outside the Church! Neither did the Church pastors. The members and coworkers and donors did with their tithes and offerings!

I think Mr. Armstrong was LESS directly involved in how far the gospel went, how many people it reached, than the average member. Mr. Armstrong didn't contribute a

dime to the preaching of the gospel. Neither generally did the other ministers who lived off of the contributions of the membership. All Mr. Armstrong did is speak, write, and manage. When a message is recorded, or something is written, the effort in producing it is the same whether it reaches 10 people or 10 million. Mr. Armstrong did the speaking and writing. He used his communications background to take what God reveals in the Bible and put it in plain language that could be understood by anybody. But it was the members who made it available to millions. Speaking and writing require talent, knowledge, training, and time, and Mr. Armstrong did that part. But sending the gospel to the public requires money, and that is the portion the members did. Mr. Armstrong structured the message. But without the membership, it would be useless because it would go no farther than the four walls of his office or studio. It was the members who took Mr. Armstrong's writings and spoken messages and brought that material to the public. Not Mr. Armstrong. The membership did that. And it went to the public only to the degree that members were willing to sacrifice. Sacrifice a little, and the gospel goes to a few. Sacrifice a lot, and the gospel goes to many. The difference in material prosperity and the physical "quality of life" the members enjoy between sacrificing or not can be measured in numbers of TV stations, the quality of the time-slots, and the magazine circulation figures. And giving up physical prosperity and the nicer physical things is something that can affect how we live every moment of our time. So members are directly involved in preaching the gospel to the world every moment of the day, if they want to be.

Also, the idea of not preaching to the world ignores the possibility, one that I think is very probable, that part of the sin included in the Laodicean condition of the Church was a lack of zeal and spirit of sacrifice for preaching the gospel to the world. Mr. Armstrong had zeal, but I think that as the Laodicean condition grew, the majority of the members did not share that same zeal for the gospel that Mr. Armstrong had. The Laodicean lukewarmness expressed itself in a lack of zeal for preaching the gospel just as much as a lack of zeal for prayer, Bible study, and obedience. If that is the case, not preaching to the world at this time is not going to solve anything.

If God has given the Church the responsibility to reach all Israel with the gospel and the warning, the Church so far has failed. If we have failed because of our lukewarm attitude towards our responsibilities to warn the public, then we need to repent of that just as we need to repent of our lukewarm attitude towards overcoming our other faults.

The Church's job is to preach the truth to the public, and the public's job is to respond to the message. Most members of the public who heard the message failed to respond, but also, most members of the public never heard the message because the Church has failed to deliver it to them. The failure of the Church may be greater than the failure of the public because, to whom much is given, much is required, and the Church has been given much (Luke 12:47-48).

I have heard an argument that we were preaching the gospel when the Church was spiritually deteriorating and becoming Laodicean and preaching the gospel did not prevent the deterioration. But we were also attending Sabbath services, the Feast of Tabernacles, reading church literature, tithing, etc. and those things did not prevent the deterioration either. So should we stop doing them? Should we stop doing what is right

because it didn't prevent the problem? We should not blame the problem on something we were doing that is right and then stop doing it. Rather we should look for where we have been wrong and repent.

I have heard it pointed out that preaching the gospel to the world can tend to develop a "crusade mentality" and that there is a danger that members may neglect their personal overcoming because they feel self-satisfied that they are okay with God because they are in a group that is preaching the gospel. I agree that this is a danger. I think that the Bible may in principle warn against this kind of thinking. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' " (Matthew 7:21-23). These people apparently cast out demons, preached to the public, and did works in Jesus' name, but also practiced lawlessness and did not make the effort to overcome their personal sins that God expected of them, and God rejects them. Paul also talks of those who do great works in God's name but without practicing love towards God and man: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). The Bible is also filled with examples of those who served God by doing God's work for a time, but were not in the end judged as faithful. Even Judas, one of the twelve apostles, preached the gospel to the world, healed the sick, and cast out demons, but that didn't save him (Mark 6:7-12, Matthew 27:3-5).

But there is also a danger that if the focus is only on overcoming, the motive can be selfish, not based on real love. One can seek to overcome his sins only so he can get eternal life, to get into God's Kingdom. He may be seeking the reward for himself alone. This can be the result of an inward focus of a group.

I would also like to point out that preaching the gospel to the world or supporting the preaching of the gospel to the world may be a key to personal overcoming, according to Revelation 12:11. "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." The "word of their testimony" can include preaching the gospel to the world.

Is it not selfish for the Church to use the knowledge that has been given to it to work to prepare itself only, but not share that knowledge with others in the world so they have the opportunity to prepare themselves also? Is that not like running out of a burning building to save our skin, but not doing anything to warn other residents of the building so they can get out also? Is that policy really going to help to heal the Church? Is God pleased with that kind of thinking?

Paul was so concerned for the welfare of his fellow countrymen, who were not converted, that he could be even more concerned for their welfare than his own personal

salvation! In Romans 9:1-5 he says, "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of *God*, and the promises; of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen."

We at least know what is coming, so if we fail to prepare ourselves, the suffering we go through will be our own fault, but these other people who never heard the truth are clueless. We received the warning. Shouldn't they receive it also?

I have mentioned this before, but God is a God of justice and there is a principle that whatever we sow that we will reap (Galatians 6:7). If God has given the Church knowledge and also given the Church the responsibility to share that knowledge with others, and we fail to do so, is it not possible that God may take that knowledge from us? Isn't it possible that by selfishly trying to keep God's truth for ourselves only, we could lose it? Satan deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9) and we would be deceived too unless God opened our minds and gave us understanding (John 6:44, Philippians 2:13, 1 Corinthians 2:9-12). All spiritual understanding that we have is a gift from God, and if we do not use it responsibly, God is able to take it away. There is nothing permanent about the spiritual knowledge and discernment we have in our minds. We can lose it and not even realize what we have lost, if we do not use it responsibly, to serve others (Matthew 25:14, Luke 13:6-9, Mark 4:21-25, Hebrews 6:4-7). God gives us the knowledge and discernment we need to do His work, and if anyone fails to do a job God gives them to do, God may take the job from him and give it to someone else, and along with the job goes the spiritual gifts required for the job (1 Samuel 16:13-14, Matthew 21:33-43).

It may be that this is one of the causes of God's judgment to allow false doctrine to enter the Church. It may be that a lack of sufficient zeal to make the necessary sacrifices to share the truth with the public on the part of the majority of the members of the Church was a cause of God's judgment to allow the Church to be scattered. It may be that some of those in the Church in the past did not really have zeal to sacrifice to support the work of preaching the gospel to the world, and because they were not doing what they could to share their knowledge with others, God took away their knowledge by allowing them to be deceived by the doctrinal changes. And if this is the case, the prescription of not preaching the gospel to the world, rather than being a medicine that will bring healing, is a poison that will make the Church sicker. A better medicine is to repent of our lack of zeal for helping the world and to be on fire to share the truth with others to help them.

Neglecting the work of preaching of the gospel to the world will not heal the Church.

I think there needs to be a balance, and we all need to be on guard to make sure what we do is motivated by outgoing concern for others. But if this love is there, I also think one will feel motivated to do what he or she can to help others outside the Church of God by sharing the truth with them, which they will need.

Some ministers may feel that they are not qualified to preach to the world, but only to feed the flock, or they may say that a minister can only concentrate on doing one thing well. But Christ did many things in His service towards His Father. Christ set us the example of both teaching His disciples (feeding the flock) and preaching to the public (speaking to the crowds). A worker can wear "many hats". Look at all the things Christ did: preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the crowds, teach His disciples, heal the sick, live a sinless life, and be killed with a torturous death. That is a lot. Did He ever say, I am only going to live a sinless life, but not preach the gospel because I can only concentrate on one thing? That would be silly.

Some might feel that only an apostle or one working under the authority of an apostle has the right to preach to the public. But according to Mr. Armstrong's autobiography, he was preaching to the public before he was even ordained as a minister, much less did he think of himself as an apostle. I never found anyplace in Mr. Armstrong's autobiography or any of his writings where he questioned if it would be presumptuous for him to preach to the public unless he knew he was an apostle. He saw that preaching to the public was commanded by Christ, he saw the need, he saw the opportunity, he saw his ability, and he did what needed to be done without regard to his title. In any case, men under Mr. Armstrong's authority, who were not apostles, also preached to the public in public lectures and by writing articles and booklets for the public. And if one feels that he needs to be under the authority of a living apostle before he can preach the gospel, all ministers of the Church today are directly under the authority of the chief apostle, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1-2, 1 Corinthians 11:3).

Nevertheless, some pastors, because of their limitations in experience, training, energy, and talents, may not be able to handle both feeding the flock and preaching the gospel to the world. If that is the case, that is where the principle of cooperation and teamwork with others applies. In principle, that was the process when we were all together. By pastoring local congregations, ministers freed Mr. Armstrong and a number of evangelists to write articles and books for the public and to prepare broadcasts to preach the gospel to the world. The same principle can be applied today even though we are not all together in one organization. If a pastor, who is independent from any large organization that is preaching to the world, feels he cannot handle both feeding the flock and preaching to the world at the same time, he can work out arrangements to share a portion of God's tithe for preaching the gospel with another Church or leading minister who is effectively preaching to the world, and he can teach his congregation to support and pray for the success of those efforts. That is better I think than belittling those who are trying to preach to the public in obedience to Christ the best they can.

Is the Church Commissioned to Preach the Gospel to the World?

Since I first published this book in March 2006, some have written to me expressing their belief that preaching the gospel to the world is not a command or commission for the Church of God. More than one person has indicated he thought only individuals specially authorized and sent by God to preach the gospel to the world should do so, and unless God commissions the man individually, anyone who preaches to the public is acting presumptuously and without authority. According to this view, Herbert W. Armstrong was sent by God to preach the gospel, but no one since then has been sent by God to do so. This viewpoint sees those Churches of God which are preaching a message to the public as competing entities, and believes that the competitive attitude of these organizations and their leaders shows that God has not sent any of them because God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Those who hold this view do not believe that Church of God members have a responsibility from God to support the effort to preach the gospel to the world or the Ezekiel warning to Israel.

Has God commissioned the Church of God to preach the gospel to the world, and are members obligated by that commission or by God's law to support the preaching of the gospel to the public?

Herbert W. Armstrong taught that the Church of God has a commission to preach the gospel to the world.

He taught that the great commission for God's Church today is described in the prophecy in Matthew 24:14, which says that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations (*The Plain Truth About Healing*, page 53). He taught that God has given His Church a dual responsibility, to go into all the world and proclaim the true gospel and to feed the flock. He taught that it was primarily the responsibility of the apostles and evangelists to do the preaching and the responsibility of the lay members to back up those apostles and evangelists with tithes, offerings, prayers, and encouragement, with the apostles, evangelists, ministry, and lay members acting as a team (*Mystery of the Ages*, pages 265-268). He also taught that one of the identifying signs of God's true Church is that it would be fulfilling Christ's commission of preaching the gospel to the world as a whole (*Mystery of the Ages*, page 249), and that the commission to preach to the world was for the Church (*Mystery of the Ages*, page 206).

Was Mr. Armstrong right in teaching that preaching the gospel to the world is a commission and a responsibility for the Church? What does the Bible say about this, and what does the Bible say about our responsibility to deliver the Ezekiel warning to Israel?

In this section I want to address this issue, in detail, from the Bible.

In discussing the preaching of the gospel, I include the Ezekiel warning to Israel as part of the gospel message. As I pointed out in the chapter on the gospel, in its broadest sense, the gospel includes the whole message of the Bible. The true gospel is the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and it includes everything about that kingdom. It includes the history of what God has done to prepare for the Kingdom of God. It includes the prophecies of events leading up to the Kingdom of God. It includes the law of God, which will be the way of life in the Kingdom of God, and it includes all biblical examples of blessings for obeying that law and penalties for breaking that law as examples for our instruction. This means that the Ezekiel warning is part of the true gospel. They go together.

The real issue here is, does the Church have a responsibility from God to preach God's truth to the public, or is this responsibility only given to specially called individuals from time to time and not to the Church of God as a team? Specifically, did the Church's responsibility to preach to the public end with the death of Mr. Armstrong or does it continue today?

There are actually two sets of scriptures that show that Church members and ministers should support the preaching of the gospel and the Ezekiel warning to the public. One is a direct commission for the Church of God, which I will show later. The other is a point or principle of God's law given in the Bible. I will show that this principle obligates the Church to preach the gospel to the world even in the absence of a specific commission to the Church. The commission for the Church only reinforces an obligation that is already there under God's law.

When God gives a command in the Bible, He expects us to strive to obey it in every circumstance. If the command or instruction is a general command, it automatically covers every specific case that falls within its boundaries, unless God clearly makes an exception for a specific case. For example, when God says, "You shall not steal", that includes every specific case that falls within its general boundaries. You cannot steal a gallon of milk from a store to feed your baby and say that is ok because God never gives a clear scripture that says, "you shall not steal milk to feed your baby"! The eighth commandment covers ALL stealing whatever the particulars.

Proverbs 24:11, says, "Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter." This is based on God's law of love which says to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 5:43-48, Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-31, Leviticus 19:18) and to do for others as we would wish others to do for us (Matthew 7:12). We should deliver those drawn towards death and stumbling towards the slaughter.

Is this world drawn towards death and stumbling towards the slaughter? I think anyone in the Church of God with spiritual discernment knows that it is. Christ said we should "watch" and He rebuked those who could read the signs of the weather but not the signs of the times they were living in, calling them *hypocrites* (Mark 13:37, Matthew 16:1-3). A Church of God member would have to be blind not to see that this world is headed towards disaster because of its sins.

Do not "deliver" and "hold back" mean warn and teach? There is no other way to deliver someone from going to disaster as a result of his or her sins but to warn and teach. You can't lock everyone in a room and *force* them to stop sinning. Teaching and warning is the only way.

Do some want to say that Proverbs 24:11 only applies to specific individuals God sends, not to the Church? If they do, then to be consistent they have to throw out the whole book of Proverbs as instruction to Church members, and then they might as well throw out the rest of the Bible as well. There is nothing in Proverbs 24:11 that indicates this is not a principle that should be obeyed by everyone.

There is nothing in the command of Proverbs 24:11 that says it is only for certain people and not for others. It is a part of God's instruction in His way of life, His law, and it applies to everyone. It is one of the ways we put into practice the great commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". When you see people headed for disaster, you try to help them by warning them just as you would want others to warn you.

Imagine you are driving on a sparsely traveled road at night and almost had an accident because you didn't see a stalled car in the middle of the road around a bend until it was almost too late. If you had flares in your trunk and knew you had an opportunity to maybe save someone's life by using the flares to warn other drivers, if you didn't do it because God didn't specially "authorize" you as an individual, would you not be violating the law of Proverbs 24:11? If you saw a fire that had just started in a building and knew there were people asleep inside, do you need a special "authorization" to warn them? Doesn't Proverbs 24:11 plus Jesus' statement that we are to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4) REQUIRE you to act on what you know and do something to help those people? The principle of Proverbs 24:11 applies in both of these cases.

This world is stumbling to the slaughter. We have the opportunity to warn. The Church of God has that opportunity. No one else can do it because no one else knows what we know. The two witnesses receive power to do their work at the beginning of the tribulation. By then it is too late. Only the Church can warn the people while there is time to heed the warning and escape. The Church sees this world stumbling to the slaughter and the Church has the opportunity to give a warning. Therefore Proverbs 24:11 applies. Nothing could be more clear.

Proverbs 24:11 is clear. The only way we can say that it doesn't apply to us in a certain way is if God in the Bible clearly authorizes an exception. In other words, the only valid biblical justification for saying that it does not apply to warning the world for Church members is if you can find a clear scripture that authorizes the exception. We have to warn based on Proverbs 24:11 unless God commands us NOT to warn in a particular case. If there are exceptions to Proverbs 24:11, it is God who must authorize the exception. Otherwise, Proverbs 24:11 is binding and in full force in every case.

In order for Proverbs 24:11 NOT to apply to the Church warning and teaching the public, there would have to be a clear scripture that only specific, authorized individuals

sent by God may preach the gospel to the world and all others are prohibited. If there were such a scripture, that scripture would override the general principle of Proverbs 24:11 in this case. But I have found none, rather, the commission to the Church reinforces Proverbs 24:11 and indicates specifically that the Church is to preach to the public.

Where is a scripture that shows that only specially authorized individuals may preach the true gospel, and others are forbidden? If there is such a scripture, then that particular case would be an exception given by God to Proverbs 24:11. But unless someone can prove that God requires that only individually authorized persons preach the gospel, then the law of Proverbs 24:11 stands, and it applies to everyone, and like any other law, to violate it is sin. Therefore, Proverbs 24:11 is a REQUIREMENT God places on everyone who knows the truth to do his or her part to warn a world stumbling towards disaster.

So even if there was no commission for the Church in the New Testament, this would not take the Church of God members off the hook about obeying Proverbs 24:11 by warning the world. To do that, you have to prove that Church of God members and ministers are PROHIBITED from teaching and warning the world unless individually authorized. Otherwise, the law of Proverbs is in full force in this circumstance. Proverbs 24:11 is a command from God that every member is obligated to obey when we see people headed for disaster and have the opportunity to help them avoid the danger, UNLESS PROHIBITED BY SOME OTHER COMMAND THAT TAKES PRECEDENT.

Only a command for Church members of equal force and clarity NOT to support the preaching of the gospel can override our obligation under Proverbs 24:11.

Some may quote Jeremiah 23:21, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" as a proof text that only those God sends should preach. Yet as I pointed out in the introduction to this book, if you read the next verse, "But if they had stood in My counsel, And had caused My people to hear My words, Then they would have turned them from their evil way And from the evil of their doings" (verse 22), it turns out that God is not just rebuking them for "running" when He didn't "send" them, but for *failing* to teach the people *God's words*. He isn't rebuking these false prophets for teaching a true message from God's word without authority. He is rebuking them for teaching a false message while claiming it is from God.

You may be familiar with the watchman God speaks of in Ezekiel, saying the blood of the people is on the watchman's head if he doesn't warn. Is this only for individuals God sends? If you look at Ezekiel 3:16-18 you might think so, but in Ezekiel 33:1-4 God speaks even of a watchman *not sent by Him* but a watchman nevertheless because he has been made a watchman by the people, saying the blood is on the watchman's head if he doesn't warn. God hasn't made him the watchman but he is still required to warn the people. Why? This is just an application of Proverbs 24:11. And even Proverbs 24:11 is based on the greater law that says "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27, Matthew 22:39, Leviticus 19:18). God requires the blood of the

people on the watchman's head, even a watchman whom God has not sent or made the watchman, not only because he has not fulfilled the responsibility the people placed on him, but also because the watchman has violated the principle of Proverbs 24:11. God is consistent. Proverbs 24:11 applies to everyone, sent by God or not. And we must obey it if we are to live by every word of God.

There is no scripture that prohibits the Church or any of its members from warning the world. Therefore, God does not authorize an exception to Proverbs 24:11 for warning the world. Proverbs 24:11 is therefore binding on the Church and all of its members. No other "authorization" to preach the gospel to the world is required. See also Isaiah 58:1.

But while I have found no command that prohibits those not specifically authorized from preaching to the public, I have found in the New Testament that there is a clear commission for the Church of God to preach the gospel to the world.

Jesus said to the apostles, "Go therefore 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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). There are two issues here. One, does "make disciples" mean preaching to the public? Two, is Christ commissioning the eleven disciples only, or through them the whole Church?

Some would say that making disciples means feeding the flock, not preaching to the world. But this cannot be right. "Make disciples" cannot refer to feeding the flock because Church members, the flock, are ALREADY disciples. In fact, even prospective members before baptism are disciples because the Bible called Christ's followers "disciples" even before they received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. "Make disciples" means to bring new members and prospective members into the flock. Once they are in the flock, they have already become disciples. This also cannot mean only waiting for prospective members to come to the Church through friends and family members. This is because the active word "go" shows that the commission was for those making disciples to actively go someplace to make those disciples. That the apostles understood that to "go" and "make disciples" means "preach the gospel" is proved by the history in Acts that shows that this is exactly what they did - they preached the gospel to the world.

The order given in Matthew 28:19-20 is "go" and "make disciples of all nations" (preach the gospel, you can't do it any other way), "baptize" (making them Church members), then "teaching them to observe all things" (feeding the flock). Feeding the flock is not "making disciples" because Church members are already disciples. You don't just wait for people to come to the Church either, because Jesus says, "go".

"Make disciples of all nations" is commanded along with the word "go". Together they are equivalent to preaching the gospel to the public. Matthew 10:7 says, "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand' ". This fits with Matthew 28:19. The "go" is to be accompanied with preaching to the public. It is not waiting for

teenagers in the Church to grow up and be baptized or for friends and relatives of Church members to express an interest in attending. That is not "going".

I have already quoted Matthew 10:7. If you read the whole passage in Matthew 10:5-15 and also verse 27, it is clear that Christ is commanding the preaching of the gospel to the public, not just feeding the flock.

And although some may not accept Mark 16:9-20 as being in the original inspired text, I will list Mark 16:15 for completeness as another possible scripture where Christ commands the preaching of the gospel to the public, not just feeding the flock.

There is also the evidence of what the apostles actually did as recorded in Acts. I won't take time to cover every scripture that applies, but if you read Acts you will find that the apostles did indeed preach to the public, not just to the Church, starting with Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5-40). This proves that they understood that the commission they received from Christ was to preach to the public, not just to the Church of God.

But some will say, "This was a commission for those apostles as individuals, not for the Church of God as a whole."

In the New Testament, when Christ commissions the preaching of the gospel, He is speaking to the apostles. But is He giving the apostles only the commission, just those individuals He is speaking to face-to-face, or is Christ giving the commission to the whole Church of God *through* the apostles? We cannot assume that the commission is only for those apostles as individuals because if Christ intended to commission the Church as a whole He would speak to the apostles in any case. This is because the apostles were to supervise the Church of God after Christ ascended into heaven, and the apostles and a few other disciples were to write the New Testament. If Christ has a commission for the Church of God as a whole, He would give it to the apostles and other disciples that were with Him so they in turn could teach the Church and record Christ's words in the New Testament. Christ would give the commission *to* the Church *through* the apostles. That is how hierarchical government works.

When Christ has a command or instruction for the Church, He delivers it to the apostles who in turn teach the Church. That is hierarchical government. Just because Christ delivers it to the apostles does not mean the instructions are for them only as individuals and not the Church.

There also has to be consistency in how we apply Christ's instructions. It would not be consistent to say that Christ's command to Peter to "feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17) is a commission to the ministry of the Church through the ages but Christ's command to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19) is a commission only for the first century apostles and Mr. Armstrong.

So how do we know when Christ speaks to the apostles and gives them the commission to preach the gospel to the world if He is speaking only to them as individuals or

through them to the Church? We have to look at the biblical evidence. And the evidence shows that the commission is for the Church, as I will show.

When Jesus speaks to His disciples, He sometimes means the whole Church of God. Matthew chapter 24 proves this. Christ speaks of events beyond the lifetimes of the disciples He is speaking to, yet all the while saying "you". This is proof that Christ can be speaking to those in the Church through the ages and not just the disciples physically present when He is speaking. See also the parallel account in Mark 13:5-31.

We see the same pattern in the messages to the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. For each church, Christ commands John to write to the "messenger" (sometimes translated "angel") of that church but the message is for all the people in those churches. It is delivered to each messenger or "angel" for each church, but it is for the membership too. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

And the evidence and strong pattern in the New Testament is that the commission and the authority for preaching the gospel to the public was for the Church as a whole.

Look at Matthew 28:16-20. I previously covered verse 19 where Christ gives the commission to go and make disciples. Whom is Christ speaking to, the eleven mentioned in verse 16 or the whole Church? It has to be the whole Church or else how could Christ say just to the eleven that He would be with them "to the end of the age"? They did not live to the end of the age. This is for the Church and was delivered to the apostles so they could teach it to the Church after Christ ascended to heaven and so it could be recorded in the New Testament as a permanent record for the Church.

In Matthew 10:5-42, Jesus speaks to the twelve apostles. He sent them out and commanded them (verse 5). Jesus gave a commission to preach the gospel saying, "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (verse 7). This commission is the main subject of the discourse from verse 5 through 42. See also verse 27. Now, is He instructing the twelve apostles only, or through them the whole Church of God through the ages until Christ returns? Although some of the instructions may be particular to those apostles, such as the instructions in verses 8 through 10, some cannot be, such as verse 23 speaking of Christ returning BEFORE they finish fleeing from one city to another in Israel. So this passage cannot be only for those apostles as individuals because Christ did not return to the earth in their lifetimes. It must be for the Church, given to the apostles to give to the Church. And even though there are details that may apply only at particular times, the whole passage covers the period from that moment that Christ spoke 2,000 years ago till "the Son of Man comes", which today is yet future. It covers the entire Church age and is therefore a general commission for the Church, and must have been delivered to the apostles for the Church of God as a whole through the ages.

There is also the evidence of the practices of the Church of God and the events recorded in the book of Acts. These tell us what the early Church's understanding of the commission was and if it was for the original apostles only or the whole Church.

It is clear that the apostles received a commission to preach the gospel. Did the apostles teach that commission to the Church? If it was a commission for the Church, then yes, they must have. And they would know one way or another. They were close to Christ, had many conversations with Him, and would know exactly the intent of His commands and instructions. They would know when He told them to preach the gospel if He was commissioning only them as individuals or delivering to them a general commission for the Church as a whole. And whatever their understanding was on this issue, that is what they taught the early Church. And we can see what the early Church understood by what they actually did and practiced as recorded in the book of Acts.

Read carefully Acts 8:1-4. The Church was scattered and preached the gospel everywhere. This says "church", not seventy, not apostles, not ministry, but "church". Look closely at Acts 8:1: "Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." It says "they" were scattered. Whom does "they" refer to? "The church". It was the CHURCH that was scattered. Now look at verse 4 of Acts 8: "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word". Who went everywhere "preaching the word"? "Those who were scattered". Who were those who were scattered? Verse 1 of Acts 8 already answered that. It was the Church that was scattered. So these verses clearly state that it was the Church that was scattered and preached the word everywhere. And there is no reason to believe that it was only the seventy among the Church members that Christ had sent out to preach (Luke 10:1). God could have inspired the writer of Acts to say that those who were scattered who were among the seventy Christ had sent out preached the gospel, but Acts 8:4 doesn't say that. God uses the word "church". The focus is on the Church, not just authorized individuals within the Church of God. See also Acts 11:19-21.

How did the Church know that they should preach the gospel after they were scattered? They must have learned it from the apostles and from those who were with Christ. This shows that the apostles understood the commission to preach the gospel to be a general commission for the Church of God, not just for them as individuals. And whatever the apostles taught about this would be correct because they were with Christ for three and a half years and would understand how He spoke. They were close to Him, and they would know if He had given them the commission to preach the gospel only for them as individuals or if He had delivered it to them for the Church.

Look at Acts 18:24-28. As far as I know, this is the first time Apollos is mentioned. He boldly spoke accurately the things of the Lord, but he only knew about the baptism of John. But he preached in the synagogue. Then Aquila and Priscilla explained the way of God more accurately, so his knowledge was limited before that time. Then He publicly preached that Jesus is the Christ. It is apparent that Christ did not appear to Him face-to-face and commission him to preach the gospel, nor did any of the apostles or the seventy delegate that to him, or he would have known more than the baptism of John and Aquila and Priscilla would not have had to explain the way of God to him more accurately. Yet he had started to preach and continued to preach in public. There is not one word showing that anyone gave him the authority to publicly preach the gospel, yet there is also not one word of rebuke towards him, rather the whole tone of

the passage is that he was doing a good work. Aquila and Priscilla didn't judge him as being presumptuous, nor did they rebuke him, but they helped him and accepted him. This is more evidence that the apostles and the entire Church understood that the commission delivered to the apostles to preach the gospel to the world was for the whole Church of God, not just the apostles as authorized individuals.

There is not one example I have found in the entire New Testament of anyone who preached the true gospel from a sincere motive being rebuked for preaching without authority. But I see examples of those who preached without any special authority and there is no rebuke of them from the Church, the apostles, or from God. The examples of those who preach even without individual authority are portrayed as positive, not negative.

I might also refer the reader to the account in Luke 9:49-50, where John told Christ someone was casting out demons in Christ's name but was not with them, that is, not with the disciples. While this refers to casting out demons, not preaching the gospel, the principle taught by Christ in this case is instructive. This man was not one of those Christ commissioned or he would have been with the disciples. He was not one of the twelve or one of the seventy. So he was not sent or authorized by Christ as an individual to do anything. Yet Christ does not indicate that the man did anything wrong at all. Rather, Christ says in the context of this man, "he who is not against us is on our side". This goes further than just saying, "don't stop him". Christ says that he is **ON OUR SIDE**. This man, who was casting out demons, but without being an "authorized individual", is said to be **ON CHRIST'S SIDE**. Not neutral. Not guilty of being presumptuous by taking upon himself authority not given to him. **ON CHRIST'S SIDE**. See also Mark 9:40.

I have found no evidence to suggest that Christ only commissioned individuals to preach the gospel to the public. Christ is certainly able to commission individuals to do certain jobs and He sometimes does that, such as when He commissioned Paul specifically to bring the gospel to the gentiles, but that does not override the overall commission to the Church but merely reinforces it.

The only conclusion based on what the Bible says is that the commission to preach the gospel to the world is a general commission for the Church of God, not just a commission for individually authorized apostles. Mr. Armstrong was correct in this. And this merely reinforces the Church's responsibility under Proverbs 24:11 to warn and teach a world that is headed towards disaster.

Just to clarify my position on the respective priorities of preaching to the world and feeding the flock, I do not say that preaching the gospel to the world necessarily has higher priority than feeding the flock. Feeding the flock is important too. They are both important and neither should be neglected. The reason I place so much emphasis in this book on preaching to the world is that there seems to be a significant number of ministers and brethren who feel that this is not important. But I know of no one who believes and teaches that the ministry should not feed the flock. If there was, I would write more about the importance of feeding the flock. We need to do both.

All I am against is the unbalanced approach of feeding the flock only and doing NOTHING or virtually nothing to preach to the world.

Also, in saying that the responsibility to preach God's message to the public is for the whole Church of God, I am not saying that every member has an obligation to preach personally to the public. The Church of God is a team, and there is a division of labor. The leadership and ministry have the primary responsibility for preaching directly to the public and the lay members have the responsibility for backing up the leadership and ministry with their prayers, financial support, and other means. Members can support the gospel even while they are learning to obey all the commandments and overcome. And even among the ministry there is a division of labor, and most pastors have a full-time job feeding the flock. But even in feeding the flock, local pastors can support the preaching of the gospel by teaching their members the importance of getting God's message out and by freeing the time of the evangelists so they can preach to the public. Headquarters speakers and writers can both feed the flock and preach the gospel to the world in a balanced way without neglecting either.

Some church members feel that God cannot be working through any of the main Church of God organizations because the leaders of these organizations are competing with each other, and God does not use competing individuals or organizations to do his work. These members often point out that God is not the author of confusion, and there certainly seems to be a lot of confusion among competing Church of God organizations.

God does not use competition to do His work. I agree with that. But God does use the Church which is made up of imperfect humans, and sometimes converted members do compete, because we have human nature and we still sin. But if anyone has a competitive self-serving attitude, it is the wrong spirit of competition that is sin, not the preaching of the gospel. I don't endorse anyone boasting in their accomplishments in a wrong way or having a competitive attitude towards others. But I do endorse preaching the gospel and I support those who do so, regardless of their human nature and weaknesses.

If a man boasts and competes with others, this does not disqualify him from preaching the gospel. Proverbs 24:11 does not say, "Hold back those stumbling to the slaughter, but only if you don't compete or boast". Boasting and competing might disqualify him from a greater reward or may bring correction from God, but that is no excuse not to preach the gospel.

I certainly do not justify competing Church of God organizations. But many of these organizations are so far off base in their doctrines I do not consider that the gospel they preach has much truth in it at all, or rather it is truth mixed with a lot of serious errors. They have so much heresy, some of them, that it seems that only a very few faithful groups are defending themselves and protecting their members from the heresies of many other groups, and this can look like the faithful groups are practicing "competition" when they are not.

I have heard or read the argument that God's priority for Christians is that we love one another in one-on-one interactions, and that Christ's admonition in His message to the

seven churches in Revelation is to overcome, not to preach the gospel. Is it true that "overcoming" does not include preaching the gospel in our time and circumstances today?

Overcoming means overcoming sin, which means practicing God's law, which is the law of love. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 gives a description of love.

Some may feel that the teaching in the Bible about practicing love towards others refers only to personal one-on-one interactions, not helping many people or helping others through an "impersonal" corporate entity such as a church organization. Those who feel this way may believe a Church of God member's only obligation to teach others is to be a light and personal example to those around him or her. It is only our personal example of living God's way of life and reflecting the character of Jesus Christ and our acts of service towards individuals we know that is important, according to this view.

But love is not limited to one-on-one interactions. Love includes outgoing concern for the welfare of many.

God so loved the WORLD that He gave His Son. That is more than just one-on-one. The watchman in Ezekiel 33:1-4 is not sent by God, but if he fails to warn Israel, their blood is on his head. He did not show love to his country to warn the people. He let them die. God says their blood is on his head. The principle of Proverbs 24:11 is not restricted to helping people only "one on one", that is, you can only help "deliver" or "hold back" one individual from stumbling to the slaughter. Proverbs 24:11 says "those", plural, who are drawn towards death and stumbling to the slaughter. Not the singular "he who is drawn towards death...". The plural "those" certainly applies to the people of the world. That is more than just one-on-one love towards one individual at a time. Our obligation to love others includes, if necessary, helping whole groups of people who need help or need a warning.

According to 1 Corinthians 13:4, love includes kindness. Read the book of Jonah. Was it not kindness towards Nineveh on God's part to send Jonah to warn Nineveh, even to force Jonah to warn them? And after Jonah warned Nineveh, they repented, and Jonah was not pleased that God didn't punish them. Then later God destroyed a plant and Jonah was angry about the plant. Then God said, "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left - and much livestock?" (Jonah 4:11). Wasn't it an act of kindness on God's part to make sure that Jonah warned Nineveh, the same kindness Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 13:4? Or is being kind to whole groups of people only God's prerogative, and people are only permitted to show kindness to one person at a time?

Is preaching the gospel to the world an act of kindness? Read Matthew 11:4-5 or Luke 7:22. Christ mentions the poor having the gospel preached to them in the same context as the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers being cleansed, the deaf hearing, and the dead raised to life. What do all these have in common? They are all acts of kindness. Mark 6:34 says, "And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He

began to teach them many things." This is just before he fed them with loaves and fishes and it says there were about five thousand men. Five thousand, maybe more if there were women and children, is not one-on-one. Yet Jesus showed compassion for them. Is He our example or not? And please notice how he showed compassion. He TAUGHT them. Here is a perfect example that shows that teaching the multitudes is an act of kindness. Then if it is an act of love and kindness on the part of Jesus Christ to teach the multitudes, and if Christ is our perfect example, then it is also love and kindness for us to teach the world the truth today.

Also, see 2 Chronicles 36:15 in which God said that He gave warnings out of a motive of compassion.

I don't object to every Church member working on being a light and working with others one-on-one to help them and bring them to the truth. I can understand that this method has advantages over having a corporate organization between the ones doing the helping and the ones receiving the help, because one-on-one is more personal. But it is wrong to condemn the corporate model as a way of preaching the gospel because it has certain advantages too, namely, the potential scope and effectiveness is enormous. I know that some people come into the Church through a personal contact. But God doesn't reach everyone that way. I had no personal contact. I found the Plain Truth magazine when I was working in the post office and I copied the address and wrote in for a subscription. I was eighteen. I had no contact with any friend or relative who was a member. It was the corporate entity that made contact with me through the impersonal vehicle of a magazine. But it worked. I learned the truth. And I am glad I did.

And today I can reach more people by contributing to a corporate organization than the number of people I even know personally.

To restrict preaching the gospel only through personal acquaintances leaves most Americans out in the cold because most Americans do not know any Church members. I do not want them left out and I am sure God does not want them left out.

Christ rebuked the Pharisees for not reading the signs of the times they were living in, calling them hypocrites (Matthew 16:1-3). We should use the spiritual discernment God gives us to see that this world is on the fast path to destruction and the end of this age is near. Israel and the world need a warning and the true gospel as never before. Love should motivate us to give that warning. And practicing love is what overcoming is all about.

Government in the Church

I am adding this section as a follow-up to the last section because I realize that in saying that the commission to preach the gospel is for the Church, I may be giving the

impression to some that I am against government in the Church and the authority of the ministry, and that I am advocating that each individual member feel free to preach the gospel to the public directly, even if contrary to the directions of the ordained ministry over him in the fellowship he attends. That is NOT what I am saying.

Nor am I trying to justify every lay member who may quit a Church of God organization for the purpose of making himself a minister without ordination and starting up a new church.

The Church of God must function as a well-organized team in order to have maximum effectiveness in fulfilling God's commission, and every team must have leadership. The head of the team is always Jesus Christ, and over Him is God the Father. Christ exercises administrative leadership over the work of the Church of preaching the gospel to the world and feeding the flock through top-down government in the Church, and this administrative authority works through the ministry to the members.

Under Christ may be one man who leads the whole Church, as when Mr. Armstrong was alive, or Christ may work through several men with each man responsible for a part of the Church of God or a part of the Work. Christ does not always work through one man at a time, but Christ uses top-down government in the Church. I have given this example elsewhere in this book, but in the first century Church, Christ worked through Peter in the administration of the work towards Israelites and through Paul in the administration of the work towards the gentiles. Christ worked through two men at the same time, Peter and Paul. In our time, Christ worked through one man, Herbert W. Armstrong, to raise up and supervise the Philadelphia era of the Church. But whether Christ uses one man or several, each man has administrative authority over the portion of the work under his control, and each man is governed by Christ directly, not by a board of directors.

The commands, instructions, and examples in the Bible support respect for authority and top-down government.

God ordained offices of authority, both in Old Testament Israel and in the Church, and gave certain ones authority to make binding decisions (1 Corinthians 12:18, Matthew 18:18, Hebrews 13:7 and 17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, Hebrews 5:4). Paul commanded Titus to appoint leaders (Titus 1:5). The Bible teaches respect for offices of authority and teaches that we should not speak evil of dignitaries (2 Peter 2:9-11, Jude 8-9). In the Old Testament, those who despised the authority of the priest were to be put to death (Deuteronomy 17:12). The Bible is full of examples of those who were punished for disrespect or rebellion towards those God had appointed to offices of authority (Numbers 16:1-35, Acts 5:1-11), or for presumptuously taking upon themselves roles that belonged only to others (1 Samuel 13:7-14, 2 Chronicles 26:16-21). David, a man after God's heart, set a positive example of respecting the office Saul had even while he had to flee from him (1 Samuel 24:1-15, 1 Samuel 26:7-24). Christ said that even though the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites and didn't practice what they preached, they sat in Moses' seat and that office needed to be respected (Matthew 23:1-3).

There are lessons God wants us to learn about submission to government, and God uses imperfect men in government to test how well we are learning those lessons. Members who are part of a Church of God organization should respect the office of the ministry and submit to that office, except when doing so brings them into conflict with God's law.

There is organization in the Church with a hierarchy of offices ordained by God. The general pattern is shown by the example given in Exodus 18:19-26 with Christ ruling Moses and Moses over leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, etc. In the New Testament, Christ, who is Himself an apostle (Hebrews 3:1-2), is the head of the Church, and under Christ are apostles, and under apostles are prophets, evangelists, pastors, etc. (Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 12:28). Not every rank is present on earth at all times in the history of the Church. There may be times when the Church does not have any men on earth who are apostles or prophets. But we always have at least one living apostle, and that is Christ, and He is also a prophet (Luke 24:19).

In the Church, the authority of the ministry has limits. Ministers do not have the authority to make you do something that is a sin. They cannot command you to break God's law, and if they do, their command has no authority behind it. They have no authority to command you to tell a lie. The principle of obeying God rather than man overrides in this case (Acts 5:29). They also do not have dominion over our faith (2 Corinthians 1:24). They cannot tell you what to believe - only God can do that. But they do have a teaching role and they can teach from the Bible and help you find answers in the Bible. It is also their job to teach by right example.

In the first century, the Bible was not complete or widely available to the public or to members of the Church, so the main word of God they had was the word of those God sent, such as Paul and the other apostles (1 Thessalonians 2:13). And so that they could know that the word of the apostles was from God, God gave the apostles the power to work signs and miracles as proof that the word they spoke was from God. But today we have the Bible as God's written word given directly to the members of the Church, and fulfilled prophecy is the proof of authenticity that it is of God. Faith includes believing what God says, and we believe what God says by believing the Bible. The requirement of faith is actually one of the three weightier matters of the law (Matthew 23:23). But our faith must be towards God, not the ministry. We must believe the Bible more than man, always, even if the man is a servant of God. Men make mistakes, God does not. Men can lie and sin, God does not. Our faith and trust must be in God the Father and Jesus Christ.

But God has ordained offices for the administration of the organized work of the Church, such as preaching the gospel to the world, teaching the flock, resolving disputes between brethren, making binding and loosening decisions, administering to the needs of the poor, etc.

And this authority includes the authority to make binding decisions about the teaching of the Church, in other words, doctrine. Not what you as an individual must believe. You must believe the Bible. But what the Church will TEACH. And members should respect those decisions.

I think some are confused on this matter of the ministry deciding doctrine.

We should all follow the Bible, both as individuals and as a Church. The ministry has the job of helping members find answers to questions in the Bible. But the ministry itself is responsible to God for believing, teaching, and obeying what the Bible says and they should prove what they teach from the Bible so that, when the members believe and practice doctrine, they are putting their faith in God's Word and not the ministry.

As a Church, we should all speak the same thing (1 Corinthians 1:10). God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). It would be very confusing if different ministers in the same Church of God organization were teaching different doctrines. It would be confusing if one article by one author in a magazine taught one thing and another article by a different author in the same magazine taught something different and criticized the first author's teaching. And it can be confusing and disheartening to members, especially new members, to hear an interesting, powerful, edifying sermon by their pastor, and then later overhear a contentious member contradicting what the pastor said and criticizing the sermon! That does not produce unity and harmony, and it is not God's way.

God has given the ministry the job of teaching. No man is perfect, so every minister will make mistakes, and that includes the highest ranking leaders in a Church of God organization. But God has not given the members the job of openly criticizing and reversing the teaching of the ministry in conversation with other members of that Church organization. That is not the job of the members. So we should not openly criticize the ministry of the congregation we attend in front of other members at Sabbath services or in restaurants or when we invite other members into our homes. It is not a matter of who is right and who is wrong. It is a matter of who has been appointed by God to the job of teacher, and who has not.

Yet that does not mean that we should automatically believe everything the ministry teaches. We must believe the Bible first, and if we are reading our Bibles regularly, since the ministry is human and makes human mistakes and each of us makes mistakes also, there will probably be times when we do not completely agree on every point. But there is a right way to handle that, and a wrong way. One of the lessons God wants us to learn is how to handle disagreements over doctrine the right way.

Suppose that in the Church of God fellowship you attend, you see one thing in the Bible but you hear the ministry teaching something else on a particular point of doctrine. How should you handle it? Or suppose you have discovered a new truth in the Bible that the Church you attend does not have. Or you discover an error in the Church's teaching.

You should not take it upon yourself to promote your discovery among the members of the church you attend in contradiction to the ordained ministry in that church. Instead, you can take it to the ministry itself. And if the ministry has an open mind, and if the Bible truly backs up your position, the change can be made by the ministry for the

whole Church. But you also should have an open mind so that if you made the mistake, you can let the ministry show you where you are wrong.

But sometimes neither will correct the other and even after discussion there will still be a difference of opinion. This can happen even among sincere people because we have different backgrounds and talents and because God does not give us all the same knowledge in every area. And I think that God probably tests our attitudes sometimes by giving understanding or withholding understanding with different people on different points of doctrine for the very purpose of testing our attitudes with each other.

So it is possible that a sincere minister and a sincere member may read the same scripture and draw different conclusions.

When that happens, the member should "put it on the shelf" so to speak, and wait till the answer comes, either because God shows the truth to whichever side is wrong, or when Christ returns and teaches us all things. As Paul wrote, in this age we only know things in part, not fully (1 Corinthians 13:9-12). So in the meantime, the member should believe the Bible but show respect to the office of the minister by not openly criticizing or contradicting what he teaches. This preserves unity, enables peace, and enables all the members of a fellowship to speak the same thing.

Is it hypocrisy to believe something different from the ministry and keep silent about it? Not at all. I am not suggesting that members, or ministers themselves for that matter, teach what they don't believe. But members can refrain from declaring their opinions about everything they think they know.

It is not wrong not to talk about something. Some things should be regarded as confidential.

This matter of not telling everything you think you know may be easier to understand in a different context, that of keeping confidential things confidential. Suppose you had a problem you wanted to discuss confidentially with a friend or a minister. You would expect that person to respect your wish that he not talk about your problem with other people. Likewise, there are times you may know something that you also know you should not be spreading around. Are you being a hypocrite because you are not talking about everything you know? Is it wrong if everything that goes through your mind does not come out of your mouth? Not at all.

God the Father and Jesus Christ are perfect examples of God's way of life, and they do not tell us everything at all times. When the disciples wanted to know when Christ would return, He told them it was not for them to know (Acts 1:6-7). God's law does not obligate us to answer every question. There are places in the Old Testament where God or the Angel of the Lord did not give His name (Genesis 32:29, Judges 13:17-18). Jesus did not answer every question that was asked of Him (Matthew 21:23-27, Mark 14:60-61, Luke 23:9, John 19:8). We can tactfully decline to discuss matters we do not want to discuss. That is not hypocrisy.

Certainly there are serious issues that may require we take a stand, such as occurs if a minister turns away from the law of God and the organization turns away from the truth and embraces heresy and turns to apostasy. But at that point, it is unlikely a member who is faithful to the truth would want to any longer attend with that organization. We are not to greet and welcome those who come to us bringing a false gospel and false doctrine (2 John 10-11). Christ said His sheep know His voice but will flee from the voice of strangers (John 10:1-11). When error becomes so serious and dominant in an organized fellowship that true Christians who attend are hearing the voice of strangers, not Christ, they will leave.

When error in a fellowship becomes so severe that a member perceives that the organization is pulling him away from God and harming his relationship with God, it is well time for that member to get out. And this point may be reached at different times with different members as an organization drifts (or races) into heresy because we all have different levels of knowledge, so we should not judge each other over WHEN we leave a group for our own spiritual protection.

Do the ministry and leadership of a faithful Church of God organization have authority to decide doctrine? If by "authority to decide doctrine" you mean the authority to decide what that organization will be teaching its members and the public, then yes, and members and ministers should refrain from openly contradicting that teaching and those decisions as long as they are with that group. But if by "authority to decide doctrine" you mean the authority over what each member believes in his or her own mind, the answer is no. Only God, through the Bible, has that authority. Any member who sees a contradiction between what the Church says and what the Bible says must make a choice. Believe God or believe the Church? We better believe God. That is what faith in God requires, and faith is one of the weightier matters of the law.

This is not a small thing.

What about a lay member doing an independent work of feeding the flock or preaching the gospel to the public? Does God's law permit that?

Is that member part of an organized fellowship led by an ordained ministry? And does that ministry approve or not approve of the lay member's efforts? Sometimes the leadership of an organization will approve and even encourage such a contribution from one of its members. I know of a lay member who publishes a blog at his own expense on matters concerning the Churches of God. This member has done research on doctrinal issues and has published articles in that blog and updates his blog with news about the Churches of God on a daily basis, and this blog is read by many people both in and out of the fellowship he attends. But he does it with the approval and encouragement of the top leadership in the fellowship he attends, and generally he does not contradict the teachings of the leadership over him. There is no conflict.

But what about a case where a lay member wants to publish or do a work that the ministry of the fellowship he attends does not allow? If the ministry does not want the lay member to teach or publish, then the lay member should submit to the authority of the ministry as long as he is a member of that fellowship. Decisions on teaching and

publishing are well within the scope of authority God has delegated to the ordained ministry, and members of a fellowship should stay within boundaries set by the leadership.

What about the case where a lay member, through no fault of his own, is not part of an organized fellowship and does not have an ordained ministry over him that he can go to for counsel and decisions? Suppose there is no fellowship that person can attend? In most cases, the best way such a member can contribute to the work of God, until he finds a fellowship he can attend, is to support with his prayers and financial contributions whatever part of the Church of God is doing God's work most faithfully and effectively. In other words, he can contribute as a co-worker to one of the established, organized fellowships led by an ordained ministry. But if that member feels he can contribute effectively to the commission of the Church by doing a separate work of teaching or publishing, and if after Bible study, prayer, and counsel where appropriate he is convicted in his own mind that it is God's will that he try to serve that way, I know of no principle or law in God's Word that rules against that. As I pointed out in the last section, there are no examples or instructions in the New Testament that rebuke or prohibit such a work. But always such a work should be open to opportunities to cooperate with the ordained ministry of the Church of God and not be disrespectful towards individuals. And of course, attitude and motivation are important, and actions motivated by vanity and self-seeking are subject to God's judgment.

And doing a work of publishing or teaching does not change a lay member into a minister.

I mentioned before that there should be unity in the Church of God. One might ask, why is there so much contention and hostility between different parts of the Church led by different men? Are these men true servants of God, or are they false ministers?

God is the judge, but I do not think most of these men are false ministers. Even true servants of God have human nature and make mistakes. The Bible shows that servants of God are not perfect. There were even differences between the first century apostles from time to time (Acts 15:36-41, Galatians 2:11-21).

Ideally, when we are in a time when God is working through more than one leader with each leader over a part of God's Church or work, as when God worked through Peter and Paul at the same time, each leader should respect and cooperate with the other leaders, as Paul and Peter respected and cooperated with each other overall (Galatians 2:7-9, 2 Peter 3:14-16). Every faithful leader of a Church of God organization should view the faithful leaders of other Church of God organizations as brothers and fellow workers, all working for the same master, Christ. That is the right pattern. And if men act like men, carnally, that doesn't change the pattern of what God teaches us in the Bible. Each man is accountable to Christ for his own mistakes.

Of course, not every leader of every Church of God group is necessarily faithful, even in major issues. It is easy for me to see why there is not cooperation between those who are faithful and those who are not.

I cannot always judge in every case whom God is working through or how faithful each leader is in an overall sense. I may see certain mistakes in doctrine or policy, but how can I judge another man and say that in an overall sense he is "false" in God's sight? All I can judge is who I can support based on the fruits I can see. And when making decisions about where to attend and who to support, I will base my decisions on who seems to be bearing the best fruit and is most effective in doing God's work.

I have heard of cases where a minister or even a lay member has quit an established Church of God fellowship for the purpose of raising up a new church group. Differences over doctrine or policy are usually a factor. Is this lawful in God's sight?

Sometimes a lay member will do this, and the group he is leaving will accuse him of rebellion for quitting where God is working and "appointing himself as a minister".

People leaving groups to form new groups has happened a lot in recent history of the Church, more often with ordained ministers, less often with lay members. From what I have been able to observe, the fruits of these people after separating to form new groups are generally not good. In many or most cases, there does seem to be a spirit of rebellion. But can there be exceptions?

A minister or lay member may be convinced in his mind that God is leading him to quit a group and form a new group. Could that be right? Could God lead a man to do this?

Fruits are an indication (Matthew 7:15-20), and for the majority of those cases the fruits seem to show that these acts of separating for the purpose of forming a new group are NOT of God and, although God allows it, He is not leading these men to quit and form new groups.

But not always.

Mr. Armstrong separated from Church of God Seventh Day, as he describes in his autobiography. He was not disfellowshipped when he started a radio broadcast independent of Church of God Seventh Day, nor did he quit fellowshiping with that Church. But he was employed by the Church and he refused further salary. In other words, he quit his paid position. Then he started a radio work separate from any work supervised by the Church of God Seventh Day leadership. Over time, the separation between the work that Mr. Armstrong led and the Church of God Seventh Day became complete.

During recent apostasy, many evangelists and pastors saw the need to separate from the group we were formerly in, and that perception was correct. They left at different times, some were fired and some quit, some started pastoring new congregations separate from any other minister and some joined with a pastor or evangelist who had started earlier, but one way or another they needed to get out, and they did.

I think the answer is that God is not limited to whom He may call to do a certain task or how and when He may call that person. If God makes His will known to a person that he should perform a certain act of service, it is not wrong. God is able to make His will

known through the Bible and through circumstances in a man's life as to what he should do. But to correctly understand God's will requires spiritual discernment that comes from Bible study and from the wisdom that comes from God's Spirit, and it also requires humility and faith before God will give that discernment. Which means that, if a man lacks humility, if his decisions are based on vanity and self-seeking, he will not have the spiritual discernment to make right decisions, and he is likely to be acting against God's will and law. And then he is responsible to God for his mistakes.

God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5). A vain and faithless man is likely to be deceiving himself when he thinks God is leading him to start a new group. But God will give discernment to a humble man of faith to know if God is calling him to a particular job or not, and he is not likely to deceive himself into practicing rebellion. His humility and the wisdom God gives in response to his humility will protect him from the error of thinking that God is leading him to start a new group if that isn't the case.

We must always be close to God and humble. If we are, we will not fool ourselves and we will not think that God is calling us to a task if He really is not. If God wants to call a humble person to a job, He has ways of making His will known so even a humble person will understand. But if we are filled with vanity, our vanity can lead us to misunderstand both scripture and circumstances and deceive ourselves into thinking God is calling us to a job when He is really not. And if we fall into that trap, we are responsible for our error because we should not have allowed vanity to rule us in the first place.

The bottom line is that if it God's calling, it is not rebellion, but if not, it is. And if a man thinks it is God's calling, but it is not, but he lacks the discernment because of a lack of humility or faith, he becomes responsible for his mistake because his decision was motivated by pride and vanity.

How can one know if God is showing him through circumstances that it is God's will that he fulfill a certain role, even by leaving a group to raise up a new work or start a new group? Look at the example of Mr. Armstrong. If you study his autobiography, you will see how God led him and showed him step by step through circumstances what God had in mind for him. Before Mr. Armstrong was ordained, God had shown him through abundant evidence and fruits that He was calling Mr. Armstrong into the ministry, and then God confirmed it by having him ordained. After that, God guided the circumstances and gave Mr. Armstrong the wisdom and discernment to know that he needed to start a new work independent of the Church of God Seventh Day leadership, and that was when Mr. Armstrong started a radio broadcast and the Plain Truth magazine. The evidence God gave to Mr. Armstrong was unusual and abundant and even included miracles. And the fruits of what God accomplished through Mr. Armstrong during the rest of his life confirms to us that this was of God and that God was using Mr. Armstrong in a special way. This evidence was as much if not more for him, that he himself would understand his own calling, as it was for anyone else.

So it is not always the sin of rebellion to leave a group and start a separate work (separate from the group you are leaving, not separate from God). It was not a sin of

rebellion for David to flee from Saul and become leader of a band of men (1 Samuel 19:10-12, 1 Samuel 22:1-2). It was not a sin for Jeroboam to become king over the ten tribes of Israel while Rehoboam was still king (1 Kings 11:26-39, 1 Kings 12:20-24), (though later, Jeroboam rebelled against God by leading Israel into idolatry - see 1 Kings 12:26-29, 1 Kings 13:33-34). It was not a sin of rebellion for Mr. Armstrong to separate from Church of God Seventh Day and raise up the Radio Church of God, which later was renamed Worldwide Church of God. It was not a sin of rebellion for Mr. Meredith to raise up Global Church of God after he was forcibly retired by the leadership of Worldwide Church of God.

But these seem to be the exceptions. Fruits seem to show that most who separate from a group for the purpose of forming a new group or to do a separate work are not being called by God to do so. And this is even more likely in the case of a lay member who separates to form a group. Though God led Mr. Armstrong through unusual circumstances to do the work of a minister before he was ordained, God confirmed his role and office with ordination BEFORE God separated him from Church of God Seventh Day.

The bottom line: If God is calling a man to a role, it is not rebellion for him to separate from a group if necessary to fulfill that role, but if God is not calling the man to that role, it may be rebellion. How can we know? We have to seek God in humility and faith, and trust Him to show us His will and protect us from self-deception. And if we figure wrong based on self-deception because of vanity and desire for self-importance, if our motives are wrong, we can be deceived into thinking God is calling us to a certain action when He is not, and we become responsible for mistakes we make motivated by vanity.

And in looking at recent history and what is still going on in the whole Church of God, in cases of a man separating from the group he is attending to start a new group, for every case that bears good fruit, showing that it is of God, there seems to be many more cases where the fruits are bad, showing it is not of God and therefore may be rebellion. The odds are not good for anyone planning to start a new group. In many cases, a minister or member pulls tithe-paying members out of a group that is effectively preaching the gospel, and then he starts up a new group that accomplishes much less, dollar for dollar, for every tithe dollar spent. Thus the work of preaching the gospel is hindered, not helped. God wants us to learn teamwork and He wants us to learn loyalty and respect towards offices He has ordained, and there are instructions and examples in the Bible about that. Learning to work together as a team is part of our preparation for God's Kingdom. I would advise extreme caution about quitting an organization that is led by top-down government and is doing God's work in order to start a new group. And in many cases, if there is a compelling reason for you to leave a group, there may be another group you can go to without starting your own.

Using my own case as an example, in case you are curious, due to circumstances not of my preference, I was not with any Church of God fellowship at the time I had to make a decision about whether to publish this book or not. There was no minister with authority over me to advise me or give me a decision. If I was in a Church of God organization, I don't think I would have published without the permission of my pastor.

And I was never disfellowshipped, nor did I quit a group for the purpose of being free to publish. My case was like those in the first century Church of God who were scattered (Acts 8:1-4). I was scattered in a sense, as many members are these days, without a place I could attend. And afterwards, when I saw the opportunity to write and publish this book and I thought it might help others, I considered the scriptures to see if there was any rebuke for lay members in the New Testament who preached to others without being ordained, and I found none. Even then, the decision to publish was not easy. And I have not tried to raise up a new Church of God fellowship, pull any members out of an existing Church to join with me, or accept any financial contributions from anyone. I am alone in this.

I would be very pleased if this book helps to motivate any Church of God members with zeal to get the gospel message out to a world that needs it and motivates them to increase their contributions to a faithful Church of God fellowship that is bearing good fruits and effectively preaching the true gospel to the world.

For more discussion of the issue of Church of God governance, see Chapter 8 - Government in the Church of God.

Summary

I do not think that devoting all resources to feeding the flock, even to the neglect of preaching the gospel to the world, is a solution to the scattered condition of the Church. At best, it is just trying to treat the symptom, not the cause of the problem. At worst, it will actually hurt the Church and lead the members farther away from God and the lessons He wants us to learn.

I think Laodiceanism began to grow in the Church of God well before the death of Mr. Armstrong. The cause of this Laodiceanism was not obedience to God's command to preach the gospel to the world, but rather I think that contributing causes of Laodiceanism may have been an attitude of judging other members, neglect of personal Bible study, and making an idol out of the Church and the ministry by putting our faith in the Church and the teaching of the ministry over and above faith in God and what He says in the Bible. I also do not rule out a lack of sufficient zeal for preaching the gospel to the world on the part of the majority of the membership as a contributing cause of Laodiceanism, or an effect of Laodiceanism that became a cause for God's judgment.

Once the Church had become Laodicean in God's eyes, God's judgment was to scatter the Church to test us and to ultimately correct us for our own good. God allowed individuals to gain control of the Worldwide Church of God who changed the doctrines that Mr. Armstrong taught us from the Bible.

The changes in doctrine led to a divided ministry, and the divided ministry resulted in a scattered membership.

Focusing exclusively now on teaching true doctrine to the Church will not heal the Church because it tries to treat the effect, not the cause, of the Laodiceanism that led to the scattering. To heal the Church, members and ministers must address the causes of Laodiceanism. False doctrine is not the cause of Laodiceanism because it came AFTER Laodiceanism, not before.

Preaching to the public is a command from God, and it is part of an overall program for the Church to build character in its members and to accomplish God's will in the earth. It is part of a balanced approach. As an organized body, we cannot just look inward, we have to look outward to share with others the truth we have been given just as those who preceded us sacrificed to share the truth they had so that we might have it. That pattern never changes. We accomplish nothing by going in an unbalanced direction of only serving ourselves by feeding ourselves. There is no indication in the Bible that you can do a better job of feeding the flock and building faith by not preaching to the public.

The solution is for each of us to renew our commitment to God, to focus more on Bible study and believing and obeying what God says in the Bible, to stop judging and evaluating other members in matters that are not our responsibility, and to learn to compare ourselves with Jesus Christ and His example and teachings rather than other church members. None of this excludes the preaching of the gospel to the world and the Ezekiel warning to Israel. Rather, as we learn to imitate the zeal of Jesus Christ for doing the Father's work, we will be more and more motivated to support preaching the truth to the public with zeal as never before.

Failing to preach the gospel to the world, or a weak zeal for doing so, may itself be an expression of Laodiceanism. We need to be more zealous for sharing the truth with the public, not less. A lukewarm attitude towards making sacrifices to preach the gospel may be one of the things the Church needs to repent of.

God has been testing us and giving us time to repent. I think that when God's time comes, He will gather together the few that have been learning the lessons He wants them to learn and will use those few to do and to finish a powerful work, and then will protect them during the tribulation.

CHAPTER 6 - OBTAINING GOD'S HELP -- PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH

Introduction

In order for a church to have maximum success in preaching the gospel, it must have the right gospel and it should understand the need. It should be motivated by love towards God and man, understanding that preaching the true gospel and the Ezekiel warning glorifies God's name, helps Israel understand their future trial and come to repentance, and helps to forward God's plan for mankind. Also, since it is God that blesses and empowers the work of preaching the gospel and the Ezekiel warning, any church that preaches the gospel must have God's help and blessing to be successful.

It is God who opens doors and opportunities. It is God who gives us the wisdom and resources to go through those open doors. Even though we may have the desire to preach the gospel to the world, without God's help our efforts will not go very far (John 15:5). It is only with God's help that we will succeed, and any church that seeks God's help should strive to make sure their ways are pleasing to Him.

The same principle is true for an individual member of the Church that wants to support the preaching of the gospel. Such a person should know what the true gospel and Ezekiel warning are, and such a person should be motivated by love. But even with an individual, God's help and blessing are needed for that individual member to be able to make the right decisions to be effective in supporting the gospel. At this time when the whole Church of God is scattered into a number of organizations, members who wish to support the efforts of a Church of God fellowship in preaching the gospel must choose which organization to support in order to be effective. God commands tithes and offerings, but the Bible does not tell us the name of the church to write on the check or the post office box number and city to write on the envelope. This is a choice individual members have a responsibility of making. It is a judgment call that must be made based on the principles in God's Word and based on available information about the Churches of God. To make such a judgment accurately and effectively requires spiritual discernment and wisdom. But this kind of discernment and wisdom must be a gift from God (James 1:5, 1 Corinthians 2:11). Also, individual members can contribute and support the gospel in various ways including financial contributions, fervent prayers, and in some cases volunteer work such as distributing mail-in cards or magazines to various outlets. But even this requires God's help and blessing to be successful. It is God who blesses us with financial prosperity so we can make

contributions. It is God who opens up opportunities. It is God who answers our prayers.

Without God's help, no individual or group can accomplish much in preaching the true gospel and the Ezekiel warning to Israel and the rest of the world. God says in Zechariah 4:6, "So he answered and said to me: 'This *is* the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts." In addition to the specific prophetic application this has to Zerubbabel, this also illustrates the principle that it is God that blesses and empowers His work. Jesus taught the same principle when He said "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Does God bless and empower everyone that tries to preach the truth? Revelation 3:7-8 says, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, *He who has the key of David*, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens': 'I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.' " See 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, 2 Corinthians 2:12, and Colossians 4:2-4 for the meaning of "open door". Christ does not make that same promise of an open door to Sardis or to Laodicea.

We can also look at recent Church history to see that God blessed and empowered the preaching of the gospel to the world much more during the Philadelphia era of the Church than so far during the Laodicea era.

If we want God's blessings and power so that we can more effectively preach the gospel, our works must be pleasing to Him.

Practicing What We Preach

It is part of God's way that those who teach should teach by example as well as word. Jesus not only taught by word, but by example, living a perfect life. Therefore, to make sure our ways are pleasing to God, we need to strive to practice what we teach others to do.

An application of this principle is that those who preach the gospel to the public should strive to practice what they preach. Whatever we ask our listening audience or magazine readership to do, we should be willing to strive to do the same things.

Anyone who reads through the gospel accounts can notice that Jesus' harshest criticism was directed towards the Pharisees because they did not do what they taught others to do. "Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For

they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers' " (Matthew 23:1-4).

This illustrates the principle that one must practice what he preaches. This principle is still valid today and applies to the Church and to individual members who want to support the preaching of the gospel. If our hearts are in doing the work of preaching the gospel to the world, we should also be striving to live godly lives and to live by every word of God. God can bless the work of the Church and answer the prayers of individual members for the preaching of the gospel when He sees that we are striving to be obedient to His word in every aspect of our lives, and when He sees we are doing the things we are teaching the members of public to do.

There are many obvious applications of this principle. We must be striving to overcome and to be obedient to the Ten Commandments. We must be striving to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We must be striving to learn to trust God and believe His promises. But there is one aspect of this that I have not heard much about, yet it may be one of the most vital points in the principle of practicing what we preach. And, indirectly, it has something to do with the Elijah question.

Significance of the Elijah Question

I have noticed on the Internet that a number of Church of God groups are concerned about the Elijah question. The question itself is fairly simply to state. "Was Herbert W. Armstrong the Elijah to come?" A number of groups say emphatically, "Yes". Not only do they say that Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah to come, several of them emphasize the importance of knowing and believing that he was the Elijah. I believe I heard one minister on an audio recording say that knowing that Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah to come is the most important thing for a Philadelphian to know. That is a heavy statement. I have also heard a leader of another group harshly criticize those who do not take a position one way or another. He seemed to feel they were "fence sitters" or cowards for not taking a definite position on this question. What struck me was that he raised his voice in anger when he spoke about this in a way that he did not do in any other part of his sermon. I got the impression he was more emotionally "charged up" about the Elijah issue than any other issue he talked about (his sermon was not about Elijah or about Mr. Armstrong). I think one minister has said that rejecting Mr. Armstrong's Elijah role was the cause for division in the Church. He didn't explain why several groups that accept Mr. Armstrong as the Elijah to come are themselves divided between themselves.

Why is this important, and what does the Bible say about the Elijah to come? And what does this have to do with the subject of practicing what we preach?

I will cover certain key scriptures about the Elijah to come, but this is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the subject. The reader can do his own study if he wants further detail. But I want to give an overview, then cover a particular point that I think is relevant.

Malachi 4:5-6 states: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." These are the last two verses of the Old Testament, and they show that God will send someone He calls "Elijah" before the Day of the Lord.

The angel Gabriel told Zacharias that John the Baptist would fulfill an Elijah role. "But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *"to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,"* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord' " (Luke 1:13-17).

When John the Baptist was fulfilling his ministry, the priests and Levites asked him if he was Elijah. "Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No' " (John 1:19-21). Verse 24 adds that the priests and Levites who questioned John were sent by the Pharisees.

Later Jesus spoke to the crowds about John the Baptist. "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:11-14).

Also, after the transfiguration, Jesus' disciples asked Him about Elijah. "Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.' And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist" (Matthew 17:9-13). See also Mark 9:9-13.

Since Jesus said that Elijah is yet to restore all things, we know there was to be a future fulfillment of the Elijah role after John the Baptist. Many believe, because of all the truths that Mr. Armstrong restored, that he was the Elijah to come. I think Mr.

Armstrong himself believed this and implied it in his speaking and writing, though I have not heard him directly state it.

Was Mr. Armstrong the Elijah to come and restore all things?

I think that he was. However, that is not the key question. I think the key question is, is it really vital that we know this one way or another? In other words, is it true, as one minister put it, that recognizing Mr. Armstrong as the Elijah is the most important thing for a Philadelphian to know?

Let's take another look at the verses that cover the Elijah to come with this question in mind.

Malachi 4 shows the importance of the Elijah to come. The work that Elijah does, the work God does in sending him, is vitally important, because unless Elijah turns the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, God would strike the earth with a curse. The Church has understood this curse to mean utter destruction. So what God does in sending Elijah, and the work that Elijah himself does, are both vitally important. But does this verse say that it is vitally important that God's people recognize that this man holds the title of the Elijah? Is there a special command here to follow the Elijah? Is there any emphasis on the importance of recognizing him as the Elijah? If there is, I don't see it. Where is the emphasis in the Old Testament? Compare these two verses with the other things emphasized in the Old Testament, such as fearing God, obeying every commandment of God, putting our trust in God, not following other gods, keeping the Sabbath, being faithful in tithes and offerings, blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, etc.

Is there any emphasis in the New Testament on recognizing the Elijah to come? Is there any instruction or commandment from Christ or the apostles to the Church regarding this issue, either on the importance of recognizing and obeying the Elijah, or instructions in how to recognize him when he comes?

Let's look at the four occasions when the subject of Elijah came up in the gospel accounts:

1. The angel Gabriel told Zacharias that John would come in the spirit and power of Elijah. This specifically refers to John, not Mr. Armstrong. In any case, although this information was revealed to Zacharias and to us, it did not seem that recognition that John fulfilled that role was essential for John's ministry. The fact that the Jews asked John about it and John denied that he was the Elijah shows that the Jews and the people John preached to did not recognize him as Elijah, yet that did not prevent John the Baptist from being 100 percent successful in his mission. He got the job done whether anyone knew he was the

Elijah or not. He succeeded in preparing the way for the Lord at His first coming. (Luke 1:5-20).

2. The priests and Levites sent by the Pharisees asked John if he was Elijah and John said he was not. I do not know if John himself did not recognize that he was fulfilling that role, because of his humility perhaps, or if John was thinking in terms of the yet future Elijah in our time to restore all things. He must have at least known that he was one that would come in the spirit and power of Elijah because his father Zacharias must have told him what Gabriel said. In any case, I want to point something else out. Who raised the subject? Who was concerned about it? It wasn't John. It wasn't the crowds. It wasn't even John's disciples and those who repented and were baptized at his teaching. It was the Pharisees or the priests and Levites. It was the ruling authorities, the religious leaders of the day, who were concerned about what title John held. (John 1:19-28).
3. In the account of the occasion when John sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He was the Messiah to come, afterwards Jesus spoke to the crowds and said that John was the Elijah. But there is no mention here of a future Elijah to come in our time. (Luke 7:18-28, Matthew 11:2-15, especially verses 14-15).
4. After the transfiguration, when Jesus' disciples asked Him about Elijah to come, Jesus said that Elijah will come and will, future tense, restore all things. Then He affirmed again that John was a fulfillment of Elijah. So here we have a clear indication that there is yet another fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy after John the Baptist, before the Day of the Lord, in our time. Yet even here, who raised the subject? Did Jesus teach this to His disciples because of its importance? No. His disciples asked the question and Jesus answered their question. Why were the disciples curious? They heard the scribes say that Elijah must come first. Again, it was the religious authorities, the scribes and Pharisees, that seemed the most concerned about the issue. (Matthew 17:9-13, Mark 9:7-13).

Where is the emphasis in the New Testament on recognizing who the Elijah is and following him? The only time Jesus spoke about a future fulfillment of the Elijah role after John the Baptist was when His disciples asked him about the teachings of the scribes. Jesus didn't bring the subject up. He didn't talk about it in the sermon on the

mount or the Olivet prophecy or any of his parables or teachings to His disciples, except to answer that one question. If this is so vital to the Church today, wouldn't God place more emphasis on it in the Bible? Mr. Armstrong himself said he thought the Bible was primarily written for the Philadelphia era of the Church. Until the printing press, the Bible was never widely available as it is in our day. During most of the first century, it was not even complete. The Bible is for us today, and if recognizing the identity of the Elijah in our time is of such vital importance for God's people, I would think that God would teach us the importance of doing so and give us instructions for recognizing who it is.

I don't find the Elijah to come mentioned by name in Acts, or any of the epistles, or in Revelation. Even in the messages to the seven churches, even in the messages to Philadelphia and Laodicea, Christ says nothing about the Elijah to come. How can recognizing who holds the title of "the Elijah" be the most important thing for a Philadelphian to know?

The impression is clear that the Elijah issue was more important to the priests, Levites, scribes, and Pharisees than it was to Jesus Christ or John the Baptist.

Let's look at this from a practical point of view. Did the work God did through Mr. Armstrong ever depend for its success on whether or not Mr. Armstrong's readers and listeners knew he fulfilled the role of Elijah as described in the last two verses of Malachi and as described by Jesus' answer to his disciples question? Obviously not. Mr. Armstrong's work of restoring truth to the Church of God and the raising up of the Philadelphia era of the Church was well under way and going strong long before even Mr. Armstrong thought of himself as a possible fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy.

Mr. Armstrong believed God's word and God opened his mind to understand the Bible, and as Mr. Armstrong learned new truths he powerfully preached those truths to the public over radio and in print. Those God was calling listened, checked up in the Bible, and believed God's word, and God added them to the Church. They became members of the Church of God during the Philadelphia era of the Church, and they in turn sacrificed to support the preaching of the truth to others who had not heard it yet. The Philadelphia era of the Church was growing and doing a powerful work BEFORE anyone thought of Mr. Armstrong as the Elijah. Mr. Armstrong himself was a true Philadelphian and a leader of the Philadelphian era of the Church for many years without knowing the identity of the Elijah to come. So how can this be the most important truth a Philadelphian can know?

Yet with some in the Church, it seems like an important issue today. Why? And what does this have to do with practicing what we preach when we preach the gospel to the world?

The idea that it is vitally important that we recognize that Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah to restore all things does not stand in isolation. It is part of much bigger issue. That issue is, can the Church of God lawfully change any of Mr. Armstrong's doctrines?

Changing Doctrine

Those who emphasize that Herbert W. Armstrong was the Elijah to come usually use this doctrine to support their position that the Church of God and its ministers and evangelists should never change any doctrine or policy that Mr. Armstrong held and taught at the time of his death. Actually, not everyone who says we should not change Mr. Armstrong's doctrines actually practices this in every detail. Some who teach that we should not change Mr. Armstrong's doctrines sometimes make exceptions to this rule. They might say that their change is not really a change because they are only changing policy or a judgment or a prophetic interpretation based on new information about current events, or that it is okay to change minor points of doctrines but not major ones. But that is beside the point.

Those who teach that we should not change Mr. Armstrong's doctrines reason that since Mr. Armstrong was prophesied to restore all things, his doctrines were 100% accurate by the time of his death. Sometimes their position that we should not change doctrine is also supported by the view that only an apostle can change or add doctrine in the Church of God, and since Mr. Armstrong was an apostle but we have no living apostle today, there is no one who is authorized to change doctrine or introduce new doctrine.

I think there are a number of flaws in this reasoning.

Actually, this is one of the most vital issues facing the Church of God, its leadership, and individual members. It not only involves preaching the gospel, but faith itself. The real issue is, what do we believe? Not only what do we believe, but WHY do we believe what we believe? Ultimately, it also comes down to, WHO do we believe?

Mr. Armstrong said, after completing *Mystery of the Ages*, that he thought it may be the most important book written since the Bible. Many in the Church of God today consider it to be a vital book. I have even heard or read that some teach that members of the Church should be "grounded" in *Mystery of the Ages*.

There is no doubt in my mind that *Mystery of the Ages* is one of Mr. Armstrong's most important books. It is an excellent summary of the truth of God. I think it is the most important book in terms of being a summary of the body of teachings that God restored through Mr. Armstrong. But hearing others talk about its importance made me think about Mr. Armstrong's other books. How would I rate their relative importance compared with each other?

I have often thought that for a brand new person first coming into contact with the truth of God, the most important book for that person to read, especially if that person is living in an English speaking country, is *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*, the larger edition published around 1969 or later (about 200 pages). This

book is not just about prophecy. It gives a person a foundation in the law of God including the Sabbath, and shows why God will soon put Israel through the tribulation. Anyone who reads this book, whether they come into the Church or not, has received the Ezekiel warning and a good portion of the gospel. But more than that, I think this book does a better job of proving the authenticity of the Bible than any other book published in Mr. Armstrong's lifetime.

How important is it that prospective members prove that the Bible is God's word? I think the question almost answers itself. In the Church of God, the Bible should be the foundation for everything we believe. We must know it is God's word. The prophecies about the lost tribes of Israel, especially the tribes of Joseph, when compared with history, enable one to objectively and logically prove that the Bible is indeed inspired by a creator God that is able to know the future in advance. Once a person knows that the Bible is God speaking, that person can then make the decision to believe what God says, to believe that God is telling the truth, to trust His word, and to obey what God commands in the Bible.

For a member already in the Church, *Mystery of the Ages* is certainly very valuable for a review of basic doctrines, but I think a book that is even more valuable, especially in the condition the Church of God is in now, is Mr. Armstrong's autobiography volume one and the first half of volume two (up to and not including the letters). Mr. Armstrong covers some important points of faith, trusting God, and Christian living in his autobiography that are not covered as well in any of his other books, including *Mystery of the Ages*. For example, there are lessons we can learn from his autobiography that can help us to understand whether or not Mr. Armstrong's doctrines can be changed. God was able to use Mr. Armstrong in a powerful way, but God was only able to use Mr. Armstrong because of what Mr. Armstrong was willing to do. It was a way of thinking and acting that made Mr. Armstrong a tool in God's hands that He could use to preach the gospel powerfully and to raise up and supervise the Philadelphia era of God's Church. No doubt God worked with Mr. Armstrong both before and after his conversion to prepare him for the work he was to do. In the autobiography are the lessons of the examples of Mr. Armstrong's thinking and behavior that enabled God to use him, and we can learn from them.

A Lesson from the Autobiography

After Mr. Armstrong was converted, he found himself looking for the one true Church Jesus Christ founded. He knew that it would be a Sabbath keeping Church that had the name "Church of God". At that time, he was considering a small Church called Church of God Seventh Day. Here are some excerpts from the autobiography. As you read the following, keep in mind the parallel between Mr. Armstrong searching for the true Church of God and a member searching for a Church of God that God is working through today:

"The only Church I had so far found which 'kept the commandments of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ,' and at the same time bore the NAME of the original true Church, was this almost unknown little Church of God with its small publishing house in Stanberry, Missouri.

"But this left me quite confused. For this was a *little* Church, especially compared to the Roman Catholic, the Methodist, the Baptist, the Presbyterian, the Lutheran, or other large churches numbering millions of members. Then I saw where Jesus called His Church the 'little flock.'

"But still I was not completely satisfied. I was deeply concerned. I prayed a great deal over it. For here was a church, which, compared to the large-scale activities of the Catholic and big Protestant bodies, was ineffective. I could see that it was imperfect. It wielded no great power. Jesus had said: 'ALL POWER is given unto me, in heaven and earth' (Matt. 28:18). I read how Jesus Christ was to be *IN* His Church! He guides it! He directs it! He EMPOWERS it! He said His Church was to RECEIVE POWER (Acts 1:8).

"No person is even a member of the true Church unless he has received, and is filled and led by, the Holy Spirit -- and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of POWER! This little church seemed to be powerless -- comparatively impotent! I failed to see where it was bearing much if any fruit! Could a fruitless church be the ONE AND ONLY true Church of GOD on earth?

"I was deeply perplexed. Here was a little church, with scattered members probably numbering less than 2,000 -- mostly in rural areas. Apparently, as nearly as I could learn, it had only a very limited number of local churches, none as large as 100 members. As I began to come in contact with some of its leaders, they seemed to be men of little education -- no college degrees -- its ministry could hardly be described as an educated ministry. Their preaching had a certain fire, yet seemed totally to lack the POWER that attracts sizable audiences, that *moves* people, *stirs* hearts, and changes lives. I could see no visible results.

"Could *this* be God's one and only true Church on earth? The very question seemed preposterous!

"....But, Where Else?

"And yet--

"Yes, and yet, small, powerless, resultless, impotent though it appeared to be, here was a church with the right name, 'keeping the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ,' and *closer*, in its doctrines and teachings, to what God had been opening my eyes to see plainly in His Word than any other church of which I knew! Small and impotent though it appeared, *it had more Bible TRUTH than any church I could find!*

"At this time, God was opening my understanding to *some* Biblical TRUTHS which this church did not accept; and also to some errors, even though minor, which it *did*

embrace. Plainly, it was *not perfect*. It merely appeared to be more nearly so, and less imperfect, in its beliefs and practice, than any other.

"COULD such a church -- imperfect, fruitless, feeble, lacking in any sizable accomplishment, be the TRUE Church of God? Could *this* be Christ's INSTRUMENT through whom He worked, in carrying on GOD'S WORK on earth? Jesus said, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' Its fruits were not evil -- it simply did not seem to produce fruit!

"I was bewildered. I was unable to come to the answer then -- or until many years later. The real answer to this perplexing question will come out in this Autobiography later, at the account of the time when I myself found the true answer. I will state here, however, that I did learn later that it was merely the remnant of a church that had been more alive many years before." -- pages 356-358.

Mr. Armstrong later believed and taught that the Church of God Seventh Day was part of the Sardis era of the Church, which Christ describes in Revelation as having a name that they are alive, but in fact are dead.

Mr. Armstrong decided to TEST this Church to try to determine if it was indeed the one true Church that Jesus Christ built. I find this interesting, especially when I try to imagine the reaction of ministers if a member tries to do today what Mr. Armstrong did then.

Imagine that a lay member of the Church of God today wants to prove if a particular Church of God organization is really a church God is working in and if the leadership is really following God. This lay member wants to find a place to attend and send his tithes and offerings to. Or maybe the member already attends a church and wants to know if he should stay or look elsewhere. He wants to know, does this group really follow and obey God? He finds truth in the Bible that this group does not have. So he performs an experiment to TEST this church. He writes up a couple of doctrinal study papers that teach from the Bible doctrines different from the beliefs of this organization. One of them is a correction to their existing doctrine. Another is a "new truth" they don't have. The lay member reasons, if they accept the truth of my papers, this shows they are willing to obey God, but if they don't accept my conclusions and cannot show from Scripture that I am wrong, then they are not fully following God. What would be the reaction of the typical minister or evangelist to this lay member's thinking? Would he say that the member was being presumptuous for testing or judging the Church? Would he say that God always corrects from the top down? Would he say that the member was vain in thinking he knew more than the Church? Would he say that we need to recognize that Christ is the head of the Church and to believe the teachings of the Church in faith that Christ is leading the Church? Would he say that Christ would never put new doctrine into the Church by revealing it to a lay member because that would be destructive to God's own hierarchical government in the Church? I have heard ministers say these things or similar things in various words in reaction to members who submit suggestions, questions, feedback, or study papers to their pastor or to headquarters of their church.

Could or would God ever introduce new truth to the Church of God or correct errors in church doctrine through an ordinary lay member? Could Jesus Christ take an ordinary lay member, not an apostle, not a minister, not even a deacon, not even a long-time member but a recently baptized "babe-in-Christ", and then open that person's mind as he reads the Bible to understand brand new knowledge from the Bible that the Church doesn't have, even a major new doctrine or a correction to existing doctrine where the Church is wrong? And then, is it possible that Christ might use that lay member to correct or test the Church's leadership by letting him submit the doctrinal correction to the headquarters of that Church? And if headquarters rejects the new doctrine but not on biblical grounds, might Jesus Christ reject that church leadership from doing a powerful work and instead take the lay member and use that person and develop him to teach new doctrine to the Church and to eventually do a powerful work?

God has already done exactly that!

Let's continue the story in Mr. Armstrong's autobiography:

"Early in this three-and-a-half-year period, between 1927 and 1930, I decided to try a dual test to help settle the question of whether this was, in actual fact, the true Church of God.

"The Church is merely the sum total of its members. By the one Spirit of God we are each baptized, or *put into*, the true Church (I Corinthians 12:13). Jesus promised that when we receive the Holy Spirit, His Spirit shall guide us into ALL TRUTH -- not merely part of it (John 16:13).

"But no person can receive ALL truth instantaneously. The human mind receives knowledge gradually. The child of God must GROW in the knowledge of our Lord (II Peter 3:18). Also he must have the spirit of REPENTANCE, always ready and willing to acknowledge error and to turn from it. The Scriptures are profitable for REPROOF and CORRECTION, as well as INSTRUCTION in knowledge new to us. And God CORRECTS every son He loves (Heb. 12:6).

"Now it was a simple truism that if each individual member of the Church must be GROWING in the knowledge of God, constantly OVERCOMING, being corrected, and eliminating error, then all the members *together*, which form the CHURCH, must also be constantly willing to confess error and eliminate it, and to accept that which is 'new light' from God's Word to the Church.

"I knew of no church or sect or denomination that had ever publicly confessed error or embraced new truth. Yet, plainly, this would be a *test* of the true Church.

"So, as the first step in this test, I wrote up an exposition of some 16 typewritten pages proving clearly, plainly, and beyond contradiction that a certain minor point of doctrine proclaimed by this church, based on an erroneous interpretation of a certain verse of Scripture, was in error. This was mailed to the Stanberry, Missouri, headquarters to see whether their leaders would confess error and change.

"The answer came back from their head man, editor of their paper and president of their 'General Conference.' He was forced to admit, in plain words, that their teaching on this point was false and in error. But, he explained, he feared that if any attempt was made to correct this false doctrine and publicly confess the truth, many of their members, especially those of older standing and heavy tithe payers, would be unable to accept it. He feared they would lose confidence in the Church if they found it had been in error on any point. He said he feared many would withdraw their financial support, and it might divide the Church. And therefore he felt the Church could do nothing but continue to teach and preach this doctrine *which he admitted in writing to be false*.

"Naturally, this shook my confidence considerably. This church leader, if not the church itself, was looking to *people* as the SOURCE of belief, instead of to God! Yet, here was the *only* Church holding to the one greatest basic truth of the Commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, kept in the NAME of God, and in spite of this and a few other erroneous teachings, nevertheless being *closer* to the whole truth than any church I had found.

"If *this* was not the true Church of God, *then where was it?*

"The Second Test

"A little later I tried the second test. After exhaustive study and research, I had found it PROVED that the so-called 'Lost Ten Tribes' of Israel had migrated to western Europe, the British Isles, and later the United States -- that the British were the descendants of Ephraim, younger son of Joseph, and the United States modern-day Manasseh, elder son of Joseph -- and that we possessed the national wealth and resources of the Birthright which God had promised to Abraham through Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.

"This truth was written in a lengthy manuscript of close to 300 typed pages, and mailed to this editor and leader of this church. I explained that although this new truth seemed to be proved beyond doubt, yet I was still comparatively new in Christ and Scriptural knowledge, and wished the judgment of one more mature and experienced in things Biblical.

"I think it was some six months before the reply came. It was written on a train late at night. This church leader stated in his letter (which I still have) that *I was most certainly right* -- that this was a wonderful new truth revealed by God, and that God surely had a special reason for revealing this new truth to me. However, he stated he did not know what use, if any, he could make of it at that time, but was sure I would hear more of it later.

"Did this Church accept and proclaim this vital new truth -- the KEY that unlocks the doors to all PROPHECY? Here was the KEY to understanding of one third of the whole Bible. But this Church refused then to accept it or preach it or publish it though their leader frankly confessed it was TRUTH and a revelation from GOD!" -- pages 359-362.

These quotes are from the edition of Mr. Armstrong's autobiography that was published in a two-volume set after his death.

I have recently heard one minister in one of the major organizations in the Church say that maybe God doesn't want doctrinal changes now because what the members need now is stability. I am reminded of this when I read the paragraph in Mr. Armstrong's autobiography where he says that the president of the general conference of the Church of God Seventh Day did not want to admit error because he was afraid some members might lose confidence in the Church if they found it had been in error. The leadership of the Church looked to the effect on the members rather than to the Bible to decide whether or not to make a doctrinal change.

According to the sequence of events as Mr. Armstrong relates them in the autobiography, he was not an apostle when these events occurred. He was not even ordained as a minister yet. He was a lay member when he submitted doctrinal changes to the leadership of the Church of God Seventh Day.

Consider what has happened.

God used a member of the Church to bring the truth about the Sabbath day to Loma Armstrong. Mrs. Armstrong accepted this truth, even though it was different from her traditions. She believed the Bible over her traditions. In a way, this was a test for her. But she passed the test. God then tested Mr. Armstrong. Mrs. Armstrong brought this new truth to her husband. He did NOT want to accept it. Mr. Armstrong was challenged by his wife on the Sabbath question. He set out to prove she was wrong, but ended up proving the opposite, that she was right and he was wrong. But he had the honesty to admit it and to accept the truth, even truth contrary to what he wanted to believe, contrary to what he was taught, contrary to the teachings and traditions of most churches and their ministers. He was willing to put the Bible first as the source of his beliefs over everything else. I have no doubt that God tested him in this. If he had failed the test, if Mr. Armstrong refused to believe the Bible and instead went along with the traditions he grew up in, could God have used him? Of course not. In a way, it seems that this was a much tougher test for Herbert Armstrong than for Loma. But Mr. Armstrong passed the test. He believed God. He not only believed God, but acted on that belief and began to put this new knowledge into practice.

God then used Mr. Armstrong, while he was still only a lay member of the Church, not an apostle or ordained minister, to test the leadership of the Church of God Seventh Day. He opened Mr. Armstrong's mind to new truth from the Bible that the Church did not have. Mr. Armstrong submitted this new truth to the leadership. They did not accept it. They gave priority to their tradition over the truth of the Bible. Could God use this Church and its leadership to do the powerful work of preaching the gospel to the world as a witness before the end comes? No. God used Mr. Armstrong to raise up a new organization, which became separate from Church of God Seventh Day. The Church that rejected the new truth was rejected by God from doing a powerful work of preaching the gospel to the world. See also Hosea 4:6.

Why?

Maybe the answer seems obvious, but I think there is more to it than most people in the Church of God have thought about.

Why could God not use the Church of God Seventh Day to preach the gospel to the world in a powerful way after they rejected new doctrine from the Bible that Mr. Armstrong showed them in favor of their traditions?

Part of the reason is that God wanted the message to the public to contain the truths that needed to be restored. God wanted the gospel that the world would hear to include all the many truths that the Church of God Seventh Day did not have. Therefore they would have to accept those truths in order to teach them to the public. Since they would not accept those truths themselves, they could not be used to teach them to the world.

But there is still more to it than that. We are now, finally, getting to the whole point of this chapter.

Do you remember the earlier quote of Jesus Christ saying that the Pharisees laid heavy burdens on men's shoulders which they were not willing to lift with one finger? They did not practice what they preached. They were not willing to do what they told others they should do.

When the Church of God preaches the truth of God to the world, what are we really asking people to do? Are we not teaching people that they should give up everything they have believed if necessary in order to believe and live by every word of God?

In effect, we are telling people, "Give up the traditions you were raised in. They are all wrong. God is not a trinity. Man does not have an immortal soul. You are not going to go to heaven when you die. Sunday is not the day you should rest and attend church services.

"Give up Christmas and Easter. Stop attending church on Sunday. Start keeping the Sabbath even if you lose your job. Trust God to provide for you. Start tithing to God. Pay your first tithe. Save your second tithe, and every third year in a seven year cycle pay a third tithe for the poor in the Church. If it doesn't look like you have enough money, step out in faith and trust God that He will provide for you. Start keeping the holy days and the Feast of Tabernacles. Stop eating pork.

"Be willing to lose your job if necessary, to give up your family and friends if necessary, to give up everything to live by every word of God. Put God and the Bible first, over what your church teaches, over the traditional beliefs and practices you were raised in, over what your minister tells you, even over what you yourself want to believe. Put the Bible first and believe and obey God no matter what the cost, even if you lose your job, friends, husband, or wife."

And if a prospective member requests a visit from a minister, and when the minister comes to his house, the person says, "I know that the Bible says I should start tithing and keeping the Sabbath, but this isn't the right time for me right now. My boss will fire me if I don't work on Saturday, and the kids have been sick and the bills piling up, and I

can't afford to tithe right now. What I need now is stability, but later I will do these things," what will the minister reply? Will he say, "I agree, what you need is stability, you don't need to make these changes right now, God understands"? Or will he say, "With the knowledge comes responsibility, and you are being judged now for what you do with what you know"?

Then what happens if a new truth or correction from the Bible is submitted to the minister and to the Church leadership, perhaps on a very tiny matter, but the minister or the leadership will not accept any doctrinal changes because "the members need stability" or "we cannot change Mr. Armstrong's doctrines"?

Does that not put the Church of God in the position of asking the public to do what we are no longer willing to do? Does that not make the Church of God like the Pharisees, who laid heavy burdens on men's shoulders, hard to bear, but were not willing to help lift them with one finger?

How can we teach members of the general public that they should make changes in their belief systems so great that it would seem to them that their whole lives are being turned upside down if we ourselves have become so comfortable and attached to our Church of God traditions that we are not willing to make the tiniest changes and corrections to our doctrines? Would that be practicing what we preach? Would God use a group like that to do a powerful work of preaching the gospel to the world when He has already rejected the leadership of the Church of God Seventh Day during Mr. Armstrong's early years from doing a powerful work because they would not accept new doctrine from the Bible?

The Source of Our Beliefs

Why do we believe what we believe? I am not asking WHAT we believe. I am asking WHY.

Is it possible to believe the right things for the wrong reasons? Can someone believe the truth, the real truth, yet for the wrong reasons?

Why do Catholics believe what they believe, Baptists believe what they believe, Jehovah Witnesses believe what they believe, Jews believe what they believe, Moslems believe what they believe? In most cases, they believe their traditions. They believe what they were taught as children, the doctrines and customs they were raised in. People also sometimes believe what they want to believe, either what is convenient to believe or what fits their own opinions. People who are religious also often tend to believe what their religious authorities have taught them or what a religious leader teaches them, because they trust him. Usually, they are comfortable in their beliefs and traditions and they do not want to change.

Are we in the Church of God today any different? Are we really different?

I am writing this June 2005. It has been 78 years since Mr. Armstrong's conversion, 71 years since the start of the Plain Truth Magazine, and 19 years since Mr. Armstrong's death. Many members of the Church of God were born and raised in the Church. They grew up attending Sabbath services and hearing the truth of God. Many others, while not having been raised in the Church, came into the Church when they were young, and now they are old. Have we become so comfortable in our beliefs and traditions that we, like many members of the Church of God Seventh Day, or even like many members of the Roman Catholic Church, are unwilling to learn new truth from the Bible if it conflicts with what we already believe?

When Mr. Tkach began making doctrinal changes in Worldwide, over a period of time, many members began to leave. They rejected the changes. The changes were wrong, and it was right to reject them, but why did members reject them? The reason may be important. We did not all reject those changes for the same reason.

Those who left Worldwide and fellowshiped with Church of God groups that hold to the basic body of doctrine taught by Mr. Armstrong did not all do so for the same reason. Members in any of the major Church of God organizations are not all there for the same reason.

Along with the doctrinal changes came a number of articles in the Worldwide News explaining those changes and trying to justify them by Scripture. The attempt failed. There were logical flaws and inconsistencies in their arguments. If one looked at the changes with an open mind, compared the changes and the original teachings with the Bible and looked up all the relevant scriptures on the subject, one could prove, from the Bible, that the changes were incorrect and that the original teachings of Mr. Armstrong are right. But how many really did that? I think that some accepted the changes because they believed church authority more than the Bible, and some people made an idol out of a church organization. But I also believe many rejected the changes simply because they were changes and they did not want to consider that the Church may have been in error and needed to be corrected. They didn't check up in the Bible. They just left.

I asked before if we are any different in why we believe what we believe than Catholics or Protestants who follow their traditions. Let me ask the question a different way.

In light of Mr. Armstrong's experiences with the Church of God Seventh Day, as related in his autobiography, were most members of that Church any different than Catholics and Protestants in WHY they believed what they believed? Didn't they believe what they were taught as children, the same as most Catholics and Protestants? Didn't they believe, accept, and practice the traditions they grew up with, just like most Catholics and Protestants? And didn't they reject the new truths Mr. Armstrong learned from the Bible because they conflicted with their traditions, just as most Catholics and Protestants reject those same doctrines?

Mr. Armstrong said in his book *Mystery of the Ages* that God had restored at least eighteen truths to the Church of God through him. Look at a list of eighteen major truths restored to the Philadelphia era of the Church. Show any of these doctrines to a typical Catholic or Protestant, and prove it from the Bible. What would be the typical reaction? The average Catholic or Protestant would reject it because it differs from what he already believes. Now show it to a member of the Church of God Seventh Day. What would be the typical reaction? EXACTLY THE SAME. The average Church of God Seventh Day member would reject that doctrine because it differs from what he already believes. Same reaction. Same reason.

In a sense, the failure of the Church of God Seventh Day leadership to accept new truth in Mr. Armstrong's early years was greater than the failure of most Catholics and Protestants to accept the truth of God from the Bible. That is because the test was easier for the Church of God leadership. They already had some truth. The change would not be as great for them as for those raised in traditional mainstream Christianity. Nevertheless, they still were not able and willing to be corrected and learn new truth from the Bible.

Now I will ask, how different are we in our attitudes towards the authority of the Bible and our church traditions and church authority than the Church of God Seventh Day seventy years ago? If someone came along, like Mr. Armstrong, with changes as great as the changes he proposed, but proved from the Bible, would the Church of God today be any more open minded and willing to be corrected by the Bible and learn new truth than the Church of God 70 or 80 years ago? And if the answer is that we might NOT be that different, would God not test us before empowering us to do a great work of preaching the gospel to all Israel, just as He used Mr. Armstrong to test the Church of God Seventh Day more than 70 years ago? And if we fail the test, if we reject Bible revelation in favor of tradition, would not God reject us from doing a powerful work? Would God judge us by a lesser standard than he judged the Church in Mr. Armstrong's early years?

I think WHY we believe what we believe is just as important as WHAT we believe. We need to believe the right things for the right reason. We need to believe the truth of God because it is what the Bible teaches and we must believe the Bible more than anything else.

I remember an occasion in Worldwide, sometime in 1995 I think, when the biggest changes in doctrine were being taught, when a speaker described in a sermonette how he was struggling to understand the changes, but at first he couldn't. He would read the epistles of Paul and try to understand what he read in the light of the new teachings, but it didn't make sense to him at first. Then he prayed and asked God to help him understand the changes. When he studied the Bible again, the changes began to make sense to him. He felt God answered his prayer. Now he understood and accepted the new teaching. After services, I talked with the man and asked him, "When you prayed for help to understand the doctrinal changes, did you ask God to help you know WHETHER the changes were true or not, or did you assume that the changes were true and asked God to help you understand HOW they were true, how they fit with the Bible?" He said, "I assumed that the changes were true, and I asked God to help me

understand how they were true." This man was not looking to the Bible for answers about what is truth. He looked to the Church for that and only wanted God to help him to believe the Church.

On another occasion, one of the men in giving the opening or closing prayer asked God to help us accept and believe the new doctrines. But I could not say "amen" to that prayer. I wasn't trying to either believe or disbelieve the changes. I already made a commitment years ago to believe the Bible. I knew that God allows His ministers to make mistakes sometimes. I wanted to learn from God's Word whether or not these changes were true just as I tried to examine God's Word years ago to see if the things Mr. Armstrong was saying were true. I never assumed that the things Mr. Armstrong said were true, and I didn't want to assume that the things Mr. Tkach was saying were true. I could not pray for God's help to believe something that could be in error.

I have noticed that people can have a number of sources for their beliefs:

- I think those who are converted in the Church who put the Bible first as a source of belief study the Bible to be corrected and look to the Bible as the final authority for any doctrine or issue. I think most of these people know that the Holy Spirit gives them understanding of the Bible, but they don't trust their own thoughts and opinions apart from the Bible if their opinions are contrary to the Bible, and they don't attribute those opinions to the Holy Spirit. They realize that the Holy Spirit will not guide them into knowledge that is contrary to the Bible. I am sure Mr. Armstrong was in this category, and this is how God wants us to set our beliefs.
- Those who use a church as their authority believe the teachings of their church and use those teachings to interpret what the Bible means. They will fit Bible scriptures together the way their church teaches them to, and they believe that they are being properly submissive to God's government and authority the way God wants them to be. They put human church leadership first and the Bible second. I think most of those who stayed in Worldwide would fall into this category, as well as many people in the Catholic Church.
- Those who use their own traditions and customary beliefs and practices as their authority for what they believe are following the traditions they grew up with as a child or adopted by choice in their youth as a teenager or young adult. In some ways, beliefs we were raised in are harder to give up because they are all we have known, but in another way, the beliefs we adopted in our youth

are harder to give up because they come as a result of our choice and we identify with them more. In other words, it may be harder to admit we have been wrong than to admit that our parents were wrong. In any case, those who hold to their traditions this way, whether they be traditions they were raised in by their parents or beliefs they adopted by choice in their youth that have become their traditions over time, will often fit Bible scriptures together and interpret their meaning in a way that is consistent with the framework of the traditions and the beliefs they have held for a long time. When an idea is suggested to them that is contrary to what they have believed and held for a long time, they often reject it without looking at it in the Bible with an open mind. They may think they are obeying God's instruction to turn away from those who bring a false gospel. But they will not first prove from the scriptures that it is false. I think some who left Worldwide as soon as the changes started without even examining them may fall into this category.

- Those who believe their own ideas and opinions more than other sources will often think that the Holy Spirit is putting those thoughts into their mind and that they are exercising faith by believing that those ideas and doctrines are true. One person I spoke to said she believed what she believed because she had faith those things she believed were true, and she believed that the faith she had was a gift from God. In other words, she knew what she knew. She thought God miraculously put the belief in her mind and she trusted that God put it there and that it was true. And anything in the Bible that seemed to contradict it in plain language she would interpret to mean something that would be consistent with whatever she already believed. This matter of believing one's own opinions can sometimes be closely associated with believing the traditions one grew up with or held for a long time.

I find it interesting that among many Catholics, three of these sources of belief may work together. Most Catholics have been raised Catholic and they have held their Catholic teachings a long time, so they have the influence of tradition on their belief system. The Catholic Church claims authority to establish doctrine and to interpret the Bible, so church authority is also a source of belief. And some Catholics may feel strongly that God is leading their belief system and working in their minds to give them faith in the teachings of the Catholic Church, and they feel they are exercising faith by trusting in those beliefs.

In the Church of God, when we were all together under Mr. Armstrong's stewardship, for those of us who were in the Church a long time, the influences of tradition, church authority, and the Bible worked in the same doctrinal direction. Those who trusted in their own opinions tended to leave. But Mr. Armstrong trusted the Bible, he set the teachings of the Church to be the same as the Bible, and as we practiced and believed those teachings they became our traditions. So a person could remain in the Church at that time even if the Bible was not his primary authority any longer. His first authority could be the Church or his traditions he had become comfortable with, and he would still stay in the Church.

But when the doctrinal changes came, people in Worldwide Church of God were challenged, and a process of separation began. People whose primary authority for what they believe was the Church were separated from those whose primary authority was the Bible OR their traditions. Those whose primary authority was the Bible examined the new teachings, looked up the scriptures given along with other scriptures on the same subject, examined the matter with an open mind, and rejected the new teachings because they were contrary to the Bible. They left Worldwide and in most cases fellowshipped with and supported new groups that were being raised up and kept the things Mr. Armstrong taught. Those whose primary authority was tradition rejected the new teachings without serious examination. They also left Worldwide and joined with some other group. And in many cases those for whom their tradition had become their primary authority and those whose primary authority is the Bible are now in the same church groups! In other words, those who have left Worldwide to go with another group have not all done so for the same reasons and not all for the right reason!

So within any one of several Church of God groups today, you can have people who want to follow the Bible and are willing to change to learn new truth from the Bible and be corrected in their beliefs from the Bible, and also those who only want to remain the same, keep the traditions they are comfortable with, and not accept new knowledge from or have their beliefs corrected by the Bible.

And in such a case, the ministry of that Church, even if they are willing to accept new knowledge and make changes, are faced with the fact that among their members are many people who do not want to change. In fact, they might even be the majority. And if the leadership knows this, they might also know that many would leave if they made changes. So in order to keep their group intact and prevent the exodus of those members that do not want to change, they may be tempted to not make changes that would be required by the Bible.

They may think, "Christ is leading the Church to not make changes because the members need stability at this time. The benefits of keeping as many people as possible together is that we can do a more powerful work and help more people."

Such a view seems very practical, but I think it is practical in the same way that Jeroboam's decision to change the times and places of worship in Israel out of fear of the people deserting him to follow the king of Judah was practical. It was very logical from a human point of view but it left God out of the picture (1 Kings 12:26-33). This

would be an example of a way that seems right to a man but is the way of death (Proverbs 14:12, 16:25).

God is the one who opens or closes doors to preaching the gospel. He can empower a small group as well as a large one. But we are required by God to believe Him and to live by every word of God (Luke 4:4, Galatians 3:6, Hebrews 3:12, Matthew 23:23). God also requires that we speak only the truth according to what we know (Luke 18:19, Colossians 3:9-11, Exodus 20:16, Revelation 21:8). If we see some new knowledge revealed in the Bible, or if it is pointed out to us, we are required by God to believe it, if it is truly what the Bible teaches. If we believe new knowledge, whether it is from the Bible or a combination of the Bible and history or science or whatever, if ministers teach what they know is not true, are they not bearing false witness? Is God going to bless that?

Also, we must make sure our ways are pleasing to God by practicing what we preach when we ask John Q. Public to change his beliefs to live by every word of God. We have to make sure we are willing to do that ourselves, even in the small things, if we want to have God's blessing and empowerment to preach the gospel to the world. That is more important than how big we are.

Concern for the stability of the Church and reasoning that stability is for the greatest benefit of the members may seem right, but such reasoning, even if motivated by love, must take second place to the principles of believing God and not bearing false witness. The world is full of people who have "love" for others but don't believe God, or have love for others that motivates them to tell "white lies" to not hurt another person's feelings or get them into trouble with the authorities. I suppose it never occurs to these leaders that if they allowed God to use them to teach new knowledge to the Church from the Bible that God would open their minds to understand new things from the Bible that the members need most at this time.

I mentioned this before, but it bears repeating. Mr. Armstrong pointed out that both Jesus Christ and the Bible are the Word of God. Jesus Christ is called the Word of God (John 1:1-14). Referring to Jesus Christ, Revelation 19:13 states: "He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God." Mr. Armstrong said that just as the apostle Paul was taught by Jesus Christ, the Word of God in person, so Mr. Armstrong was taught by the Word of God in print. He said that just as Jesus Christ is the Word of God in person, so the Bible is the Word of God in print, the same Word. Jesus Christ must be our foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). If Jesus is the Word of God in person and the Bible the Word of God in print, the same Word, and if that Word must be our foundation, this seems to indicate that the Bible must be the foundation for everything we believe. Our faith in the Bible is really faith in Jesus Christ.

I am speculating that at some time, just as God allowed or caused the apostasy to separate out those who follow Church authority more than the Bible or tradition, God will in the future separate those who follow the Bible from those who follow tradition in the Church of God.

Faith

This whole subject is really about faith. Mr. Armstrong taught that faith is not just believing that God exists, but believing what God says. I remember him making the distinction between believing ON Jesus Christ and believing what Jesus Christ said. He taught us that false Christianity tries to exalt the person of the messenger, Jesus Christ, while rejecting the message.

In his booklet *"What Is Faith?"*, Mr. Armstrong taught that faith is believing what God says and trusting God to do what He has promised.

Faith is not just a body of doctrine one happens to believe. True faith has to be based on a relationship with God.

Faith is a choice to believe God. It is closely tied with the Bible because the Bible is God speaking to us. It is the Word of God. Mr. Armstrong explained that Jesus Christ is the Word of God in person, and the Bible is the Word of God in print, but it is the same Word.

Faith means that we believe the Bible because we trust and believe the God who authored it.

Mr. Armstrong also said that he thought the Bible was primarily written for the Philadelphia era of the Church, and by that I think he meant it was written for the Church in our time.

When I hear some members and leaders try to say that we must recognize that Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah, and they exalt his person, and they say we should never change any of his doctrines, this has a familiar ring to it for me. To me, they are doing with Mr. Armstrong the same thing traditional mainstream Christianity has done with Jesus Christ. They exalt the person of Christ while rejecting and changing His teachings and message in the Bible.

Mr. Armstrong always taught us to be willing to be corrected by the Bible and to accept new knowledge from the Bible. He emphasized that we must always grow in grace and in knowledge. He rehearsed with us his experiences with the Church of God Seventh Day to remind us that we must not be like them. Today, it seems to me that if a Church of God organization makes a doctrinal change, typically they try to keep a low profile about it, as if they are ashamed of it or they don't want anyone to notice. They may say, "This is not a doctrinal change really" even though it is. But when Mr. Armstrong made a change or introduced new doctrine, he said so, loudly, even with things that were minor. If I remember correctly, in the sermon in which he taught for the first time that

the Church of God was the Kingdom of God in embryo, he first reminded us about the Sardis Church's unwillingness to accept new truth, and then he said, "Here is NEW TRUTH, brethren". He wanted to keep us in an attitude of being willing to accept new doctrinal truth.

Mr. Armstrong taught us that faith is believing what God said. He practiced that faith, and was himself willing to learn from the Bible, to accept new truth from the Bible, to be corrected by the Bible in doctrine and policy, and to admit mistakes when he was wrong. I remember him saying over and over on radio and television, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible".

When I first heard Mr. Armstrong teach that faith is believing what God said, and that the Bible is God speaking to us, I began to think more about faith. I wondered, over the years, why faith is so important to God.

It is obvious that God places enormous importance on faith. Faith is a condition for salvation. It is a condition for answered prayer. Faith is actually one of the weightier matters of the law, along with justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23). And since sin is the transgression of the law, or "lawlessness" (1 John 3:4), and faith is one of the weightier matters of the law, disbelieving what God says is a transgression of the law, sin. But why? Why did God set it up like that? Why did God make faith so important? When Abraham believed what God said, God counted it as righteousness. Why was it so important to God that Abraham believe Him?

To illustrate the question, contrast faith with love. Why is it important to God that we love Him and love our neighbor? The answer to that is a little more obvious. God wants us to get along with each other and cooperate with each other and with Him. He wants us to have an outgoing concern for each other and to love God so we will help and serve one another and obey God and do His will for all eternity. Love is the way of "give" that produces peace and harmony. It is the opposite of the way of "get", of hostile competition and selfishness that leads to conflict and destruction. All we have to do is imagine eternity with love versus eternity without love to understand its importance.

But I still asked myself, how does faith fit in? As long as we have love, what difference does it make if we always believe what God says for all eternity? Suppose we didn't always believe that God was telling us the truth? As long as we love God and want to please Him, wouldn't we obey Him anyway even if we sometimes didn't believe what He said?

I am going to indulge in a little speculation here. I do not know anywhere in the Bible where God specifically talks about why He considers it so important that we believe and trust what He tells us. We do know from the Bible that angelic beings were created before man. The Bible also teaches us that Lucifer was perfect in all his ways until iniquity was found in him (Ezekiel 28:15).

Revelation 12:3-4 seems to indicate that Satan enticed a third of God's angels to join him in rebelling against God. These angels became demons. If Satan led them into sin,

it may be that Lucifer was the very first angel to sin against God. Once Lucifer sinned and became Satan, he was able to tempt other angels to sin. But if Lucifer was the first to sin, there was no other being to tempt him into sinning that first time.

Why did he do it? I remember one time, a new member or prospective member in the Church asked me that question as we were riding together on a train to Sabbath services. Why did Lucifer sin? I didn't know the answer, but it started me thinking about it.

God said Lucifer was perfect in his ways before he sinned. He must have started on the right track. It seems logical that God must have thoroughly taught all His angels the right way of life so they would know how to live. And in love God must have taught them the consequences of sin, that if they went the wrong way it would lead to misery and unhappiness. Lucifer started on the right way of God's law. But something happened. What was the first thing that happened that led to Lucifer's sin?

Ezekiel 28:15 states that Lucifer was perfect in his ways till he sinned. Verse 16 says he was filled with violence from within by the abundance of his trading, and verse 17 says that his heart was lifted up because of his beauty and he corrupted his wisdom for the sake of his splendor. So violence and vanity are listed as two sins he committed. But these were not necessarily the very first sins, or errors, Lucifer committed.

If God taught the angels the consequences of sin, then Lucifer was warned. And if he was the first to sin, then there was no evil being to tempt or entice him or influence him in an evil direction. God would not tempt him, and if he was perfect in his ways then there wouldn't be any evil nature within him to tempt him. There was no temptation to resist. Yet Lucifer chose the path of sin. He chose the path of violence and vanity, even after God warned him that that path would lead to misery and frustration. Apparently, it was a deliberate, thought out choice, not an accidental slipping into sin because of weakness in the face of temptation. Every influence in the universe was only for good, and there was no evil tendency built inside Lucifer. Yet he chose sin. Why?

I don't believe Lucifer would deliberately choose an eternity of unhappiness. The only explanation that makes any sense to me is that Lucifer did not believe what God told him. He did not believe that God was telling him the truth when God told him that vanity and violence would lead to Lucifer's utter misery and unhappiness. He must thought that vanity might lead to greater happiness for himself, and he may have figured that the only way he could find out for sure was to try it. I think he took a calculated risk, the risk that God was telling the truth versus what he thought would be the pleasures of sin if God was lying to him or was wrong. He gambled and he lost. He should have believed God. But once he began to practice vanity, his mind began to become twisted, and there was no turning back. As it says in Ezekiel 28:17, his wisdom became corrupted. The more he sinned, the more perverted his thinking became and the more sinful his nature became. The more his mind and wisdom became corrupted and perverted, the more he sinned. And since sin causes suffering, Satan is miserable. And now he can never repent or go back. And it may all have started with a decision to doubt God's word and teachings.

I could be wrong about this. I said before this is my speculation. The Bible doesn't say exactly why Lucifer chose to practice vanity and violence, only that he did. But if he did it because he refused to believe God's word and chose rather to experiment for himself, that might help to explain why it is so important to God that His children learn the lesson now in this life to believe and trust God implicitly in everything God says. God may have many things to teach us in the eternity to come, and He doesn't want His family doubting or second-guessing his word like Lucifer may have done.

When I was first learning the truth, I had to make a choice whether to believe God or not. I remember the circumstances clearly. When I first came into contact with the Plain Truth Magazine, like many new readers I eagerly read each issue and wrote in for all of the booklets mentioned, then read each booklet as soon as it came. I read the booklet *"Does God Exist?"*. With the help of that booklet and with the knowledge of science I had (as a hobby only, I am not a scientist), it took me maybe a few hours to prove for myself beyond any doubt that God the Creator must exist.

Then I set about to prove that the Bible was God's word. This took much longer, several years in fact. I studied all the prophecies in the Bible and I studied history to see if they came true. I worked in my spare time and took careful notes so each time I began working on it I could pick up where I left off. I used whatever books and booklets the Church published on the subject as well as outside sources. Eventually, I proved to my satisfaction that the Bible is definitely the word of God.

But at the end of this proof I realized that I had not really proved that the Bible was true. I had proved that the Bible is God speaking, because no human could predict future events thousands of years before they came to pass. But by itself that did not prove that God always told the truth. I knew God said in the Bible that He cannot lie (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18), but that was not proof.

I turned it over in my mind for maybe an hour or two. I realized that no research I could carry out could prove for me whether or not God was infallibly honest and truthful at all times. I knew God claimed that about Himself, and I knew He required me to believe that if I were to be accepted by Him. But I didn't think there was any logical way to prove it the way I had proved God's existence or that the Bible is God's word. I knew it had to be a choice. I simply made the choice that I would believe God. I committed myself to believe that God cannot lie and always tells the truth in His Word, the Bible. I realized that because I am human doubts might come into my mind from time to time and that I would have to try to put those doubts out, but my choice as far as what I willed to believe was to believe God always from that point on, no matter what the cost, and to base all my future actions and decisions on that belief in God's word and in God's truthfulness. I made the decision to base all my future decisions and actions on trust in what God says in the Bible.

The faith that God requires of us is the kind of belief in God's word and trust in God that leads to obedient action. It is not an academic, intellectual belief that has nothing to do with how we live our lives. We obey God because we trust Him and believe what He tells us. That is why the author of Hebrews equates the disobedience of Israel in the

wilderness with their unbelief (Hebrews 3:16-19) and why James says that faith without works is dead (James 2:20-24). If Lucifer had exercised the right kind of faith in God, trusted God, and believed what God taught him, that faith in God would have led to obedience, and he never would have sinned and disobeyed God and practiced vanity, violence, and rebellion.

In a sense, believing what God teaches us means that we submit our thoughts to His thoughts and we make His views our views. We learn to pattern our views and thinking after God's views. We believe whatever God tells us. And as we learn to think as God thinks, obedient action will follow. As we choose to believe what God says in the Bible, we learn to agree with God, and as we agree with God we learn to obey Him because we agree with Him. And in those cases where we may not understand why God tells us to do something, we obey God in trust, knowing that God has all wisdom, righteousness, and love, and that His will is always right. We trust God even though we do not know everything God knows. We trust that what God tells us is right even if we do not understand the reason for whatever it is He tells us. We trust what God tells us even more than we trust ourselves and our opinions (Proverbs 3:5-6). So as we believe and trust God, we submit our wills to Him. This is why godly faith leads to obedient action.

Faith has to be based on a personal relationship with God. Faith in God is not based on a relationship with a body of doctrine. It is not just an academic believing of a body of teachings, even if we are obedient to those teachings. It is based on trust in God, trust in His truthfulness, trust in His righteousness. We have to trust God that He will never lie to us. This basic relationship is emphasized in both the old and new testaments. The Old Testament talks mostly about trusting God. The New Testament emphasizes faith. They are actually very similar, and both are based on a relationship with God.

We have a relationship with whatever we have faith in. If our faith is in our traditions, then we have a relationship with our traditions, not God. If our faith is in a body of doctrine, then our relationship is with a body of doctrine, not God. If our faith is in the authority of the Church or of the ministry and leadership, then our relationship is with the Church and the leadership, not God. If our faith is in our own ideas and opinions apart from the Bible, then we are in love with our own ideas. If we want our relationship to be with God, then our faith better be in God's Word and we better believe the Bible over everything and everyone else.

So it comes down to not only WHAT we believe, or even just WHY we believe what we believe, but also WHO we believe.

Faith is also a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). But our free moral agency is still involved. We must still choose to believe God. There is an aspect of faith that is our free choice, and there is an aspect of faith that is a gift from God. Repentance is also a gift (Acts 11:18, Acts 5:30-31, 2 Timothy 2:25), yet we have our part to play by exercising our free moral agency to choose to repent. Likewise, we must choose to believe God. God does not force anyone to believe Him. It is our choice.

The Message to the Sardis Church

Mr. Armstrong identified Church of God Seventh Day in his early years as the Sardis Church. I believe this is accurate, but I think there is an aspect of the message to the Sardis Church that may apply more fully to some of the Church of God fellowships today that have come out of Worldwide than to the Church of God Seventh Day seventy or eighty years ago.

Revelation 3:1-6: "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' "

Notice the first part of verse 3: "Remember therefore how you have received and heard...". Note that Jesus refers to HOW Sardis received and heard, not what they have believed, but HOW they came to believe what they have believed. He is admonishing them to remember how they came into the truth.

How did Church of God Seventh Day come into the truth? When Mr. Armstrong came among them, the Church was not growing very much, so most members were taught by their parents as they were growing up. If the message to Sardis only applies to the Church of God Seventh Day when Mr. Armstrong came among them, it is hard to see how this applies. Why would Christ be reminding them that they learned the truth by being raised in it as their family tradition? The Church of God Seventh Day did not have any problem with the truth that they were raised in. Their problem was that they did not want to accept new truth from the Bible Mr. Armstrong tried to teach them.

But if you apply this verse to some of the Church of God groups today, it fits much better. It makes perfect sense that Christ would remind us HOW many of us came into the truth. Many of us learned of the truth by being willing to accept and prove new truth with an open mind. We needed to be willing to give up our old beliefs and be corrected by the Bible, changing our beliefs as necessary, and adding new knowledge to what we already knew. And even most of those who grew up in the Church of God have parents who went through this process, and their parents probably related stories of how they first heard Mr. Armstrong on the radio. It was also through Mr. Armstrong's willingness to change his belief system that God was able to use him to teach us. That is exactly HOW we have received and heard, and Christ tells us to remember. We are to remember that we only know the truth because of the willingness of Mr. Armstrong,

our parents, and/or ourselves to accept new knowledge and correction, and to believe the Bible more than the traditions of the churches we formerly belonged to.

There is also a point to be made that in remembering HOW we have received and heard, we will also remember that it was through the sacrifices of others to preach the gospel to the public that enabled us to receive and hear the truth of God, and we should consider that we need to do likewise.

Can we apply this message to the Church today considering that this is the Laodicean era, not the Sardis era? Christ says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." As Mr. Armstrong taught, what Christ says to each church can apply to any one of us. Each individual needs to examine himself in light of all seven of the messages to the seven churches. Though the Laodicean condition predominates at this time, that does not mean there are not individuals, or even individual groups in the Church of God, that are in different conditions. Also, there may not be a lot of difference between the Laodicean condition and the Sardis condition anyway. The characteristic of Laodicea, "you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' " (Revelation 3:17) also seems to fit those who are self-satisfied with the knowledge they have and are no longer willing to learn anything new or be corrected.

The Inconsistencies of Saying We Can't Change Herbert W. Armstrong's Doctrines

Those that teach that Mr. Armstrong's doctrines can never be changed have a serious problem. There is a built-in inconsistency in their position, based on Mr. Armstrong's own teachings.

Mr. Armstrong NEVER taught that his teachings could never be changed. In fact, he taught just the opposite. He was willing to change his own teachings when he realized he was in error. Changing the observance of Pentecost from a Monday to a Sunday is just one example.

There are those who claim a spiritual connection with Mr. Armstrong, and they say that he is their spiritual father. The Jews who wanted to kill Jesus claimed Abraham as their father, but Jesus pointed out that if Abraham were their father they would do the works that Abraham did (John 8:39-40). Jesus was saying that Abraham was not their spiritual father because they were not following the practices of Abraham. Likewise, many of those today who claim allegiance to the teachings of Mr. Armstrong and exalt his person do not do the deeds that Mr. Armstrong did. They are not willing to admit error and change doctrine as Mr. Armstrong did. They are not willing to put the Bible first over church tradition or over the teachings of men, even the teachings of Mr. Armstrong himself, as Mr. Armstrong did. They are not willing to let the Bible interpret the Bible as Mr. Armstrong did, but instead they put their own meaning into verses without scriptural proof from the rest of the Bible that those verses mean what they say they

mean. Someone today can exalt the person of Mr. Armstrong and claim that God is revealing new truth to them as He did to Mr. Armstrong, and yet be twisting scriptures to suit their own purposes. Mr. Armstrong did not do that.

Anyone who teaches that Mr. Armstrong's doctrines cannot be changed has already changed the most important doctrine he taught the Church of God. It is the one doctrine that differentiates God's true Church from all other churches. It is the doctrine that we must believe God's word, the Bible, over everything else, including tradition, the authority of men, and our own opinions and desires. This also includes the truth that we must be willing to be corrected by the Bible, to confess and correct error, and to learn new truths from the Bible, and to live by every word of God. Mr. Armstrong often said, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible." He taught us by word and by example to not just accept what we are told but to prove doctrine from the Bible.

Mr. Armstrong in the last months of his life reached a point when he knew he might die soon. He had time to make provision for the Church of God after his death. I remember hearing him give what may have been his last sermon. It was obvious that he knew he may die soon. He spoke of God providing a new pastor general to succeed him. This close to his death, it would have been a perfect opportunity for Mr. Armstrong to tell the Church, "Don't let anyone change any of the doctrines I have taught you." But he never said that. In fact, he implied just the opposite. He said, "Your faith must not be in me, it must be in Jesus Christ. He's the head of the Church, I'm not. And if I were not here, there would be another who would become the pastor general. And if that should ever happen, if you want into get into God's Kingdom you will follow that pastor general. And you will remain united and you will remain one. And your eternity depends on that, every one of you, don't you forget it." This was in the 1985 Day of Trumpets sermon. Now, I am sure Mr. Armstrong never expected Mr. Tkach to make all the doctrinal changes that he did. Mr. Tkach ended up completely reversing just about everything Mr. Armstrong taught that was different from traditional mainstream Christianity. Much error was introduced into the Church. I do not say that Mr. Tkach deliberately and knowingly taught error. He may have thought he was doing the right thing. Only God can judge his heart. God allowed all this for a purpose. I think one of the purposes God had in allowing this was to test the membership and ministry, to see who would follow the Bible more than the Church. Nevertheless, look at where Mr. Armstrong placed emphasis in the last weeks or months of his life. Not on becoming fixed on a body of doctrine as it existed at the end of his life. Not on the fact that Mr. Armstrong was an apostle or that he was the Elijah to restore all things. But he emphasized willingness to be led and taught.

Here is a suggestion, and a question, for someone who is looking for a Church of God that is following Mr. Armstrong's doctrines 100 percent without change. When you find a Church of God that claims we should never change Mr. Armstrong's doctrines and that they follow his doctrines 100 percent, get their official statement of beliefs and compare it with the official statement of beliefs for the Church that Mr. Armstrong published that was current at the time of his death, and see how they compare. That way, any important difference would be apparent, right? Which Church of God do you think most closely matches Mr. Armstrong when comparing the two statements of beliefs?

It is a trick question. Someone can correct me if I am wrong, but to the best of my knowledge, Mr. Armstrong did not publish a statement of beliefs during the latter part of the history of the Worldwide Church of God. I believe he may have published one in the early years, when the Church was called, "Radio Church of God", but later he did not. The REASON is important. One reason may be that a statement of beliefs is a poor way to introduce the public to our teachings because it does not explain why we believe what we believe. But I think there was another reason also. I did not know Mr. Armstrong personally, but from what I heard, and this is consistent with everything else I know about Mr. Armstrong from his sermons, broadcasts, and writings, one of the reasons Mr. Armstrong did not publish an official statement of beliefs is that he did not want the Church to get tied into a set of doctrines in a way that would make it hard to change doctrine and learn new doctrine from the Bible. He saw the way the Church of God Seventh Day was and how they had a culture that resisted doctrinal change from the Bible, and he did not want the Worldwide Church of God to develop that same culture. Having an official statement of beliefs for the Church would tend to "lock in" those doctrines and would send a wrong message to the members. He wanted our loyalty to be to the Bible, not a list of beliefs.

Some say that Mr. Armstrong's teachings cannot be changed because he was the Elijah to come who would restore all things. But this is a misuse of the Elijah doctrine. Although Mr. Armstrong implied without stating directly that he was fulfilling the role of the Elijah to come by restoring all things to the Church, anyone familiar with his teachings should know that he never intended this to mean that he was somehow infallible or that the Church should never be corrected by or learn new truth from the Bible after his death.

If indeed Mr. Armstrong did fulfill the role of the Elijah who was to restore all things, which I believe he did, this does not mean that the truth the Church of God had at the time of his death was complete and perfect without error. Mr. Armstrong primarily restored truth by first pointing us to the Bible as our authority for doctrine. Mr. Armstrong himself was always willing to learn new truth from the Bible and be corrected by the Bible, and he set the example for us. It was because of his willingness to put the Bible first that Mr. Armstrong was able to learn the eighteen truths he restored to the Church. Any new truths the Church learns today or any corrections to doctrine the Church makes, if honestly based on the Bible, are a continuation of the work Mr. Armstrong started in restoring truth to the Church. In that sense, any new truths or corrections we learn from the Bible today, even if they are changes or additions to the things Mr. Armstrong taught, are a continuation of Mr. Armstrong's Elijah role in restoring lost truth by being willing to believe the Bible first. Even if more truth is restored today, it is Mr. Armstrong who has done it by restoring and teaching the process of believing the Bible first. He was the one God used to set all these things in motion. He was the one Christ used to establish a culture in the Philadelphia era of the Church that is willing to learn new things from the Bible. We are merely the continuation of the faith and the process and way of life God taught us through Mr. Armstrong. By establishing faith in the Bible as God's word, Mr. Armstrong has restored all truth that comes from the Bible whether or not he is the particular individual that learns a particular point of doctrine.

There is an example in the Bible, from the life of Elijah himself, that may illustrate this point. After Elijah fled from Jezebel, he was on the mountain with God. "So it was, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice *came* to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' And he said, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.' Then the LORD said to him: 'Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael *as* king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi *as* king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint *as* prophet in your place. It shall be *that* whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him' " (I Kings 19:13-18). Notice that Elijah was to anoint three individuals: Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha.

But Elijah did not anoint Jehu. This was done by one of the sons of the prophets at Elisha's, not Elijah's, instruction. Elijah was already taken away at this time. It was Elisha, not Elijah, who had Jehu anointed king of Israel, and even Elisha did not do it directly, but a son of one of the prophets did it at Elisha's command: "And Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets, and said to him, 'Get yourself ready, take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth Gilead. Now when you arrive at that place, look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in and make him rise up from among his associates, and take him to an inner room. Then take the flask of oil, and pour *it* on his head, and say, 'Thus says the LORD: "I have anointed you king over Israel." ' Then open the door and flee, and do not delay.' So the young man, the servant of the prophet, went to Ramoth Gilead. And when he arrived, there *were* the captains of the army sitting; and he said, 'I have a message for you, Commander.' Jehu said, 'For which *one* of us?' And he said, 'For you, Commander.' Then he arose and went into the house. And he poured the oil on his head, and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "I have anointed you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; and I will cut off from Ahab all the males in Israel, both bond and free. So I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. The dogs shall eat Jezebel on the plot *of ground* at Jezreel, and *there shall be* none to bury *her*." ' And he opened the door and fled. Then Jehu came out to the servants of his master, and *one* said to him, '*Is* all well? Why did this madman come to you?' And he said to them, 'You know the man and his babble.' And they said, 'A lie! Tell us now.' So he said, 'Thus and thus he spoke to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'I have anointed you king over Israel' " ' " (2 Kings 9:1-12).

God said that Elijah would anoint Jehu, but it was Elisha who commanded one of the sons of the prophets to do it. The only explanation that I know of for this is that Elijah instructed Elisha, who carried on Elijah's work in his absence. In other words, Elisha's work was a continuation of Elijah's work, but from God's point of view, it was all done

by Elijah. In the same way, if the Church of God continues to learn and restore new truth from the Bible, even corrections to past doctrines that may be wrong, as a continuation of the work Mr. Armstrong did in learning new truth and accepting doctrinal correction from the Bible, from God's point of view it is still truth restored by Mr. Armstrong because we are following the pattern he taught us, the pattern of putting the Bible first.

So even if Mr. Armstrong is the fulfillment of the end-time Elijah, that does not mean it is wrong to change his doctrines if the Bible shows us errors that need to be corrected. This is what Mr. Armstrong would want us to do because that is what he would do, and has done. Mr. Armstrong accomplished the work of restoring truth to the Church, not only by his individual efforts, but by training a Church to carry on his work after his death even today.

Some say only an apostle can make doctrinal changes in the Church, and that we cannot make doctrinal changes because we have no living apostle. But this is wrong on two counts. For one thing, we have the example of Mr. Armstrong in his autobiography of proposing doctrinal changes and teaching those doctrines before Mr. Armstrong or anyone else in the Church thought he was an apostle. In fact, in time sequence as related in the autobiography, he embraced and proposed doctrinal changes before he was ordained as a minister. He taught and proposed the doctrinal changes to the headquarters leadership while only a lay member, before he was ordained. Secondly, it is wrong to say we do not have a living apostle. Hebrews 3:1 calls Jesus Christ an apostle. He is alive today and guides the Church. If Mr. Armstrong as an apostle had the authority to put doctrine into the Church, Jesus Christ likewise has that same authority today. This is not just a play on words. Jesus Christ is able to make doctrinal changes in the Church and He does not need any human apostle to help Him do it.

Some say we should be faithful to the faith once delivered, quoting Jude 3: "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints", and saying that this faith refers to the body of doctrine taught to us by Mr. Armstrong. Now while I agree that in this context, Jude may be using the term "faith" to refer to a body of doctrine, this cannot refer to the body of doctrine delivered by Mr. Armstrong to the Church in our time. The only body of doctrine this can refer to is body of doctrine delivered by Christ to the Church of God in the first century, which He delivered to the Church through the original twelve apostles as well as Paul and those that preached to the gentiles. Jude cannot be looking to a future fulfillment of this in our day, because then it would be the faith twice delivered, once by the first century apostles to the first century Church, then a second time by the twentieth century apostle to the twentieth century Church. The fact that Jude says "once delivered" shows that the context of his statement is referring to the doctrines of the first century Church of God as recorded in the Bible. The "faith once delivered" does not include anything delivered to Mr. Armstrong that had not already been delivered to the first century apostles, otherwise, Jude could not have told his readers in his time to contend earnestly for what they never received. I think anyone who talks about "the faith once delivered through Mr. Armstrong" either thinks Mr. Armstrong delivered a

faith to us that the original twelve apostles and Paul never had, or they have trouble understanding the meaning of the word "once".

Mr. Armstrong often said, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible." You can't throw that away and claim you are following Mr. Armstrong.

In some cases, the Bible may not seem clear to someone on a point of doctrine that Mr. Armstrong taught. I am not talking about those situations. I am not saying we should be quick to make changes where the Bible is not clear. Mr. Armstrong's teachings carry weight. We should err on the side of caution and not make any significant change unless the Bible is clear that the change needs to be made. The more important the doctrine is, the more important it is to require a high standard of proof before changing it. So there has to be a balance. But we should not go to the other extreme and refuse to examine proposed changes on principle, the principle that we should never change what the apostle taught, or the principle that for the sake of unity and stability we should not make changes. We have to have a willingness of mind to make corrections or additions for legitimate reasons according to the Bible just as Mr. Armstrong himself would do and has done. The principle he taught us, of being corrected by the Bible in matters of doctrine, is a weightier matter of the law than the particular doctrines he taught us because all the other doctrines Mr. Armstrong taught came as a result of his willingness to be corrected by the Bible.

If the Bible isn't clear on a proposed change, then probably a change should not be made until it is clear, or else an official doctrinal position should not be taken on the issue until the matter is clear. (The Church of God does not have to take a position on every small question and issue. It is not wrong and we should not lose the respect of others if we sometimes say, "We don't know.") But if the Bible is clear that a current doctrine is in error and we don't make the correction, how can we claim that we strive to live by every word of God?

Some may place an over-emphasis on the cause of unity in the Church even at the expense of doctrinal accuracy. In other words, if they sense that some brethren will leave the Church if a doctrinal change is made, even if the doctrinal change is true according to the Bible, they would rather not make the change for the sake of unity. God wants unity in the Church, but not at the expense of truth. Jesus said he did not come to bring peace. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to *'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'*" (Matthew 10:34-35). I think Jesus is primarily referring to the conflict that occurs between members of His Church and our family members and people in the world, but to the extent that the influence of the world can also be in the Church, and to the extent that church members can still make mistakes, still have human nature, and still have the free moral agency to choose wrong, this can apply to the Church as well. And it shows that unity between those that follow God and those that do not follow God is not God's priority.

Sometimes it seems that there are ministers and members in the Church of God that want to think like many Catholics. Mr. Armstrong's doctrines have become their

traditions, and they want to live in their traditions just like many Catholics do. And many of these ministers and members look at Mr. Armstrong the way Catholics look at the pope. But they are not using the Bible as their ultimate authority as Mr. Armstrong did and as he taught the Church of God to do. Papal infallibility is a doctrine of the Catholic Church, not the Church of God. God allows ministers and evangelists to make mistakes. God allowed Mr. Armstrong to make mistakes.

Does the Bible Teach Us to Follow Tradition?

Some might point out what Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 to say that we should follow our traditions. Paul wrote, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." Also, 1 Corinthians 11:2: "Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you." And finally, 2 Thessalonians 3:6: "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us."

Does this mean we should not change Mr. Armstrong's doctrines because we should hold fast to the traditions we learned from him?

First I want to ask, is this referring to the traditions Paul gave to his congregations or the traditions given to us by Mr. Armstrong? Or both? First, and obviously, it refers to the traditions Paul gave the congregations he established because it is those he is most directly addressing. And we know that these traditions that Paul and the other apostles gave to the Church of God are correct because they received them from Christ directly. But does it also apply to the traditions and doctrines Mr. Armstrong gave the Church in our time?

Yes, it does apply to the traditions and doctrines given to the Church by Mr. Armstrong, but only to the extent that those traditions and doctrines are the same as the traditions and doctrines received from Christ and given to the early Church by Paul and the other apostles. God does not have two sets of inconsistent traditions that we are required to hold, one given in the first century and one given in the twentieth century.

How do we know if any tradition or doctrine is consistent with the traditions Paul is talking about? By the Bible. If there is any tradition or doctrine given to us by Mr. Armstrong that is inconsistent with the Bible, then it is also inconsistent with Paul's traditions, because Paul would not give traditions that were at odds with the Bible. Therefore, if we find in the Bible that a tradition or doctrine of Mr. Armstrong is wrong, that tradition cannot be a tradition Paul is referring to in 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

Some might say that Paul is teaching us a general principle that we should follow the traditions given to us in any age. But we already know that is wrong. Should a

Catholic or Protestant or a Church of God Seventh Day member read this verse and conclude that they should keep their doctrinal traditions rather than check up in the Bible to see if the things Mr. Armstrong taught are true? Is that the lesson and the principle God wants us to learn?

Perhaps some have done exactly that! Perhaps many heard Mr. Armstrong say on the radio, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible", and then their ministers pointed out 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and said, "See, the Bible says, follow your tradition." But this is a mis-application of the correct principle. We should follow our traditions ONLY when they are correct according to the Bible. The Bible must ALWAYS take precedence over tradition. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for following their traditions when they contradicted God's commands in Scripture (Matthew 15:1-9, Mark 7:1-13). The Bible always comes first.

I was talking about doctrinal change with one minister, and he asked me, how much doctrinal change did Jesus Christ introduce? I think his implication was, Jesus Christ did not introduce much doctrinal change, so we should not either. But actually, Jesus introduced a great deal of doctrinal change, so much so that after He spoke about someone eating His flesh and drinking His blood, many of disciples left him (John 6:35-66, especially verse 66). At one point, John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (see Matthew 11:2-3). Yet earlier, John had testified that Jesus was the Son of God (John 1:29-34) and called Jesus the "Lamb of God" (John 1:35-36). Consider this: if the things that Jesus taught did not seem like a lot of doctrinal change, why is it that after all the miracles He performed, only 120 believed what He said (Acts 1:15)?

Here are some of the "doctrinal changes" that Jesus introduced. Not all of these are actually new doctrines, but at the least they must have SEEMED to be new to the people who were taught by Him, who previously had been taught by the scribes and Pharisees and priests. Some of these are recorded in the gospel accounts and some are known from the teachings of the apostles as recorded in Acts and the epistles:

- Whoever eats the flesh and drinks the blood of Jesus Christ has eternal life (John 6:54).
- Passover symbols were changed from eating a lamb to bread and wine (Matthew 26:26-20).
- Foot washing was introduced to Passover service (John 13:1-15).
- Jesus kept the Passover meal on the correct evening, contrary apparently to the traditions of the priests and many of the Jews at that time, who ate the Passover meal one evening later (Matthew 26:20-32, John 18:28).
- Jesus taught obedience to the spirit of the law as well as the letter (Matthew 5:21-30).
- Jesus taught against divorce (Matthew 5:31-32).
- Jesus taught not to swear (Matthew 5:33-37).
- Jesus taught to call no man "rabbi" or "father"

- as a religious title (Matthew 23:6-9).
- We are to forgive others and love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48, 6:14, 18:21-35).
- Jesus rejected the traditions of the elders that the religious authorities added to God's commandments (Matthew 15:1-12).
- Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and His name is the only name by which men can be saved (Matthew 26:62-68, Acts 4:8-12).
- Salvation is open to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:18).
- Physical circumcision, along with animal sacrifices, is no longer required, and there is a change in the law and a change in the priesthood (Galatians 5:1-6, Hebrews 7:11-14, Galatians 3:23-25).
- New prophecies were given to the Church by Jesus Christ, either while He was on earth in the flesh (Matthew 24:4-46) or after He ascended to heaven (book of Revelation).
- Jesus Christ and the Father are both God (John 1:1-14).

I could go on and try to keep making the list longer, but I think what I have listed above makes the point. Many of the things Jesus taught were very different from what the Jews were used to hearing. His doctrines were very different from many of the traditional doctrines of the Jews (Matthew 16:6-12). He made many doctrinal changes, both additions and corrections, to what the Jews of that time had been taught.

Think: If the doctrinal changes taught by Jesus Christ were not that great, why was there so much persecution by the Jews against the Church? Why did Saul, who became Paul, so zealously persecute the Church (Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-30, 13:9, Galatians 1:13, 5:12)?

Think of how HARD it must have been for people who thought they had the "truth" to learn and accept these changes. Jesus Himself said that believing and living the truth would be hard (Matthew 7:14).

It is not loyalty to a list of beliefs handed down to us by tradition that God is looking for. It is loyalty to God and to Christ to respond to what they teach us, to "jump" when they say "jump". We have to learn to follow the Lamb WHEREVER HE LEADS (Revelation 14:1-5). How does Christ lead us? He leads us the same way He led Mr. Armstrong, by opening our minds to understand God's Word, the Bible, even to understand new things from God's Word. Christ led Mr. Armstrong to see new truth in the Bible, and He led us to believe the things Mr. Armstrong taught us by opening our minds to understand the Bible as we PROVED the things Mr. Armstrong taught us. We need to imitate the attitude of the writer of Psalm 119 who prayed in verse 18, "Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law." We also should desire that God will reveal new truth to us from the Bible, not only to us individually, but to the Church as a whole.

Christ tells the Philadelphians in Revelation 3:11, "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown." What is it Christ wants the faithful members of His Church to hold fast to? A list of doctrinal beliefs, which the Philadelphian leader, Herbert W. Armstrong, did not compile into a "statement of beliefs" because he didn't want the Church to get locked into believing a list more than the Bible? Or are we to hold fast to the principle of putting the Bible first above tradition and being willing to be corrected by the Bible and learn new knowledge from the Bible, which is the way of life Mr. Armstrong actually practiced? I suppose each person will have to choose for himself or herself which is more important. For my part, I believe Jesus Christ is referring to the principle of putting the Bible first in our beliefs and being willing to be corrected by it, because that is a weightier matter of the truth. Believing the Bible is a weightier principle than a list of beliefs because we would never have the list of beliefs we have if Mr. Armstrong and the Church did not practice the principle of putting the Bible first.

God Speaks Through the Bible

I have touched on this before, but I want to re-emphasize something. Mr. Armstrong has said that he believes the Bible was primarily written for the Philadelphia era of the Church, by which he meant our modern time. I agree with this. In the early Church, the New Testament was not complete during most of the first century because it was still being written. Even when it was complete, it was not widespread. Because the books of the Bible were copied by hand, they were more expensive and more rare.

Before modern times and the invention of the printing press, both during the first century and in the times of the Old Testament, God's primary communication with His people was through the prophets and apostles. God spoke through individual servants, then often backed up what the servant said with signs and miracles. The sign or miracle was a mark of authenticity so the listener could know that the words being spoken by the servant were really from God. It was the proof of God speaking. This was why Paul was able to say to the Thessalonians that they received the words which they heard from Paul as the word of God, which it was (I Thessalonians 2:13). They did not have complete Bibles, but God gave Paul the power to perform miracles and signs, and they knew from this that Paul was speaking the truth from God.

We do not see servants like Mr. Armstrong and others performing great public signs and miracles in modern times. God certainly does perform miracles for the Church, but they are of the quiet variety, not designed to arouse public attention, or even very great attention within the Church.

But instead we have the word of God in a different form, not as words coming from the mouth of a miracle-working prophet or apostle, but in the form of the Bible. There are three things different about the Bible in modern times compared with the first century and earlier:

- 1) The Bible is complete. This was not true till near the end of the first century.
- 2) The Bible is widespread. Anyone can easily obtain a Bible in just about any language. This was not true before the invention of the printing press.
- 3) We have objective proof that the Bible is God speaking. Prophecy has been fulfilled in modern history, such as the prophecies concerning the lost tribes of Israel, and this fulfillment of prophecy provides the proof that the Bible is God's word. This replaces the kind of public miracles that were performed by the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament first-century apostles. It is the mark of authenticity that shows that God is the real author of the Bible, just as God in the past used miracles to show that he was speaking through Moses or Peter or Paul. This proof was not available before these prophecies were fulfilled in history, especially the prophecies concerning the lost tribes of Israel that have been fulfilled since around 1800 AD.

So in a sense, there has been somewhat of a change in the primary way God communicates His word to us. The emphasis today is on the Bible, and God uses his servants, such as Mr. Armstrong, to point us to where we can find the answers in the Bible.

I know that some hope and believe that before the end of the work of the Church of preaching the gospel to the world as a witness, and before the two witnesses, ministers and/or members of the Church will be empowered by God to perform public miracles, and this will grab attention and draw people towards the teaching of the Church and enable us to do a great work of preaching the gospel. They point to Mark 16:17-18 as evidence that miraculous signs will be with true Christians. But while God certainly does at times empower His servants with the power to perform miracles, it is evident in church history over the last century that dramatic, public, miraculous signs are not always present with true Christians in a way that draws great public attention.

It may be that God will empower ministers and members of the Church to perform public miracles before it is time to flee as a way of empowering the work of the Church of God of preaching the gospel to the world. Miracles would attract attention to the Church and its message and would provide evidence that our message is from God. But He might not empower us that way, for the following reason. God may choose to test people entirely on whether or not they will believe His Word, the Bible, without public miracles and signs. God wants people to believe His Word, the Bible, not just individuals who can work signs and wonders. So, the Church may have to do a great work of preaching the gospel without the benefit of many public miracles. God may

continue to test Israel the same way He has been testing them, with the Bible. God did not back up Mr. Armstrong with great public miracles to draw attention and prove to the public that he spoke the truth. Instead, God used Mr. Armstrong to challenge Israel to blow the dust off their Bibles and believe what God says in His Word. That has always been the test that Israel has had to face in modern times. God might not change the terms of the test. God may not make it easier for Israel to accept the truth by giving the Church power to perform many public signs and wonders. It may be that God will require the same thing he required when Mr. Armstrong was alive, "Blow the dust off your Bible and believe what God says." The test may be the same for everybody. Will people be willing to take the time away from TV, music, movies, video games, sports, etc. to actually read the Bible and believe what it says? That has been the test for this time so far, not "Will you believe someone who works miracles?" That is the test every person may have to face and pass if he is to escape the tribulation. This will change when the two witnesses are given power, but by that time the tribulation has started.

I truly believe that Mr. Armstrong held the office of apostle, and that he was no less an apostle in terms of rank and importance than the twelve apostles and Paul. But there are some differences between the way Christ used Mr. Armstrong in that office and the way Christ used the twelve apostles and Paul in that office. Jesus Christ taught the twelve and Paul directly, in person. They could ask Jesus questions. Jesus taught them face-to-face (Galatians 1:11-17, 1 Corinthians 9:1). Mr. Armstrong was taught by Christ, not in person, but through the Bible. This is why he taught us that as the apostle Paul learned from the Word of God in person (Jesus Christ), he (Mr. Armstrong) learned from the Word of God in print (the Bible), the same Word. Another difference is that the twelve and Paul worked public miracles that served as signs that they were apostles and that their message was from God (Mark 3:13-15, Matthew 10:5-8, 2 Corinthians 12:12). This was a proof to others. Mr. Armstrong was not used in that way. Miracles did occur, but they were not the type that attracted great public attention. Rather than pointing people to himself, Mr. Armstrong pointed people to the Bible. Paul had to point to himself in a stronger way as a source of the word of God because complete Bibles were not available (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul could not say, as Mr. Armstrong did, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible."

Between the time of Paul's writings and our time now, the Bible was completed, the printing press made the Bible widely available, and prophecy was fulfilled in history, especially since 1800, enabling any objective person to prove that the Bible is God speaking. The final change to occur was that God sent an apostle to point us to the Bible as no apostle ever did before. He build a culture in the Church of proving doctrine by the Bible, as was done in countless sermons by ministers during Sabbath services.

God speaks to the Church today through the Bible. Yet, as we get closer to the end, there may come a time when God speaks to the Church of God through prophets. This will be the case with the two witnesses, and whether or not God will use prophets to teach the Church before the time when the two witnesses are given power, I do not know. But God will not send a prophet who contradicts the Bible, and any prophet, if he is a true prophet, will teach doctrine consistent with the Bible and will show good

fruits, and this should include the good fruits of supporting the preaching of the gospel to the public.

I think one of the major things Christ used Mr. Armstrong for, and possibly Mr. Armstrong's greatest role and function, was to turn the Church of God to the Bible. That may be the major teaching and accomplishment of his apostleship.

Should Each Member Promote His Own Opinion?

Some members go to an opposite extreme. They are willing to learn new things, but they are so willing that they find what they think is new truth in the Bible, and then begin to advocate and promote this new truth among the members of their local congregation even when it contradicts the official teachings of the Church from headquarters. This causes division and confusion and violates God's instruction through Paul that we should strive to all speak the same thing. Notice 1 Corinthians 1:10: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." God is not the author of confusion and all things need to be done properly and in order.

I think the answer is that when a member discovers something in the Bible that seems like a new truth that the Church does not have or seems to contradict a doctrine the Church already believes, that in itself is not wrong. We all have different backgrounds, experiences, strengths, and weaknesses, and it is not unusual for different people to read the same scriptures and come up with different conclusions. Not only do our backgrounds and abilities vary, but some people may spend more time studying and researching a particular doctrine than even most ministers. None of us knows everything perfectly (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 13:9-12). In such a case, if the member thinks it is something that should be shared with the Church, he should go through proper channels and follow lawful procedures. He should not discuss any opinions he holds that contradict church doctrine with other members, but should submit it to his local pastor or to headquarters for evaluation and feedback. He should have a humble attitude and realize that he could be mistaken, and be willing to seriously consider the point of view of the Church if he is corrected in this. At the same time, the leadership of the Church has an obligation to examine the matter with an open mind using the Bible as final authority and to make the change for the whole Church if that change is indeed taught by the Bible, and if not, if the member is wrong, to show the member his error by going over it point-by-point with the Bible. If the member's position is rejected, the reasons would be explained to the member in detail so he could understand.

If after honest discussion the member still disagrees with the position of the Church, then in matters of conversation with and teaching of other members he should defer to the authority of those Christ has placed in a position of leadership and not promote his

opinions where they contradict the Church. The member should not lie and pretend agreement, but simply decline to discuss the matter with other members. The member can "put it on the shelf" so to speak, and wait for Christ to either help the member to understand his error or eventually help the church leadership to see that the change should be made. If neither one of these things occur, then when Christ returns He can answer all questions and we will know all doctrines more perfectly.

Should a member automatically believe whatever the Church teaches, even if it seems to contradict the Bible? I don't see how that can be the right course of action.

Whenever anyone sees something in the Bible that seems to contradict the doctrines of the Church, in his mind that person has to make a choice. The Bible is God's word.

Does that member believe and trust God more than the Church, or not? This is a test of faith, and we are required to believe God first. But we should all be humble and realize we can make errors and strive to have an open mind that is willing to be corrected if it is wrong.

When I first came into the Worldwide Church of God, the pastor of our congregation had explained the procedure of submitting doctrinal disagreements or suggestions for change to church authority for evaluation and decision. He did not say or imply that for a member to have a different view than the Church was wrong, but that things had to be done in an orderly way.

I once heard a minister say that he knew that God would never reveal new truth to him to give to the Church because he was only a local minister, and revealing new truth through him would be destructive of hierarchical government. I think he was trying to be tactful by referring to himself, but I think what he really meant was, "God will not reveal new knowledge to any of you members to give to the Church, because that would be destructive of hierarchical government." He seemed to be saying that God would never permit a lower ranking member to understand something before a higher ranking evangelist understands it, but I do not remember him giving any scriptural support to prove this. This makes no sense to me. It is not destructive of government if a member suggests changes to the ministry without promoting doctrine himself among the members. Correction and suggestions can be offered to those above one in authority, provided it is done privately in a respectful way, not in openly in front of others in a rebellious way designed to belittle the office or the man holding the office in the eyes of the people. An example from the Bible shows the attitude of one who rightly corrects someone over him.

2 Kings 5:1-8 tells how Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, came to Elisha to be healed of leprosy. The story continues starting with verse 9: "Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and *you shall* be clean.' But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, 'Indeed, I said to myself, "He will surely come out *to me*, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy." Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?' So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near and spoke to him,

and said, 'My father, *if* the prophet had told you *to do* something great, would you not have done *it*? How much more then, when he says to you, "Wash, and be clean"?' So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (2 Kings 5:9-14). Here is an example where a commander's servants corrected him, but respectfully out of concern for him, and he heeded their correction and was healed. Even in our day in corporations, which are hierarchical, employees are encouraged to submit suggestions. Companies encourage employees to make suggestions because they know that some valuable ideas and knowledge can come from the rank and file. When Mr. Armstrong submitted his ideas to the leadership of the Church of God Seventh Day, he had not yet been ordained a minister. Nevertheless, God was already revealing new truth to him through the Bible, which the Church of God Seventh Day leadership rejected. And the way Mr. Armstrong learned the truth about the Sabbath is also an example of one under authority offering correction or information to the one in authority. Mr. Armstrong first was challenged on the Sabbath by one under his authority, that is, his wife. God used Loma Armstrong to reveal new truth to Mr. Armstrong, which led to his conversion.

So it is not true that new knowledge or correction only comes from the top down.

Mr. Armstrong wrote this in an article entitled "Should We Listen to Others" I believe in the May 1960 issue of the Good News magazine: "In God's Church, we ministers do not tell you what to believe, and command you to believe us, without even looking into your Bible. That is what the Roman Catholic Church does -- but not God's Church." Later in the same article he wrote: "But suppose, when you study your own Bible, you come across something you feel is contrary to the teaching of the Church? Must you hide your eyes from what you see in your Bible? CERTAINLY NOT! Well then, can you go to other members with it, to set them straight? CERTAINLY NOT -- that would only tend to CAUSE DIVISION. The Bible teaches that we must all SPEAK THE SAME THING. Well, what shall you do, then? LISTEN! UNDERSTAND THIS! You MUST NOT go to any other member with what you feel you have found is contrary to the Church's teaching. Instead, YOU MUST BRING IT TO THE MINISTERS! If you are a member of a local congregation, take it to your pastor. Go into it WITH HIM -- but with NO ONE ELSE, lest you foment division, and be cast out of the Church! If there is no local pastor, bring it to one of God's ministers, or write it to HEADQUARTERS. God's ministers will go into it with you. If you are right -- if you have found any place in the Bible where we are in error, then WE WANT TO KNOW IT. We hate error, and love truth, even though the truth correct and reprove us! Bring it to us. If YOU are wrong, we will patiently show you, and explain it more perfectly to you. If we are wrong, we will correct it BEFORE THE WHOLE CHURCH, so that ALL the Church may, with one mind, believe the TRUTH, and speak the SAME THING!"

That explanation made sense to me. It still makes sense to me. It allows every person to believe the Bible first over human tradition or church authority. It allows the Church to be corrected by the Bible and grow in knowledge. And it prevents division and confusion because members do not promote their pet ideas among other members. We all speak the same thing because we all speak within the boundaries of doctrines set by

headquarters. But there is a mechanism in place for doctrinal disagreements to be resolved, even in the case where the Church is wrong, and for errors to be corrected.

This process preserves unity, peace, and order in the Church without violating the principle of absolute faith in God and His Word on the part of every member as well as the Church as a whole, without violating the principle of submission to God's government in the Church, and without violating the ninth commandment.

Did Mr. Armstrong Point to Himself as the Authority for Belief?

Some may point out statements Mr. Armstrong made to the Church pointing to himself as the authority for doctrine. I know that Mr. Armstrong made such statements. I have heard Mr. Armstrong say, "God puts all doctrine into the Church through the apostle." In the context of the times, I think he was referring to putting doctrine into the official teachings of the Church so that the Church is consistent in what it is teaching. This is in support of the principle that a member who disagrees with a doctrine should not promote his opinions among the members, but rather submit proposed doctrinal changes to the ministry or headquarters for evaluation and decision. This does not override the principle that the Bible must come first in our beliefs.

Mr. Armstrong said, in reference to his book, *Mystery of the Ages*, "...I worked very hard on it...and out of it has come the most important book by far that God has ever written through me, and I think God wrote it through me." This may have been in the 1984 Feast of Tabernacles opening night message or first day message. When he said that God wrote it through him, did he mean it carried the same authority as the Bible? I don't think so, because I remember he has also said, on another occasion, perhaps in an address to Ambassador College students, that *Mystery of the Ages* is not Scripture.

On one occasion I think I heard him say that we all need to speak the same thing, and he said that this means we have to believe the same thing. I do not remember which sermon this is from but I think it was from a sermon late in his life, around 1984 or 1985. He wrote something similar in *Mystery of the Ages*, in the chapter on the Mystery of the Church, where he says that there must be no division in what is believed.

I have heard him say, I believe in the 1985 first day of unleavened bread sermon: "And there are many of you women sitting right here that are keeping paint off your faces just because I said you have to, and your heart isn't in it. And you better get your hearts right with God. You call me God's apostle. You better listen to what I say."

In these statements, did Mr. Armstrong intend to point to himself and his authority as an apostle as the source of what church members should believe in regards to doctrine? Was he saying we should let him interpret the Bible for us, and that in matters of

doctrine we should believe what he tells us the scriptures mean, based on his authority from God as God's apostle?

I did not know Mr. Armstrong personally. I only know about what he taught by what he said in articles, books, broadcasts, and sermons. In these sermon messages to the Church in the later years of his life, was he saying or implying that if we see something in the Bible different from what he taught us, we should believe him more than the Bible? Was he saying we should let him interpret the Bible for us rather than let the Bible interpret itself? Was he saying that God was speaking directly through him and that he was therefore infallible in his teachings? Was he saying our faith should be in his words and doctrines because he was God's apostle? I never knew him personally or even met him, and I never had the opportunity to ask him, but if this was his intended meaning it would not be consistent with what I have heard him say in earlier articles, books, and broadcasts, and it would not be consistent with his own teaching and example in his autobiography. That is not how he himself lived. He NEVER would have believed a man, any man, more than the Bible.

These statements were made at a time when we had recently gone through rebellions against authority, and Mr. Armstrong and the ministry had long experience dealing with individuals who stirred up division, confusion, and rebellion by unlawfully promoting their own pet doctrines among the brethren. Mr. Armstrong's statements pointing to his authority as an apostle should be seen in that context. Many of the problems that he and other ministers had to deal with in matters of division over doctrine would never have occurred if those who had different opinions submitted their suggestions lawfully to Mr. Armstrong and the ministry and did not discuss or promote them among the members.

However, if his views had indeed changed, if he came to view himself as an authority for doctrine that we must believe, even to the extent of having the members let him decide what verses in the Bible mean rather than letting the Bible interpret the Bible and putting the Bible first in our belief, and if this was what he was teaching the Church, then look at the fruits of this teaching. Compare the fruits of the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s when most members and co-workers were hearing Mr. Armstrong on the radio placing emphasis on the Bible, with the fruits of the 1980s and 1990s after Mr. Armstrong emphasized to the members in taped sermons that God put all doctrine into the Church through the apostle. You can also look at the fruit of those groups today that teach that Mr. Armstrong's teachings cannot be changed. Do they exhibit brotherly love towards their members and towards each other? Do these groups even get along with each other?

When I look at Mr. Armstrong's entire life and teaching since his conversion, what I see is that the predominant doctrine he taught and practiced is that God speaks directly through the Bible, that the Bible is the Word of God in print just as Jesus Christ is the Word of God in person, that the Bible, not any man, is infallible, that we have to let the Bible interpret itself, and that we must believe what God says, the Bible, first.

That is how he himself tried to live, and that is the example he set for us.

I would summarize Mr. Armstrong's whole life and teachings in three words: Believe the Bible.

Were Mr. Armstrong's Teachings Infallibly Correct at his Death?

There are some who believe that because Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah to restore all things and that he was God's apostle, that his teachings therefore must have been infallibly correct at the time of his death and cannot be changed. Some of those who believe this may acknowledge that Mr. Armstrong made mistakes during his life, even mistakes in doctrinal matters, but say that those mistakes were corrected before he died. They will then point to *Mystery of the Ages* as their source of doctrine and authority for what they believe, and they often seem to speak of it as if it is equal in authority to the Bible, or almost equal, depending on who you talk to and how they express it.

Mr. Armstrong completed *Mystery of the Ages* shortly before his death. AFTER writing *Mystery of the Ages*, Mr. Armstrong made this statement in a sermon message to the Church. He said, "Your faith must not be in me, it must be in Jesus Christ. He's the head of the Church, I'm not. And if I were not here, there would be another who would become the pastor general. And if that should ever happen, if you want into get into God's Kingdom you will follow that pastor general. And you will remain united and you will remain one. And your eternity depends on that, every one of you, don't you forget it." This was in the 1985 Day of Trumpets sermon. I know this was AFTER *Mystery of the Ages* was completed because it was a few days later at the Feast of Tabernacles when the copies of the book were distributed to the membership.

Here is my question for those who claim that *Mystery of the Ages* cannot contain any error because Mr. Armstrong's teachings were infallibly correct by the time he wrote it: Was his statement about another man to become pastor general after Mr. Armstrong's death infallibly correct and free from error? Mr. Armstrong is on record as saying that each one of us needed to follow the pastor general that would succeed Mr. Armstrong if we want to make it into God's Kingdom. That pastor general was Joseph Tkach. Is it true that we needed to follow Joseph Tkach if we wanted to be in God's Kingdom? Is that a true statement? Is it free from error, infallibly correct, something we must believe because it came from God's apostle, the Elijah to restore all things?

Mr. Tkach, the pastor general that Mr. Armstrong said we must follow in order to make it into God's Kingdom, reversed virtually everything or almost everything that Mr. Armstrong taught!

Now, was Mr. Armstrong infallible at the time of his death? Were all his teachings correct and free from error? This statement he made, about following the pastor general that would succeed him, is just as much a part of Mr. Armstrong's teachings as the book *Mystery of the Ages*. This statement was part of a sermon Mr. Armstrong gave to the

Church. It was his TEACHING, just as much as anything he wrote. It was one of the last things he taught the Church, shortly after finishing *Mystery of the Ages*.

And it was wrong.

And in the resurrection, after Mr. Armstrong learns what happened in the Church after his death, I am sure he will be the first to admit that his statement about following Mr. Tkach was wrong, that it was a mistake.

Those who say we can never change Mr. Armstrong's teachings should state whether they think it is okay to change his teaching that we should follow Mr. Tkach if we want to be in God's Kingdom.

I do not intend this as a reflection against Mr. Armstrong. It was God's decision to allow this in order to test the Church and to teach us lessons. But it does prove a point, and it may be that one of the reasons God allowed Mr. Armstrong to make this statement was to teach us the lesson that our faith must be in the Bible, not any leader in the Church of God, even if that leader is an apostle or the Elijah to come. We should always respect the office, but the Bible must come first in our beliefs and obedience.

Neither Mr. Armstrong nor his writings nor his sermons were infallible and free from error at the end of his life. Only the Bible is infallibly true, and we need to be grounded in the Bible, not *Mystery of the Ages*. The best way we can follow the way of life God showed us through Mr. Armstrong is to follow Mr. Armstrong's example of always striving to put the Bible first in our beliefs and obedience, to learn new knowledge from the Bible, and to let the Bible correct and rebuke us in our doctrines and behavior.

The Eighteen Truths

I have previously made reference to the eighteen truths Mr. Armstrong restored to the Church of God. Probably most Church of God members are familiar with this, but I want to give some background information, and then I want to make a few comments about the role of the list of eighteen truths in our faith and our beliefs.

In a sermon Mr. Armstrong gave to the Church, I believe on December 17, 1983, Mr. Armstrong listed a number of truths God restored to the Church through him. These included the major doctrines of the Church that Mr. Armstrong introduced, truths that the Church of God Seventh Day did not have, such as the modern identity of Israel, the holy days and the plan of God, God's purpose in reproducing Himself in man, etc. In some sermons after this, Mr. Armstrong mentioned that seventeen or eighteen truths had been restored. Later, in *Mystery of the Ages*, Mr. Armstrong wrote that at least eighteen major truths were restored to the true Church of God since 1933. I have explained most of these doctrines in chapters one through three.

These doctrines became known as the eighteen truths.

A number of lists of the eighteen truths have been published after Mr. Armstrong died, but they can vary among themselves, primarily because Mr. Armstrong did not number the truths and did not even give the total number as "eighteen" when he listed them in the original sermon. The number "eighteen" comes from later sermons and from *Mystery of the Ages*, but *Mystery of the Ages* does not list or itemize these doctrines by number. Any list of eighteen truths is built by putting together the number "eighteen" from *Mystery of the Ages* and the actual doctrines mentioned in the sermon given by Mr. Armstrong, or in other places. But because Mr. Armstrong did not number the doctrines in the sermon or anywhere else, there can be differences of opinion about where one doctrine leaves off and another begins. That is why lists of these doctrines compiled after Mr. Armstrong's death can vary.

Since the scattering of the Church, many have used these eighteen truths as a kind of "litmus test" of faithfulness to the things Mr. Armstrong taught. In effect, this list has been used as a substitute for a statement of beliefs that some have used to measure faithfulness to true doctrine in the Church. Some believe that to be in the Philadelphia condition we need to "hold fast" to the eighteen truths, as Jesus admonished the Philadelphia Church to hold fast to what they have (Revelation 3:11). Thus, some use allegiance to the eighteen truths as a test to judge if a Church is in the Philadelphia condition.

Is this a proper use of the eighteen truths? Is this what Mr. Armstrong intended? More importantly, is a list of doctrines what Christ had in mind when he told Philadelphia to "hold fast"?

Is holding fast to the eighteen truths a sign of the Philadelphia Church?

I think it is important to note that Mr. Armstrong never published a formal list of eighteen restored truths while he was alive. All such lists were published after he died using what Mr. Armstrong said in that sermon and the number "eighteen" from *Mystery of the Ages* and other sermons. This suggests to me that Mr. Armstrong did not intend a list of eighteen truths to be a kind of "statement of beliefs" or an "apostle's creed" that everyone was to hold fast to. The title and subject of Mr. Armstrong's sermon was, "the mission of the Philadelphia Era of the Church", and I believe the context shows that Mr. Armstrong's purpose in listing the truths to be restored is to show how we have been given something special and we have a special work and mission to perform. These restored truths are a blessing from God, and we should appreciate them, but we should also have a sense of responsibility to do the work that God has called us to do, and to share these truths with others. This is along the lines of the principle that "to whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). I think this was one of the main reasons why Mr. Armstrong reviewed the restored truths in that sermon.

My point is that at no time did Mr. Armstrong publish a formal list of eighteen restored doctrines, command the Church of God to remain faithful and hold fast to those doctrines, and make belief in the list a litmus test of being in the Philadelphia condition. He could have done that. But he didn't.

What is the role of the eighteen truths? Should we hold fast to them?

Yes, provided we do so for the right reason.

I agree with the eighteen truths, and I think they can serve as an excellent summary of the truth of God, but I think we should believe them for the right reason. We should believe them because we can prove them from the Bible, not because they are our tradition or because Mr. Armstrong taught them. And I do not think holding fast to the eighteen truths is the definitive test of whether or not a church member is in the Philadelphia condition. One can believe all eighteen truths and still be a Laodicean. And these doctrines were revealed DURING the Philadelphia era, which means members have been true Philadelphians even before all of these truths had been restored. So allegiance to the eighteen truths is not necessarily a defining characteristic of a Philadelphian Christian. But I think allegiance to the Bible, the Word of God, is. And it is the Bible that is the source of the eighteen truths.

What is Jesus Christ referring to when He tells Philadelphia to hold fast? What are they to hold fast to? If you read the message in Revelation 3:7-13, you will notice that before Christ tells Philadelphia to hold fast, He commends them for four things: 1) you have a little strength, 2) you have kept My word, 3) you have not denied My name, 4) you have kept My command to persevere. These are all things that Philadelphia has. Then Christ says, "hold fast to what you have."

What are we to hold fast to? Other than "what you have", Christ doesn't specify. Is He referring to the things He has already mentioned, such as keeping His word, not denying His name, and keeping His command to persevere, or is He referring to a list of doctrines restored during the time of the Philadelphia era? To know this, Philadelphians have to use the spiritual discernment God gives to them based on principles taught in the Bible.

The message to Philadelphia is a message for the entire Philadelphian era. That includes those members during the late 1930s, the 1940s, the 1950s, etc. I don't think the eighteen truths were complete then. Mr. Armstrong was learning them from the Bible one point at a time during those early years and afterwards. So how could Philadelphians in those early years hold fast to doctrines they had not received yet because they were in the process of being restored?

But what they could hold fast to was what Mr. Armstrong and those who learned from him had from the beginning, a willingness to believe the Bible, to be corrected from the Bible, and to learn new knowledge from the Bible ("you...have kept My word"), and a zeal for taking what is learned from the Bible and preaching it to the world. I think this is one of the primary things Christ wants us to hold fast to.

Each Philadelphian Christian must use the wisdom and discernment that God gives to Philadelphia to understand what Christ is telling Philadelphia to hold fast to. I personally believe He is telling us to hold fast to the Bible, the Word of God, rather than an itemized list of doctrines, because allegiance to the Bible is a weightier matter than any itemized list of doctrines. Which is greater, a list of true doctrines, or the Bible from which those doctrines come? I say the Bible is greater. Another thing

Philadelphia has and should hold fast to is zeal for preaching the gospel to the world. And if God's name represents His authority, and I believe it does, then Christ is also telling us to hold fast to government ("you... have not denied My name"). Holding fast to government can include the understanding that Christ leads the Church from the top-down and can include respect for government in the Church.

I believe that holding fast to the eighteen truths can be included in what we are to hold fast to, IF we hold fast to the eighteen truths because we can prove them from the Bible and we are holding fast to the Bible.

How do we implement this? How do we put holding fast to the Bible into action? It may be that there will be no major new doctrines revealed between now and the return of Christ. It may be that God will not use major doctrinal change to test the Church to see if we are willing to change our beliefs to follow the Bible, as God tested Mr. Armstrong with the Sunday vs. Sabbath issue or the way God tested Church of God Seventh Day on the identity of the lost tribes of Israel. But God can know our hearts and read our attitudes and test us in other ways, such as whether we approach the Bible in an attitude of belief and if we prove the things we believe from the Bible. All of us should prove what we believe from the Bible. Everyone should believe doctrine because it is what the Bible teaches, not because of tradition or Church teaching. Ministers who preach should use the Bible to support and prove their teachings, not tradition or Church authority. Ministers and headquarters should examine doctrinal questions or proposed changes from members with an open mind and make changes if necessary to follow the Bible as accurately as possible, no matter how it might upset some members who want to hold to their traditions. If conclusions of Bible research done at headquarters are announced to the Church, then sufficient Bible evidence to prove the conclusions should be offered to those who request it, in the form of a booklet, article, or study paper, so that the members can check this out with the Bible and look up the proof themselves, and so their faith can be in the Word of God, not in Church leaders.

Mr. Armstrong placed heavy emphasis on believing the Bible.

In a sermon given, I believe on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread in 1985, about 52 minutes into the recording, he said, "I only know what God says. When I tell you these things, I'm only telling you what God reveals and you can check up on it. It's all in the Bible, and you can see it the same as I can. I'm not giving you things that I made up in my mind. I didn't originate the truths that I teach. But I learned them the same way the apostle Paul did, directly from Jesus Christ. But you see, Jesus Christ in person was on earth and taught Paul, and the Bible is Jesus Christ in writing. It's the same Word exactly. And Jesus Christ in person was the Word of God, and the Bible in print is the Word of God, and they're both the same. I just learned it from the printed Word and he learned it from the verbal Word and from Jesus in person who spoke to him. But the Word is the same, precisely the same."

In the first two minutes of the sermon in which Mr. Armstrong spoke of the truths restored to the Church, the same sermon dated December 17, 1983 on the mission of the Philadelphia era of the Church I have talked about above, he said: "It's been seeming

more and more to me, as the years go by, that the Bible was written primarily for the Philadelphia era of the Church. It has not been understood previously to now. The Bible was not all written yet during the beginning of the Church during the Ephesian era, the first era of the Church, until close to the end of the first century. The Bible was not complete. There was no printing. Every copy had to be written carefully, slowly, one copy at a time by hand, and by copyists. There were not very many of them. The average person never saw one."

In a sermon recording I found on the Internet dated 1984 on the label (I do not know the exact date), Mr. Armstrong said this: "The Church lost so much of its truth. Now there were three elements, basic elements of truth, that the Church still had when I first came among them. That was, the name of the Church, the Church of...[interruption in the recording when the tape was turned over]...in the Bible, it's modified the location of the Church, as to where they're located, and so on. Well we do that today. Today it's not in any one place or city or district, it's worldwide, so we call it Worldwide Church of God, which is true, truly according to the Bible, the correct Bible name of the Church. They had the tithing system, with tithes holy to God, and something else that is holy to God, His Sabbath day. And they had the truth of the law of God, and they knew that sin was the transgression of the law. There were seventeen other major points of doctrine that they had lost, and God has restored all of those to the Church through His apostle. Now all twenty are here, and if more are to be restored we shall accept them as fast as God reveals them." Notice that Mr. Armstrong says that if more points of doctrine are to be restored, "WE" (not "I") shall accept them as fast as God reveals them.

Is what Mr. Armstrong has said in the quotes above consistent with what I said, that Christ wants Philadelphia to hold fast to the Bible? Is it consistent with what I have said, that we need to be willing to learn new truth from the Bible? And could the Bible be what Christ is referring to when He praises Philadelphia because they "have kept My word"? I think the answers to all these questions are yes.

Mr. Armstrong emphasized that we should believe the Bible, be willing to be corrected by the Bible, learn new truth from the Bible, and grow in grace and in knowledge. Add to that an emphasis on preaching the gospel and on government. Those three things. Not holding to a list of doctrines.

One more quote from Mr. Armstrong, from his 1985 First Day of Unleavened Bread sermon, speaking of his early years with the Church of God Seventh Day when Mr. Armstrong first learned the truth about the holy days: "And for seven years we kept these days alone. I explained these days to the Church that we regard now as the Sardis era of the Church, but it was the Church of God down in the Willamette valley of Oregon. They laughed me to scorn. They would have nothing to do with the annual Sabbaths. They kept the weekly Sabbath, but they would go no further. In other words they would do what they had been doing all their lives. They had been taught by their parents I guess. But they would go no further. They would not grow in grace or in knowledge."

It is the willingness to learn new knowledge from the Bible that is the major thing that set the Philadelphia era of the Church apart from the Sardis era.

I think willingness to believe and obey what God says in the Bible is one of the major things Philadelphia Christians have that they should hold fast to.

A Possible Problem in the Church

A problem that can exist today in certain groups is the policy of church leadership of viewing suggestions for changes to doctrine from members as a sign of arrogance and rebellion. There can be a prejudice against new ideas and against anyone who would suggest a new idea. Members who offer suggestions for change may be accused of being presumptuous. And along with that, the leadership may promote the idea that ministers and members should accept decisions from headquarters as being right because we have faith that Christ is leading the Church, thus implying that God would not allow the ministry to make mistakes. The idea is suggested that we should exercise faith in Christ by believing that the doctrines and decisions from headquarters are correct, and to question or doubt those decisions shows a lack of faith in Christ's leadership.

This reminds me of the Catholic teaching on church government, which I came out of. They teach that the Pope is Christ's representative on earth, and when he speaks officially on matters of church doctrine, he is infallible. The Bible means what the church interprets it to mean and lay members are not to have their own private interpretation. Only the church can interpret the Bible correctly because the pope is led by and inspired by Christ. To doubt the pope means to doubt Christ.

Some ministers in the Church of God, in justifying decisions of the leadership, will say, "Christ leads the Church", but when they say this they seem to me to be implying, "Ministers in the Church follow Christ perfectly", which is not necessarily correct.

When I was in Worldwide in the days of Mr. Armstrong, I was taught something different. No one said the Church was infallible or that Mr. Armstrong did not make mistakes, but we were told that if there is a problem in the Church we should trust Christ to correct the problem in due time. In other words, trusting Christ to lead the Church did not mean believing that every decision or doctrine of the Church was right, but that if a decision or doctrine was wrong, Christ would fix it eventually. The emphasis was on waiting for Christ to correct an error and not taking matters into our own hands by quitting the Church or creating division. The teaching was not that Mr. Armstrong and the ministers never made mistakes, but that Christ would eventually correct their mistakes in one way or another.

The problem with believing that church decisions must be correct because Christ leads the Church is that Christ does not remove free moral agency and force any leader to do what is right. This means Christ can only lead someone to the extent they are willing to follow Him by following the Bible. And even when a leader is willing to follow Christ,

Christ does not always protect the leader from making mistakes. Even Mr. Armstrong made mistakes, and he was very willing to believe and follow the Bible. How much more are other leaders able to make mistakes?

Members sometimes make suggestions to the ministry or government in the Church out of an attitude of wanting to help and serve. These suggestions can even take the form of suggestions for doctrinal change based on Scripture. A member may even be concerned about Christ's rebuke of those who, out of fear, want to bury their talent in the sand (Matthew 25:24-29). Not wanting to fall into that category, a member who feels he has been given some insight or understanding in something that the church leadership might not have may want to share it with the ministry. Yet often, such suggestions are ridiculed and rejected as being presumptuous and rebellious. Even so, a member might not be told why his suggestion is wrong or given any meaningful feedback. The member might simply be told, "We have studied this before and here is our conclusion", without showing the member his error, as if the ministry could not have made a mistake or overlooked a point of scripture or logic in studying the matter in the past. Also, wrong motives are often imputed to the member who offers such suggestions. Yet the ministry may advise members, in a sermon or article on how brethren should get along with each other, to avoid imputing motives to the actions of others and not make assumptions or jump to conclusions about the motivations of another person.

The Bible teaches us to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered" (Jude 1:3). Although we should respect government and not become upset over minor disagreements, there is clearly a point when the foundation for our faith is challenged, when a member or minister may be motivated to take a stand. For me, the issue is the authority of the Bible. When someone tells me or implies to me that I should believe ministerial authority or church tradition more than what I read in my own Bible, they are challenging the very foundation of my faith. They are teaching me a wrong faith when they justify their doctrinal positions, not by proving them point-by-point from the Bible, but by referring to our traditions or church government for proof of a doctrine. This is what they do when they ridicule a different position by making the "accusation" that this is different from the long-time position of the Church, or from what Mr. Armstrong has taught, or what the ministers in the Church have already studied and decided. I spent too many hours over too many years proving that the Bible is God's word to think that this is a minor issue.

Some ministers may point out that if everyone forms their own opinion about what Scripture means, we will have a situation of confusion and division comparable to Israel's condition in the book of Judges where every man did what was right in his own eyes. But I have already explained that government in the Church exists to establish official positions of what will be taught in the Church, and members should not discuss their differences with the Church among other members, but rather should offer them to the government in the Church, not promoting them among the brethren in opposition to the government. This process preserves unity. Promoting opinions to the brethren is not the issue. The issue is that the ministry does not have dominion over our faith (2 Corinthians 1:24). The head of every man is Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). Mr. Armstrong often equated Jesus Christ with the Bible, saying that the Bible is the Word of God in print and Jesus Christ is the Word of God in person, the same Word. This is

also backed up by the Bible, which uses the term "word of God" to apply both to Scripture and to Jesus Christ (John 1:1-2, Revelation 19:11-16, John 10:34-35, Mark 7:10-13). To follow Christ means to follow the Bible.

It is not a matter of what members say to other members, but what they believe. I can respect government by not discussing where I think a Church may be wrong in doctrine with members of the Church I am a member of or attend with, but I better believe the Bible more than the ministry or I am in trouble with God.

Also, the ministry itself has an obligation to be honest with the scriptures and be willing to look at possible errors or new knowledge with an open mind. That is expected. When I come to services to hear a sermon, I expect the minister to teach from the Bible and to prove his major points from the Bible, and I expect headquarters to make every effort to make sure that the Church's teachings are from the Bible and are as accurate as possible. This is the foundation of everything Mr. Armstrong taught us. I have to be able to have some trust that this is being done in the Church if I am to have any trust in the teachings of the Church. I don't think I am the only member who believes this. When church government does not follow this policy but rather teaches according to its own authority as the government of God ("Christ is the head of the Church and He leads the ministry") or according to our tradition, and uses this to justify doctrine instead of the Bible while ridiculing those who have "different ideas", that comes across to me as a betrayal of trust. I came into the Church trusting the ministers to teach me because I trusted that Mr. Armstrong and the Church get all their teachings from the Bible and are willing to learn new knowledge from the Bible, and even be corrected from the Bible when they are in error. If that is no longer true, then trust is damaged.

I sometimes get the impression in listening to sermons that some ministers do not deal honestly with the scriptures as Mr. Armstrong did. I cannot trust ministers once I find they use scripture dishonestly, unfaithfully, twisting it and putting whatever meaning into it they already have in their minds. When they do that they are getting between me and God, misrepresenting what God is saying, and I cannot allow myself to be influenced by that. There is too much at stake. When this happens in the Church, I feel that I am hearing the voice of a stranger, not of Christ (John 10:27, 5). Many of us heard the voice of strangers in our former association, but sometimes we may still hear the voice of a stranger even in churches that claim allegiance to Mr. Armstrong's doctrines.

I am not advocating that every member interpret the Bible for himself, believing his own ideas and making the scriptures fit what he wants to believe. But neither should the ministry be doing this. Mr. Armstrong taught us that we should never interpret the Bible because the Bible interprets itself. What did he mean by this? I think he was making the point that we should not put our ideas into the Bible, but we should be honest with the scriptures accepting what the Bible really says without prejudice. We should put scriptures together, consider the context of each scripture, and let clear scriptures interpret unclear scriptures. But we should not let our traditions interpret the Scripture, or let government in the Church interpret the Scripture. The Catholic Church uses their traditions and their authority to interpret the Bible, but we must be different.

Following the Bible -- Pattern of Government

Anyone who teaches the public that they should strive to follow the Bible in their beliefs and practices should strive to do the same. Oftentimes we can be sincere in believing we are following the Bible, yet be in error because we may assume things without being diligent to research and prove them, or we may allow our preconceived opinions and preferences to influence our conclusions without realizing it. We all tend to make these kinds of errors, and we must continuously strive to be in an attitude of being willing to research what we believe in the Bible with an open mind and to root out any errors in our doctrines and practices. This takes time and effort, but I believe God is pleased with those who make this effort and have an attitude that is willing to admit mistakes and change. This also sets a right example for anyone we may teach. I believe God will bless the efforts of those who preach the gospel with this attitude.

One of the controversial subjects in the scattered Church of God is the issue of government in the Church. Mr. Armstrong taught that God's government in the Church is hierarchical from the top down, but some members today do not agree with this. Many of them may believe that recent experience shows the dangers of "one man rule", and that the Church is better served by a system of checks and balances that will prevent a leader from becoming powerful enough to change major doctrines against the will of the majority of the ministers and members. Ministers and members who are concerned about this may prefer a form of governance in which ministers vote for a board of directors and/or a president and board chairman who then govern the Church.

I believe this view is in error and that the Bible does indeed teach that God's government in the Church is hierarchical.

Mr. Armstrong taught us that God's government is always hierarchical, government from the top down. Although Mr. Armstrong had men who could advise him, and the Bible teaches that in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 24:6, 15:22, and 11:14), Mr. Armstrong made final decisions without being subject to the voting or balloting of a body of men. He reported directly to Jesus Christ in the administration of the Church and the work of God.

Hierarchical government has been an issue in the Church of God since the scattering of the Church after the doctrinal changes in Worldwide. Although a number of major Church of God organizations practice hierarchical government, at least one large group does not. Rather, the ministry of that Church gathers periodically to vote to elect members of a board of about twelve men. I believe the board then votes to elect a chairman and a president, and these men lead the Church. They call their voting "balloting". Nevertheless, it is government by democracy, not hierarchical government.

The Bible teaches us about God's government, and every example shown is hierarchical government from the top down. There are certainly cases where the leadership relied

on advice and counsel of those under them, such as when the apostles relied on the advice of the membership in appointing deacons, but always the authority came from the top down. Only the apostles had the authority to actually ordain men as deacons, not the membership of the Church. The way these leaders used the advice of those under them before making a decision is not much different than a pastor "polling" his members to see if they prefer morning or afternoon Sabbath services. It in no way diminishes the top-down authority of the leader.

Some make a point of saying that the Bible does not explicitly state that it is wrong to vote or that government must always be from the top down. But the Bible does not have to state something that it shows by example after example. The Bible SHOWS us God's government in action. We can SEE from every example that it is hierarchical. God does not need to state what He clearly shows us.

You can find example after example in both old and new testaments of those who hold office being appointed by someone over them, but there is not one example in the Bible of God appointing a leader of Israel or in the Church of God through a system of voting.

It think it should also be obvious, although I suppose it might not be for some, that in the Kingdom of God we will not be establishing who will hold a certain position of authority in the family of God by those under the authority of the position electing by vote or ballot the person who will be over them, and doing this for all eternity. We are being taught and prepared for our eternity in the Kingdom of God, and we are not learning the lessons we need to learn by practicing democracy in the Church of God.

I think that those who take the view that voting men into positions of authority in the Church is sanctioned by the Bible may be basing this on a misunderstanding of Acts chapter one. Some say that Acts 1:15-26 suggests or implies that the 120 voted for two candidates to replace Judas. But this passage does not indicate this at all. It only says that Peter stated that someone had to replace Judas and that "they" (whoever "they" were), proposed two. It does not even seem clear to me if the "they" referred to the eleven apostles or to the 120 disciples. But in any case, where does it say that the proposing was done by voting? And if it was done by voting, why select two, and then cast lots for the two? Why not select three, or four and cast lots to decide between them? Or why not go all the way and just "elect" one?

The entire 120 would probably have included both men and women in every type of circumstance, including some that were elderly. They also would have included people who became disciples of Jesus at various times during His ministry including some that may have come relatively recently. The qualification to replace Judas included being with Jesus during His entire ministry from the baptism of John until He ascended into heaven, and it would be obvious that the women and the elderly who could not stand the rigors of the work ahead would not be qualified. Some may have eliminated themselves from consideration for one reason or another. This could easily have eliminated all but two. Consider that many who became disciples of Jesus came with Him at various times during His three-and-a-half year ministry. There was even a time when many of His disciples left him, and the implication is strong that most of His disciples left him except for the twelve and a few others (John 6:66-67). But the one to replace Judas had

to be continuously among Jesus' disciples in order to be a witness with the other eleven. Eliminate the women, eliminate the elderly and those who remove themselves from consideration for one reason or another, and eliminate those who were not continuously among Jesus Christ's disciples through His whole ministry, and it is quite understandable that there would be only two.

The "proposing" could easily have simply been a discussion and sorting out to determine which men who were fit out of the 120 were among the disciples from the beginning and remained with Jesus continuously to the end. There could have been complete agreement as to who these were, and there were only two. Then lots were cast to determine God's will in the matter.

If there were 10 or 20 qualified men, why would they vote to elect two, then let God pick one of the two? Was God only a tie-breaker in this "election"? Why wouldn't they let God choose among all the qualified candidates by casting lots for all 10 or 20? Or if voting was proper, why not vote between the two and save God the trouble of choosing between the two?

There is no indication here of an election by the democratic process of voting or "balloting" that I can see.

There may also be cases today, even in a Church that acknowledges top-down government, where a church leader is so tied to the advice and approval of the ministers who support him, that even though he has authority, he is afraid to use it without the agreement of the other ministers. In other words, he would not make a doctrinal change, even if he sees in the Bible that a change is needed in order for the Church to live by every word of God, unless he can win the support of the top ministry for the change. If all of his "multitude of counselors" advise against the change, the leader will not make it. I think this is a wrong application of the principle of getting advice before making a decision. The purpose of the advisors is to point out to the leader aspects of the decision that the leader may not have considered, or to provide information the leader may not have. But the decision is the leader's, and sometimes he may have to go contrary to the wishes of all his advisors. The leader must submit to Christ, not a board of directors or counsel of elders. It may be that God would test such a man by giving him the discernment to know God's will in a matter, but not giving that discernment to his advisors. Would the man be faithful to God and fulfill God's will according to the Bible, or will he do the will of his advisors to maintain their support? This can be a test.

There are examples in the Bible where a leader had to make a decision contrary to advice given him. Look at the life of David. When he was fleeing from Saul, and the Philistines attacked, his men did not want to fight the Philistines, but David relied on God and did God's will, not the will of his men (I Samuel 23:1-5). On other occasions, those with David advised him to kill Saul when he had the opportunity, but David refused to follow that advice because God had given David spiritual discernment about God's will that God had not given to David's men and advisors (I Samuel 24:4-7, I Samuel 26:8-12). The same can be true in the Church of God today. The leader of a Church organization under Jesus Christ may see the need to make a doctrinal change because the Bible teaches the change, and God may give that leader the discernment to

understand the Bible, but the other ministers and close advisors may advise against it. If the leader is teaching the public to live by every word of the Bible, and if he wants to make sure that he is doing what he teaches others to do, then I would think he must make the change that the Bible indicates, even if it is against the will of his advisors and even if he risks losing their support, the support of his ministers, and the support of the membership by doing it.

The leader has to be willing to practice what he teaches even if it is hard. Otherwise, he can hurt his credibility, his effectiveness, and lose blessings and support he needs from God to finish the work of preaching the gospel to the world and the Ezekiel warning to Israel.

For more discussion of the issue of Church of God governance, see Chapter 8 - Government in the Church of God.

Proving the Truth

This is not the main point of this chapter, but I have mentioned how Mr. Armstrong proved things, and towards the end of the chapter I will explain in more detail how Mr. Armstrong proved the truth, and I think there is a point to be made about proving the things we believe that would be useful for members of one or more particular churches, and this is a good place to talk about it.

Among the various Churches of God that trace their roots to Herbert W. Armstrong, there are one or more Church of God organizations that may seem to place great importance on Mr. Armstrong and his teachings, and they also say that it is very important to know who God is working through today. I have also heard that one or more of these organizations strictly instruct and command their members to not read any literature from any other church including other Churches of God that claim to be continuing in the teachings of Mr. Armstrong. I have heard this about at least one Church of God that came out of Worldwide relatively early, before most other Churches of God did so.

I also notice that one or more Churches of God may place a very heavy emphasis on the principle of God working through a man. It seems to me that those who say this are in effect saying that we should follow that man alone, even to the point of letting that man interpret the Bible for the membership and believing that man's interpretation, even without real proof from the Bible that his interpretations of Scripture are correct. In this view, we follow God by following the man.

Is this all consistent? Didn't Mr. Armstrong teach by word and example that we prove what is true by looking at both sides of an issue?

The Bible teaches us, and Mr. Armstrong taught us, that we are to "prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). If knowing who God is working through today is important, then this should be one of those things we should prove and not carelessly assume that we know without proof.

How do we prove something? Mr. Armstrong taught us by his example in his autobiography that to prove something we have to look at both sides of an issue. The Bible also teaches this, in Proverbs 18:17: "The first *one* to plead his cause *seems* right, until his neighbor comes and examines him." You can't prove anything by looking at only one side or one set of arguments. The first side will always look right if that is the only side you look at. You have to look at both sides with an open mind. Mr. Armstrong set the example. When he set out to prove whether or not evolution was true, he looked at both sides. He read everything he could against evolution, but he also read everything he could in favor of evolution. When he set out to learn the truth about which day is the Christian Sabbath, he looked at both sides. He read everything in favor of Sunday keeping as well as everything against it and in favor of the seventh-day Sabbath. He taught us to GET THE FACTS. There is even a speech in the Spokesman Club manual called "Get the Facts".

In regards to the question of "Where is God working today?" or, as it could be phrased, "Who is God working through today?", how does one get the facts? You have to look at all sides. If it is a matter of determining which Church of God or which leader God is working through, then one must examine the teachings and positions of more than just the one side of whoever left Worldwide first. In other words, when the first leader to break away from Worldwide and raise up a Church of God started, several others that were to do the same thing had not done so yet. The FACTS of the circumstances of these men and why they did not leave Worldwide earlier, and why they did not join with those who left before them, and what they are trying to accomplish now, were not known when the first Church of God was raised up because the relevant events had not yet occurred. Yet if one is going to prove the truth, he has to get all the available facts and consider all sides. It should not be carelessly assumed, without proof, that whoever left Worldwide first is Philadelphian, and whoever left Worldwide afterwards is Laodicean because they waited too long, without considering what these other men and other Churches of God have to say about it.

Should a member of a Church of God obey his minister if his minister commands him not to read the literature of any other Church?

If a member must prove where God is working, and in order to prove the truth on that question the same way Mr. Armstrong taught us to prove things, if that member must read the literature of more than one Church of God in order to get all the facts on both sides of an issue, then this is a case where the member must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). In that case, even though the member should respect the office held by the ordained minister, the member should give higher priority to God's command to "prove all things" than to the minister's command to "not read another church's literature". So the member should read whatever literature he needs to read and to get whatever facts he needs to prove the truth on any important question the member needs to answer, such as where or through whom God is working.

This does not mean we read whatever garbage we find just for our personal entertainment. I am talking about particular circumstances where there is a valid reason to read certain literature to get facts needed to prove something in a balanced, objective way on an issue God has given us the responsibility for deciding.

Can We Make an Idol out of a Man or Church?

I have tried to stress the need for every individual as well as the ministry to put the Bible first as a guide to our beliefs and practices, not church authority, a particular minister, tradition, or any other source, or even our own opinions and preferences. I think that there is a danger for church members in that we can make an idol out of these other things if we put them first in place of the Bible. We don't usually think of this when we think of idolatry. We usually think of idolatry as using pictures and images in worship, as some churches do, or of putting the world and worldly pleasures before God, as human nature tempts all of us to do. But many of those in certain churches who use pictures and statues of Christ in their worship do not just violate the second commandment. Many of these also violate the first commandment by putting their traditions and the teachings of their present and past leaders ahead of God's Word, the Bible. We in the Church of God must avoid doing the same thing.

If we put the teachings of a person, whether Herbert W. Armstrong, Ellen G. White (a supposed prophetess accepted by the Seventh Day Adventists), or any current leader in the Church of God ahead of the Bible, could we not be judged by God as being guilty of idolatry?

As much as we may respect, honor, cooperate with, submit to, and obey a human servant of God, our FAITH must be in God alone, and that means the Bible. We should submit to other human persons only when and how the Bible teaches us to submit to them. The Bible must come first because the Bible is God speaking directly.

I have heard, though I have not confirmed this, that cases may have occurred where a Church of God fellowship makes it a requirement for members to attend with them or for prospective members to be baptized to first affirm belief that Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah to come. Also, there may be requirements for membership and attendance that members believe that the existing leader of a Church of God holds a particular prophesied office. If this is true, I believe adding such requirements for membership in the Church of God is a very serious error.

Mr. Armstrong understood the dangers of adding requirements for baptism beyond what the Bible requires when he was working with the Church of God Seventh Day brethren. Mr. Armstrong resisted pressure from the Church of God Seventh Day authorities to only baptize new converts AFTER teaching them about unclean meats. Mr. Armstrong stood firm in saying that knowledge of clean and unclean meats was not a requirement

for baptism and he would not add what the Bible did not require. Mr. Armstrong certainly taught newly baptized members not to eat unclean meats, but he did not require pre-existing knowledge and agreement with this doctrine before baptism. See his autobiography, volume 1, pages 518-524.

Ministers today often want prospective members to understand and agree with many of the doctrines of the Church of God before being baptized because this can be a way of determining if a person has really repented and is willing to exercise faith in God and in Jesus Christ by believing what God says in the Bible. This is a way a minister can evaluate if a person is ready for baptism. It is also a way of helping a person to count the cost. I do not disagree with this. I think this approach is the result of lessons the Church has learned through experience. I only caution that the Church must be careful to not add conditions for baptism and attendance that God does not require.

God requires repentance and faith as conditions for baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit, and it is the receiving of the Spirit of God that makes one a Christian and a member of God's Church (Acts 2:38-39, Hebrews 11:6, Romans 10:6-11, Acts 8:36-39, Galatians 2:15-16, John 11:25-26, Romans 8:9-11). This is consistent with what Mr. Armstrong and the Church of God have always taught. I do not know of any verse in the Bible that authorizes the Church of God or any of its leaders to add additional conditions for membership in the Church of God, such as believing that a current or past leader of the Church fulfills a particular prophesied office. One of the reasons I say that adding non-biblical requirements for baptism or attendance is a very serious error is the strong reaction of the apostle Paul against those who wanted to add circumcision as a requirement for salvation. Physical circumcision may seem like a small matter, and saying that it is required for salvation may not have seemed like a big deal to some in the first century Church of God, particularly since they could find Old Testament scriptures to show that circumcision was commanded by God. But to Paul, it was a VERY big deal. Notice what he says in Galatians 5:2, "Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." And Galatians 1:6-7, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ." Also see Galatians 5:11-12 where it seems that Paul may be suggesting that he could wish that those who teach circumcision as a requirement would mutilate themselves!

Why was Paul so upset with those who would add physical circumcision as a requirement for salvation and becoming a member of the Church? I think it is because he understood that adding something as a requirement that God does not add is just the tip of an iceberg. There is a whole way of thinking that is involved. In the case of circumcision, it was not the physical circumcision that concerned Paul. Paul himself circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). What concerned Paul was the way of thinking that was represented by making physical circumcision a requirement. You can read all of Galatians and look up "circumcision" in Acts and all the epistles of Paul in a concordance to get the full story, and you will find that those who taught circumcision as a requirement were really teaching that justification came through the physical rituals of the law rather than by faith. Physical circumcision as a requirement came to represent giving something, in this case a physical ritual, a higher priority than faith in

and our relationship with God and Christ. This was why Paul felt so strongly about the matter.

Likewise, making the belief that Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah to come or the belief that an existing church leader holds a particular prophesied office a requirement for church membership can be a VERY serious error because of a wrong way of thinking that it can represent and encourage. This wrong way of thinking substitutes faith in church leaders for faith in God and the Bible. It puts Jesus Christ and the Bible in second place by implying that the Bible means what the leader says it means. It teaches members to let the Church and its leaders interpret the Bible for us rather than let the Bible interpret itself. For some members, this way of thinking can become a form of idolatry.

Just as carnal human nature can cause some people to crave to use a physical image, such as a statue or picture of Christ, in worshiping God because it is something they can see, so that same human nature can cause some to crave to look to a physical human being they can believe and follow more than the Bible, because a physical person is someone they can see, hear, talk to, and ask questions of. A modern day human leader and his writings and speaking can seem to some to be a "shortcut" or easy substitute for personal Bible study and faith in God. Certainly the role of the ministry is to teach and help members learn where to find answers in the Bible, to help members learn from examples how to apply God's law to daily life, and to remind members in due season of the truths the members and the Church have proved from the Bible. Although I believed the Bible more than I believed Mr. Armstrong and I was careful to prove Mr. Armstrong's teachings from the Bible, I would never have learned the truths of the Bible without the writings of Mr. Armstrong to help me find where they are in the Bible. And ministers have authority to restrict open criticism of official doctrines of the Church they supervise in order to prevent confusion and division within their congregations, and members should respect and cooperate with that. But just as a limited physical image cannot represent the infinite God, so a fallible human being and his teachings cannot represent the infallible God and his Word.

I think we have all seen an example in the recent apostasy where some church members made an idol out of a church organization and its leaders and allowed themselves to be led into heresy because they didn't put the Bible first. Idolatry may have been a cause for the scattering of the Church even as it was a contributing cause in the scattering of ancient Israel. This idolatry may have been occurring in the minds and hearts of many church members even while Mr. Armstrong was alive. Many people may have been neglecting the study of their Bibles. They had their priorities wrong. The Bible should come first, the Church second.

What comes first, the Church or the Bible? Do we attend church services because the Bible teaches us to attend services, or do we read the Bible because the Church teaches us to read the Bible? Which comes first in authority?

Mr. Armstrong often spoke of two walking together and said that two could not walk together unless they be agreed. He also said that two cannot walk together unless one is the boss. I think this is a valid principle when applied to the Bible and the Church. One

or the other must take priority. One must be the "boss". Either the Bible must come first or the Church must come first as a guide to what we will believe. If the Bible comes first, we will look to the Bible for our beliefs and will follow biblical instructions on how we should conduct ourselves in God's Church, but if the Church comes first, we will let the Church tell us what the Bible means. Both the Bible and the Church are important, but one or the other must come first in authority. I believe the Bible must always come first, and the Church, both ministers and members alike, must submit to the Bible.

We should never trust any human person with the trust that should belong to God alone. Trusting in the word of a man more than the Bible can be a pitfall (Psalm 146:4, Jeremiah 17:5-8).

If there is any book we need to be "grounded" in, it is the Bible, not *Mystery of the Ages* or any other book written by a man that is not part of the canon of the Bible.

We should certainly respect the authority of those God has placed in positions of leadership in His Church. We should seek ways to obey such authority when it is not in violation of a command of God or God's way of life. We should not spread confusion and division by promoting our own ideas about what the Bible says among members contrary to the official teachings of the Church we attend. If we see the Church is wrong on some important point of doctrine or policy according to the Bible, we can communicate this to the ministry and go through proper channels. The ball is then in the court of the ministry, and they have a responsibility before God to believe and be corrected by the Bible when they are wrong. God is judging the ministry as He judges all members of His Church. But our faith must be towards God directly and must be demonstrated by our individual willingness to believe and obey the Bible first above everything else.

Our relationship with God the Father is through Jesus Christ. Jesus authorized us to go to the Father directly in Jesus' name (John 14:13-14, 15:16, 16:23-28). Our relationship with God does not go through the ministry. God has given us the ministry to help us to learn and grow and to help us do the work of preaching the gospel in an organized way, but they are not priests that stand between us and God. Jesus Christ fulfills that function alone (1 Timothy 2:5). Ministers fulfill the priestly function of teaching, and in that sense Old Testament prophecies that refer to priests in our day may symbolically apply to the ministry, but they do not fulfill the priestly function of intermediaries between us and God as Christ does. 1 Corinthians 11:3 says, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God." It does not say, the head of the man is the minister, and the head of the ministry is Christ. In an organization chart, there would be a solid line from each individual member to Christ and from Christ to the Father. A minister would appear as an older brother of the member, on about the same level but to the side of the membership, and his teaching, counseling, and administrative roles in serving and guiding the members would appear as a dotted line relationship to the members, and the minister also is under Christ as the members are. Our direct relationship with God always comes first. God speaks to us through the Bible and we speak to God through prayer.

On the issue of refusing permission for a baptized member of the Church of God to attend with a particular group because he or she does not profess agreement that certain leaders fulfill certain prophesied roles, I think such a group should consider what Christ says to the Laodiceans. I think that during this Laodicean era of the Church, any pastor should be cautious about refusing a baptized member of the Church of God who wants to attend Sabbath services, or Passover, or the Feast of Tabernacles, unless there are scriptural grounds for doing so. In Christ's message to the Church of the Laodiceans, He says that He stands at the door and knocks (Revelation 3:20). This may refer to many things, and there may be many ways that a Laodicean can exclude Christ from his or her life so that Christ is pictured as being on the outside, knocking. But in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus said that those who did good deeds to the least of His brethren were really doing them to Christ and those who did not do good deeds to their fellow Christians were not doing them to Christ. Could this have application to those converted members who come to a pastor and say, "please, may I attend Passover", or "please, may I attend the Feast of Tabernacles with you"? Could this be something that Christ is referring to when He say that He stands at the door and knocks? Could those Church of God congregations that refuse to allow one of Christ's brethren to attend with them, but not on scriptural grounds, be refusing Christ? I think that in the scattered condition of the Laodicean era, this might be the case.

The following is a summary or recap of some of the things I have covered. It is somewhat repetitious, but brings out what I have been saying in a little bit different way. Most of it is a segment I wrote separately from the preceding material, and it can serve as a summary.

A Summary -- the Nineteenth Truth

Mr. Armstrong is said to have restored eighteen major truths to the Church, truths which the Church of God Seventh Day did not accept. But there is a nineteenth truth he taught that is included in the eighteen but not listed among the eighteen. It is actually a greater truth than all of the eighteen truths put together because all of the eighteen truths listed flow from it. Without this nineteenth truth, the other eighteen would not have been discovered and taught. It is included among the eighteen by implication, but is not explicitly listed. Like the other eighteen truths, the Church of God Seventh Day did not accept it. Yet it is vital for doing God's Work.

Before Mr. Armstrong was converted and became a member of God's Church, his beliefs on two issues were challenged: evolution vs. creation, and the Sabbath vs. Sunday question. On both issues he had firmly held beliefs. On both issues someone had challenged his beliefs. So he set out to study those issues and to prove what the truth was. Actually, he probably expected to prove that he was right and he wanted to prove to those who challenged him that they were wrong.

Most people in a situation like this only look for arguments to support their point of view, and reject, explain away, or minimize anything that tends to prove they are wrong. They only want to prove they are right and the other person is wrong. But Mr. Armstrong was honest in his investigation. He wanted and expected to prove that he was right, but he was honest enough with himself to accept the truth whatever it was, even if it meant the painful realization that he was wrong. His background and training in journalism probably helped him here because he had learned from experience to get all the facts and not base any conclusions on careless assumptions.

So Mr. Armstrong studied both sides of these issues and gathered all the facts he could. He believed evolution was wrong, but he honestly gathered all the facts and considered all the arguments on both sides of the issue. He believed that the Bible endorsed Sunday observance rather than Sabbath keeping, but he studied all the scriptures and all the arguments on both sides of the issue.

In the end he proved that he was right about evolution. But he also proved he was wrong about Sunday. It was painful for him to admit that his wife was right and he was wrong, not only to admit it to her but to admit it to himself. Most people in this situation would find ways to justify their position and to twist or ignore facts to the contrary. Their vanity does not permit them to change their beliefs. It hurts to change. Mr. Armstrong also had vanity, and this admission that he was wrong was painful for him also, but he was willing to do it for the sake of truth.

God was preparing and testing Mr. Armstrong for the work God had for him to do. Mr. Armstrong had to pass this test in order for God to be able to use him. If he had refused to admit he was wrong, God would have had to use someone else to do the work God wanted done. Mr. Armstrong could never even have been converted if he did not accept the Sabbath. But there is more to it than just Mr. Armstrong's conversion.

Most of society in this country was reared in and accepted traditional mainstream Christianity, or no religion at all. Even those who were not religious, Mr. Armstrong being an example, still had their views of the Bible colored and shaped by what the mainstream churches taught for centuries. Though Mr. Armstrong was not religious, he was sure the Bible said "thou shalt keep Sunday" or something to that effect. God was preparing a man to lead a work of restoring truths that were lost, building up the Church, and preaching the true gospel to the general public. But virtually all of society had accepted beliefs and ideas contrary to that message. So in order for anyone to accept that message, they would have to be willing to unlearn their established beliefs and accept new knowledge, even correction, no matter how painful that might be. And it was necessary for the man God would use to publish that message to first be tested to see if he was willing to go through that process himself.

In other words, God purposed to use a man who had proved he was willing to go through the painful process of admitting he was wrong to preach to the public that they had to admit they were wrong. The man God used had to be tested to make sure that he practiced what he was going to preach.

Mr. Armstrong passed that test. He had previously been prepared with experience in advertising, business, writing, and speaking. Now God had a leader He could use to lead the work.

Now, the work of preaching the gospel is not the work of one man. A church is required to support and back the leader, with tithes, offerings, prayers, and participation and labor, and a church is also required to support and nurture those who respond to the message and to provide an environment in which they can be fed spiritually, counseled, helped, and given the opportunity and circumstances for service and personal growth. So God had to provide a church to back the work that would be led by Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Armstrong searched for the one true Church. He came into contact with the Church of God Seventh Day brethren and began to fellowship with them. Although he was concerned with their apparent lack of power, they seemed to have more of the truth than any other church Mr. Armstrong knew of, and had the right name, "Church of God". But Mr. Armstrong was still concerned about the question of whether this was God's Church or not.

He decided to do a test. He had read the admonition in the Bible that we should grow in grace and in knowledge. He reasoned that the Church is a collection of individuals, and if all the individuals are growing then the Church as a whole would be growing. He further reasoned that if the Church was willing to grow in knowledge, it would be willing to accept new knowledge and to acknowledge and correct error.

So he wrote a couple of articles or manuscripts and sent them to the headquarters of Church of God Seventh Day. One was a correction to a minor point of doctrine. The other was an exposition of the new truth about the identity of the lost ten tribes of Israel.

Mr. Armstrong was doing this to TEST the Church of God Seventh Day. In his autobiography, he calls it a "test". But in my opinion, it was not just Mr. Armstrong that was testing that Church. I think God was also testing that Church, using Mr. Armstrong as a tool, to see if they would put new knowledge from the Bible first over their traditions. God used Mr. Armstrong as tool to test the Church of God Seventh Day just as He used Loma Armstrong to test Herbert Armstrong on the Sabbath question. Mr. Armstrong passed the test and believed the Bible over his traditions. Would the Church of God Seventh Day leadership also pass a similar test?

The Church of God Seventh Day leader replied to Mr. Armstrong. As related in Mr. Armstrong's autobiography, he did not refute his correction, but he said that if they admitted to the membership that they had been in error, the members might lose confidence in the Church. On the identity of Israel, he said it was interesting but did not know what use they could make of it. In both cases, he did not refute the new knowledge or show Mr. Armstrong from the Bible that he was mistaken, but he did not accept and teach the new knowledge.

As time went on and God began to reveal more truth to Mr. Armstrong and to use him more and more in a powerful way, the leadership of the Church of God Seventh Day and the vast majority of its members never accepted the new truths God was revealing

to Mr. Armstrong. The result? God could not use the Church of God Seventh Day to back the work He was doing through Mr. Armstrong. I think there are two reasons for this. The most obvious is that those brethren who were not willing to accept new truth would not be willing to support a man who was teaching the new truth. But I think there is another reason.

It is God who decides who to use in His work. He didn't begin to use Mr. Armstrong until Mr. Armstrong was tested and proved he was willing to admit he was wrong and to accept and act upon new truth revealed in the Bible. Then God was able to use that man to preach to the public that they need to give up their traditional beliefs and practices and be corrected by the Bible.

God practices what he preaches. God doesn't say "do as I say, not as I do." Jesus Christ lived a perfect life as a human being and told us to follow His example. He did not command us to keep commands that He was not willing to keep Himself. Jesus condemned the Pharisees because they bound heavy burdens on men which they were not willing to help lift with their finger. In God's plan, that is how leadership works. Those that lead must practice what they preach and lead by example as well as by word.

How could God choose a church to back a message of repentance and change, and ask the public to give up their traditions, their doctrines, and their beliefs, if the leadership and most of the members of that church were not willing to accept correction and change and accept new truth even in the relatively smaller matters?

So God started small, with Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong only plus a very few members of the Church of God Seventh Day, and from that mustard seed built a new era of the Church. The Church that Christ used Mr. Armstrong to build was primarily made up of members who, like Mr. Armstrong, had to prove their willingness to change, to be corrected by the Bible, to accept new knowledge and give up their traditional beliefs and practices, no matter how painful. More than that, many of these people had to give up their jobs or careers, their friends, and their closest family members. Christ says we have to be willing to give up everything to follow Him. But these people could then be used by God to pass the message on to others as it had been passed to them. They were practicing what they "preached". Most people who came into the Church as a result of Mr. Armstrong's teachings had to pass the same kind of test he passed, in varying degrees.

We had to be willing to unlearn our false beliefs and be corrected by the Bible, and accept new knowledge from the Bible before we could be used by God to ask the public to do the same thing.

Because Mr. Armstrong was willing to grow in grace and knowledge as the Bible commands, and because it was God's purpose to restore knowledge to this era of the Church, God began to reveal more and more new truth to Mr. Armstrong through the Bible, and Mr. Armstrong taught it to the Church, proving it and backing it up from the Bible. Mr. Armstrong taught by word and example that the Bible is our authority and we need to be willing to be corrected by it, both individually and as a Church.

This was how the eighteen truths began to be restored.

What is the nineteenth truth that was taught by Mr. Armstrong? It is implied in the eighteen, but not listed with them. Like the eighteen, most of the Church of God Seventh Day did not accept it. It is greater than the other eighteen truths because without it the other eighteen truths could not be restored. Without it, the work of God could not be done.

It is the truth that we must always be willing to give up our beliefs and traditional doctrines in order to be corrected by the Bible and to accept and put into practice new knowledge found in the Bible. That is the foundation for everything else that follows.

Some churches today say they do not want to change anything Mr. Armstrong taught. That is itself a change from what Mr. Armstrong taught. Mr. Armstrong changed his own teaching more than once. Mr. Armstrong taught us by word and example that we must always be willing to unlearn error and learn new truth. I think he would be very upset to find that some are using his name to promote the opposite practice.

How can God use a leadership and a church membership to do a powerful work of preaching the gospel to the world if that church and its leadership have become so set in their traditions and doctrines that they will not make the slightest change for fear of upsetting people or because they do not want to "leave their comfort zone"? How can God use such a group to go to the public and say: "Give up the beliefs you grew up with since a child. Give up Sunday church attendance with your family and friends and stop working on God's Sabbath. Lose your job if necessary. Give up Christmas and Easter. Stop eating bacon and ham. Pay God ten percent of your gross income plus offerings and save a second tithe for the Feast. Lose your friends if necessary. Lose your wife and children and the ones you love most if necessary.

"Change your entire concept of God. God is not a trinity. You must not use holy pictures and repetitive prayers as you have done your whole life. God is reproducing himself. You do not have an immortal soul. You will not go to heaven when you die.

"But don't send us any doctrinal studies and expect any serious consideration or reply. We have the truth now and we don't want to change anything. Even if we are wrong on some small matter, we don't want to change. We changed when we were young, but now that we are old, we are comfortable with what we have believed and practiced for decades. Besides, it might upset our members. They need stability right now. They don't want to leave their comfort zone and neither do we. Also, if you introduce one change you open the door for other changes. We don't have the time to examine every issue that is presented to us. Doing the Work is more important.

"But never mind if you think you need stability right now. Never mind if you the TV viewer don't want to leave your comfort zone. Never mind if the truth of the Bible would upset your whole family. Never mind if you have work to do and do not have time to examine these issues in detail. You have to learn to put God and His truth first. Your eternal life depends on it."

How can a church do this and not be doing the same kinds of things Christ rebuked the Pharisees and lawyers for? These Pharisees and lawyers not only put heavy burdens on men's backs that they were not willing to lift with their finger, but they placed their traditions above God's law, above God's Word, and above the new knowledge God was revealing through the teaching of Jesus. Jesus said to do what they say because they sit in Moses' seat, but not what they do, because they say but do not (Luke 11:46, Matthew 23:1-4, Mark 7:6-13).

Mr. Armstrong taught the Church of God and the general public to whom he preached to be willing to be corrected by the Bible and to be willing to learn new doctrinal knowledge from the Bible, and he practiced what he preached. Mr. Armstrong put into practice the things he learned from the Bible, and even in his old age I don't think he ever stopped learning, ever became unwilling to be corrected and accept new truth, ever settled into a comfort zone of not wanting to change anymore.

Some have used the analogy of focusing on the trunk of the tree only and not being concerned with the twigs. But if the trunk is healthy, there will be new twigs every year. A tree is more than just a trunk. The twigs are important too. A healthy tree will grow every year. That is why you can measure the age of a tree by counting its rings. If the tree isn't growing, if new twigs are not sprouting, that may be a sign that the tree is dead.

I do not remember hearing Mr. Armstrong ever say that we should only focus on the trunk of the tree and avoid the twigs and branches. Rather, I remember that he said that he decided that he would focus on the main trunk of the tree in his preaching and would leave the smaller branches and twigs to the other ministers to cover. He said that they would fill in the details. But I don't think he ever said that the twigs and the details of doctrines are not important. Both the trunk and the twigs are important, and the trunk is more important than the twigs.

In the "trunk of the tree" analogy, if the tree represents doctrine, then the trunk of the tree must represent the main, basic doctrines, the weightier matters of the law, and the branches and twigs must represent the smaller doctrines and details of doctrines. Does the Bible support the idea that we only need to worry about the big doctrines and not the details of what God teaches us? Matthew 5:17-19 says, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Here Jesus says that even the least of the commandments are important. We are to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3). Jesus said that the Pharisees should do the weightier matters of the law, but also not leave the smaller matters undone (Matthew 23:23). God often admonishes His people in the Old Testament to be careful to observe EVERYTHING God commands (Deuteronomy 11:32, Deuteronomy 17:19-20). Luke 16:10 says, "He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much." God killed Uzza when he touched the ark of God when it was being transported on a cart contrary to God's

instructions to have it carried by Levites on poles (1 Chronicles 13:7-10, 1 Chronicles 15:11-13). He also killed the sons of Aaron when they offered profane fire (Leviticus 10:1-2). I think God is concerned about details. I think even more than the details, God is concerned about our attitudes towards the details, because our attitudes towards the details of what God tells us reflect our attitude towards the God who gives us those details.

Our attitude towards details can demonstrate our real attitude towards the weightier matters of the law. In the matters I have been talking about, the attitude of an unwillingness to examine and change even small doctrines in order to follow the Bible more perfectly may indicate an attitude of not being willing to put the Bible first over our traditions and the opinions and reactions of men. This can become an issue of faith, of willingness to believe God first, and faith is a weightier matter of the law (Matthew 23:23). The matters Mr. Armstrong discussed in the doctrinal papers he first submitted to the Church of God Seventh Day were not weightier matters of the law and were not the truck of the tree, but I think that by rejecting those truths, the leadership of Church of God Seventh Day demonstrated a problem with one of the weightier matters of the law: faith, and a willingness to believe and obey what God says in the Bible first. Sometimes God may use something small to test our attitude on something big.

Making mistakes in small doctrines may not be an important problem in itself, but an unwillingness to correct those mistakes, if that becomes the predominant pattern of thinking, is a very BIG problem because it indicates an unwillingness to submit to God.

The Bible is clear that our zeal to be faithful to God even in details and small matters is important to God. While small details may be less important than major issues, our ATTITUDE about details is not. We should strive to obey God even in little things. Not doing so shows a wrong attitude, and a wrong attitude can be a big thing. I think God will overlook honest mistakes in small details provided there is an attitude of wanting to be faithful even in little things. But if the whole attitude is, "little things are not important, so I won't make corrections in small matters", that shows an attitude that is not faithful in small matters, and if a person is not faithful in small things he will not be faithful in big things (Luke 16:10).

Possibly because of the unwillingness of the Church of God Seventh Day to accept correction and new truth from the Bible, and possibly for other reasons also, Mr. Armstrong later concluded that they were the Sardis Church. In the message to the Sardis Church in Revelation, Christ says they have a name that they are alive, but they are dead. More importantly for us today, He admonishes them to remember how they have received and heard and tells them to repent.

Mr. Armstrong applied the messages to the seven churches to the eras of the Church, and I believe that is correct. But Christ also says that he who has an ear to hear should listen to all the messages to the churches (Revelation 3:6) and Mr. Armstrong explained this to mean that in any era of the Church you can have individuals that fall into any of the seven spiritual conditions described, even though one might predominate. We need to be careful we do not fall into the Sardis way of thinking.

In Christ's admonition to those in the Sardis condition, He tells them to remember how they have received and heard. This applies more to the Church today than to the Church of God Seventh Day when Mr. Armstrong first came among them. We need to remember how we learned. Why? We received and heard because Mr. Armstrong was willing to learn new truth, because the Church that backed and financed him was made up of people who were willing to learn new truth, and we were willing to learn new truth. I think Christ is telling members of His Church that are in the Sardis condition that they need to remember and recapture the attitude of being willing to learn new things that they had when they first learned the truth. Otherwise, how are we different from those members of the Church of God Seventh Day who rejected the work God was doing through Mr. Armstrong because it was new and different from what they were used to?

Some may say that if we disagree with the church leadership we are disagreeing with Christ who is the head of the Church. They may say we should trust Christ to lead the Church by believing the doctrines of the Church. They may also say we should not judge the Church.

On the matter of judging the Church, let's look at Mr. Armstrong's example. When he was searching for the true Church, he actually tested the Church by sending in doctrinal papers to see if they would be accepted. He did this to determine if the Church of God Seventh Day was willing to accept new knowledge. In his autobiography, he actually calls this a test! Mr. Armstrong was baptized as I recall, but at this point in the autobiography he was not ordained as a minister. He relates the story in his autobiography. So here was a lay member of the Church "testing", and one could say judging, the leadership of the Church, to see if this was the one true Church Christ had founded. Was Mr. Armstrong wrong to do this?

This raises the question of judging. When and how should we judge? Is it always wrong to judge others, or their behavior? Is it always wrong to judge those who are higher than us in rank or authority or position?

There are places in the New Testament that tell us not to judge, but there are also places that say we should judge. We are told to not judge by appearance but to judge righteous judgment. We are told if we judge ourselves we will not have to be judged by God. We are explicitly told to examine ourselves. And Paul rebuked a Church in an epistle for brethren suing each other in worldly courts instead of judging the matter themselves. See Luke 6:37, Matthew 7:1-5, John 7:24, 1 Corinthians 11:31, 2 Corinthians 13:5, 1 Corinthians 6:1-6.

There are times when we have to judge a situation or a person when it is necessary in order to make a decision God has given us a responsibility for making.

Should a member judge the church leadership?

God commands us to pay His tithes, but God does not tell us what name to write on the check or what address to write on the envelope. Today, God's Church is divided, or at least there are many who claim to be God's Church. In order to obey the law of tithing,

members have to make a decision on where to send the check, and in order to make that decision wisely, they have to judge which Church is most effectively doing the work God wants done at this time and which Church or Churches God is primarily working through.

Was Mr. Armstrong wrong to test the Church of God Seventh Day? No. He had a legitimate reason for it. He had to do the best job he could of finding the one true Church Christ had founded so he could support that Church and fellowship with it.

Should we express our trust in Christ as head of the Church by believing and accepting whatever the church leadership teaches? One minister told other ministers in the Church that they should teach the doctrines of the Church in faith trusting God to lead the Church. But recent experience shows the fallacy of this. Christ always does his job of leadership faithfully, but that doesn't mean that ministers always follow faithfully, and it doesn't mean God always protects ministers from making mistakes. "Christ leads" does not equate to "minister follows".

In matters of doctrinal disagreement, what about division and confusion in the Church? Doesn't the Bible teach that we must all speak the same thing? Yes it does. But that does not mean we must all believe everything the Church teaches. There is a process for handling doctrinal disagreements that is lawful.

When I first came into the Church, I heard a minister explain that process, and I have since read an article written by Mr. Armstrong that covered the same subject and said the same thing. It makes sense to me and seems consistent with Scripture. The explanation is as follows: If you disagree with a point of doctrine of the Church, do not discuss it with other members, but bring it to the ministry, either by discussing it with the local pastor or writing to headquarters. The matter will be examined with an open mind. If the member is in error, an explanation will be provided. If the Church is in error, the Church will correct itself and present the change to the whole membership. If after this communication, the disagreement still persists, if the Church has not changed and has provided an explanation to the member, but the member still does not agree, then the member should put the matter "on the shelf" so to speak and continue to not discuss it with other members. By declining to discuss with other members the matters we disagree about, in effect, we speak the same thing for the sake of unity, and we wait till Christ chooses to correct the matter or make it clear to all parties, either in this age or in the Kingdom.

This process preserves unity and respect for church government. It does not cause division or confusion. It does not require that members choose to believe the Church more than what they see in the Bible. It does not require that members lie about what they believe or play the hypocrite by pretending to agree with the Church on a point of doctrine when they don't. They simply decline to discuss the matter, and other members should respect that.

So disagreeing in our mind with the church leadership on one point of doctrine or another is not a violation of God's law provided we do not turn such disagreement into a cause for division and confusion by openly criticizing and disagreeing with the Church

leadership or trying to promote our beliefs among the brethren contrary to the decisions of the leadership.

The willingness to be corrected by the Bible and learn new knowledge was a vital difference between Mr. Armstrong along with the brethren who supported him and the Church of God Seventh Day leadership and many of their members, a difference that I believe disqualified the Church of God Seventh Day leadership from being the tool in God's hands to do a powerful work. Christ admonishes the members in the Sardis condition to remember how they received and heard. If we do this, we will remember not only what we heard, but our attitude of being willing to learn and be corrected. That attitude may be just as important, if not more important, than the actual knowledge we received, and if we no longer have that attitude, we need to recapture it.

The nineteenth truth that Mr. Armstrong taught, and actually is first in importance and sequence, is the truth that we must grow in the grace and knowledge the Bible reveals, both by allowing the Bible to correct us where our doctrines are wrong and by allowing the Bible to teach us new truth we never had before.

Without the acceptance of this truth, none of the other truths could have been revealed.

Why Voting in the Church of God ALWAYS Leads to Division

The Church of God has been scattered since the death of Herbert W. Armstrong. Most Church of God organizations practice government from the top down as Mr. Armstrong did, but at least one major fellowship has a system of voting where the general ministry elects a board that runs the organization.

And that system of voting is leading to a spirit of division and strife.

I believe governance in God's Church by voting or "balloting" will ALWAYS lead to discord, strife, and division! Every time. Guaranteed.

The only question is the degree of division and the time it takes division to grow.

Democracy has within it the seeds of division. Division is built-in to the democratic process. Democracy cannot exist long without division. The two must exist together, like two sides of one coin. When a new democracy is started, the degree of division may be small. But over time, as voting is practiced, the division will grow as surely as a plant will grow when you give it water and sunshine. It is the process of voting, and the decision making process voters go through in deciding who to vote for, that BREEDS division. It cannot be helped. It is cause and effect.

In a democracy, where those under authority select those over them in authority, the whole question of authority is confused. How does the authority flow? Who is in charge? In Old Testament Israel in the wilderness, authority flowed from God the Father, through Jesus Christ, through Moses, through the rulers Moses appointed (Exodus 18:24), to all the people. When David was king over Israel, authority flowed from God the Father, through Jesus Christ, through king David, through the men David appointed, to the whole nation of Israel. In the first century Church of God, administrative authority over the work of the Church flowed from God the Father, through Jesus Christ, through the apostles, through the whole ministry, to the entire membership.

But today, if 500 ministers regularly vote to elect members of a 12-man governing council, who is in charge, the 500 ministers or the 12-man council? If the council appoints a president or someone in charge of the ministry, the 500 ministers have to obey the man who is in charge over them and the regional directors or pastors. But that man has to obey the council who gave him his authority, and the council is ultimately responsible to the entire ministry. So how does authority flow? Where does God come into the picture? If it is just a circular arrangement, with authority flowing from the 500 ministers through the 12-man board, through the man in charge of the ministry, through the regional directors, through the 500 ministers, through the 12-man board, etc., etc., etc., then this is really just self-rule with God left out of the picture. It is self-government, man ruling man. Such an arrangement excludes Christ as head over the administrative work the Church.

From whom does the 12-man council derive its authority and to whom is the 12-man council accountable, God or the 500 ministers who gave them their authority? Isn't there a conflict of interest here?

Some may think that God, through the Holy Spirit, will inspire the 500 ministers to vote correctly in elections, so that the authority really flows from God. Perhaps. But we are here to learn the way of life we will be practicing for eternity in the Kingdom of God, and God has given us His Word, the Bible, so we can learn about that way of life so we can practice it and prepare ourselves in the way of life we will be living for eternity. The pattern of government taught in the Bible is clearly government from the top down, not democracy. God is training us in that way of life and testing us to see if we are willing to live that way of life. So the question becomes, would God bless a process of democracy in His Church if that very form of governance is contrary to God's will and instruction in the Bible? Would God lead the Church of God differently today than He led it in the first century just to accommodate the wrong ideas of men?

God's purpose is to teach mankind lessons - that is the reason for the seven thousand year plan of God. The first six thousand years will show that man's ways, apart from God, do not bring happiness and peace. Then God will rule the earth through Jesus Christ for one thousand years so mankind can see the contrast between the results of man's self-rule compared with the fruits of God's rule.

Likewise, I believe God is demonstrating certain lessons in the Church of God, lessons designed to teach the membership about government and prepare us for His kingdom. And if it is God's will to show the Church that government by voting does not work in the Church any better than it works in the world, I don't think God would bless such a system of governance by leading 500 ministers to vote in a way that produces peace and harmony. Rather, it seems more likely God will let things take their natural course so we can see the fruits of such a system.

The passage of time is showing, and I think will continue to show, that democracy in the Church of God does not work. God is letting us all learn lessons about this from the fruits.

The Church of God is today scattered. It can be useful to look at the history of the Church of God in the last 80 years to see if lessons can be learned about government and the fruits of right or wrong government.

Herbert W. Armstrong began to fellowship with the Church of God Seventh Day around the time of his conversion in 1927. While still a lay member, he wrote up papers proposing changes to doctrine based on his independent research in the Bible and sent those papers to the COG7D leadership, including a paper on the identity of Israel. The leadership of that church never accepted the new doctrines Mr. Armstrong discovered in the Bible. Eventually, Mr. Armstrong and the COG7D parted company, and around late 1933 and early 1934 Mr. Armstrong started a work that led to the formation of the Worldwide Church of God, which he led till his death in 1986.

Mr. Armstrong taught God's government in the Church from the top down, what some would call "one-man rule." Mr. Armstrong did not report to a ruling board of men or any body of men who vote, or "ballot," to select a leader. He understood, from the Bible, that democracy, the selection of the leadership by those under the authority of the leadership, is not God's way. He understood that he personally was responsible to and under the authority of Jesus Christ, not any group of men. This was an important doctrine to Mr. Armstrong. You can get a clear idea of how Mr. Armstrong viewed the importance of reporting directly to Christ if you read his autobiography, especially the portion that covers the time when he raised up a work independent of Church of God Seventh Day and refused further salary from that organization (in other words, he quit his employment with that organization).

So when he was ill and knew his death was near, he did not leave the selection of a replacement to a voting board of men, but by God's authority appointed Joseph Tkach to succeed him as Pastor General of the Church. I have no doubt that Christ led that decision and inspired Mr. Armstrong to appoint Mr. Tkach, not for any reasons Mr. Armstrong could anticipate, but for God's own reasons. God wanted a man who would turn away from the doctrines Mr. Armstrong taught because it was God's will to scatter the Church, to test us and to teach us lessons.

During the decade after Mr. Armstrong's death, Mr. Tkach changed most of the important doctrines of Worldwide. The Church of God became scattered and split into

many organizations. By the end of 1995, most of those who remained faithful to the doctrines taught from the Bible by Mr. Armstrong had left Worldwide at various times and formed a multitude of fellowships, with almost all of the major organizations, except one, following Mr. Armstrong's judgment that right Church governance is from the top down.

But some rejected Mr. Armstrong's judgment and teaching from the Bible on government and built an organization based on the authority of the ballot box.

I am not one of those who say that Mr. Armstrong's teachings and judgments cannot be changed. Mr. Armstrong changed his own teachings when he saw in the Bible that he was wrong, and he taught by instruction and example that we should be willing to change, to be corrected, and to learn new knowledge from the Bible. But Mr. Armstrong's judgments do carry some weight, basically because the fruits of the work he did show that he was faithful to and blessed by God, and before any major judgment or doctrine is changed, there should be a thorough Bible study of the matter, and it should only be changed based on the Bible. To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever done that with the issue of government in the Church. Those who overturned Mr. Armstrong's teachings on government have done so without biblical authority.

The Bible does NOT teach that governance by voting is permissible in the Church of God. In the Bible, God's government is always by appointment from above (Mark 3:13-19, Titus 1:5). Some may point to Acts 6:1-6 as an example where a congregation chose people for position. But in this example, the people's recommendation to the apostles carried no authority. It was the apostles who made the decision to have the membership make recommendations, and it was the apostles who appointed the men by laying hands on them. The authority of these men came through the apostles, not the members of the congregation. The members of the congregation were in an advisory role only, and the apostles did not have to follow their recommendations.

Some may suggest that the selection of two men as candidates to replace Judas in Acts 1:15-26 was by voting and indicates that the whole congregation had the authority to appoint these two. But that is not the case at all. There is no suggestion of voting. As I point out in another place in this book, if they wanted to vote, they could have selected one. God was not a tie-breaker in an election. The two they proposed were those who were able to fulfill the office based on the qualification that they had been with the apostles during the whole ministry of Jesus Christ (verses 21 and 22). The proposing of these two was not a matter of voting, but a matter of asking around to see who was with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry, who was fit, and eliminating those who eliminated themselves or otherwise could not fulfill the office. There were only two that fulfilled the qualifications. If there were three, they would have cast lots for the three. It was not a popularity contest or a difference of opinion in the congregation. There is no suggestion of balloting.

Some who favor voting call it "cooperation" and try to justify it by the principle of seeking counsel. But voting cannot be called "cooperating" or "seeking counsel."

Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, and 24:6 cannot be used to justify creating an organization that operates by the authority of the ballot box. Cooperation is voluntary, and while we should seek qualified advice before making a decision, the advisors do not have the authority to make the decision. It is the person receiving the counsel that has total authority to accept or reject the advise of his counselors.

The scriptures in Proverbs that refer to a multitude of counselors are misapplied if they are used to justify placing authority in the hands of 500 voting ministers. Those scriptures have to do with the giving and receiving of advice, not authority for making decisions. Mr. Armstrong used the principle properly when he would get advice from those under him before making a decision. But always the authority for the decision came from Christ through Mr. Armstrong, not through the men who advised Mr. Armstrong.

The Bible does NOT teach that those who give counsel under the principle of Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, and 24:6 have authority over the decision, nor does the Bible teach that those who receive such counsel must follow it. Look at the example of King David and some of the occasions when he received counsel from those who were with him. He did not always follow their advice, as in 1 Samuel 23:1-5 and 1 Samuel 26:7-11. David understood that the responsibility for the decisions he made was his, and he had to follow God even when it meant going against the advice of counselors.

The apostles Peter and Paul did not depend on the voting of men for their appointments. You will not find a single example in the Bible of God's authority flowing through the voting of men. Democracy is one of Satan's forms of government, and you can see the results of it in the division and steady weakening of the United States. And it should be obvious that there will be no balloting in the Kingdom of God.

Why have some disagreed with top-down government in the Church and replaced it with government by ballot?

After the man Mr. Armstrong named as his successor used his authority to change most of the doctrines of the Church, many felt that government from the top down was discredited. It was Mr. Tkach's authority over Worldwide, the authority of one man not restrained by any council or board that could vote him out of office, that gave him the power to make massive doctrinal change, change not supported by most of the ministry and members, in only ten years. They felt that the division and scattering of the Church was a result of that form of government, so they replaced it with government by ballot, a government that derived its authority from the entire ministry, not the government of one man under Christ. They felt they needed a human system of checks and balances, modeled after the democracies of this world (they didn't get the idea of voting from any other source), so that no one man had the power to change doctrine without the consent of the majority of the ministers, as had happened in Worldwide. There was a desire for unity and cooperation among the ministers, but without the kind of strong top-down government that existed when Mr. Armstrong was alive. Government by ballot seemed to be a solution to a problem. The idea was that the vesting of power in the hands of the

whole ministry would prevent doctrinal heresy that could divide and scatter the church once again.

But there are several problems with that approach.

First of all, putting authority into the hands of the whole ministry will not prevent doctrinal error from entering the Church, it only slows down the process. This may become more apparent as time goes on. The majority of ministers can still vote for those who introduce error gradually. There is also an inconsistency in introducing one doctrinal error in order to prevent others. God's government from the top down is an important doctrine. It doesn't make sense to try to preserve other biblical doctrines by abandoning that one biblical doctrine. We can't pick and choose which biblical doctrines to remain faithful to and which ones to throw overboard in an attempt to protect the rest.

Second, we must not forget our roots and how we received the doctrines and the understanding we have today. God led Mr. Armstrong to understand the Bible and to discover new knowledge, and Mr. Armstrong was able to teach that knowledge to the Church of God because he did not have to report to a voting body of ministers for approval for doctrinal change, but only to Christ.

While making doctrine subject to the will of the entire ministry may make it harder for any one man to introduce false doctrine, it also makes it harder for correction to doctrine and new knowledge to be taught from the Bible. Those who favor voting like to look at what happened in the ten years from 1986 to 1995 when the important doctrines taught by Mr. Armstrong were overturned, but they do not look at the fifty plus years from 1934 to 1986 and how those doctrines came to be in the first place. Mr. Armstrong was able to discover those doctrines in the Bible and teach them to the Church precisely because he reported directly to Christ and not to a voting board. Had he stayed with Church of God Seventh Day, we would not have those doctrines (unless God used someone else). Had those doctrines been subject to the voting of men, we would not have them today.

Third, democracy is a guaranteed recipe for division. You cannot separate the two. You will ALWAYS have division, eventually, if rule is by ballot. Balloting MUST lead to division and will ALWAYS lead to division.

Why? Why will voting lead to division?

There is a biblical principle that those under authority should respect and submit to those over them in authority. That is how government works. Part of that respect and submission includes not openly criticizing those who hold an office of authority in front of those under that office. When you do that, you weaken the authority of the office and make it more difficult for leaders to lead. You should not openly criticize those holding an office of authority over you in the Church of God.

But in order for democracy to function, there must be freedom to criticize. And church governance by the authority of the ballot box is a democracy, not a spirit-led consensus. Those who make an important decision, such as how to vote, must be free to seek counsel and others must be free to give counsel and advice. The receiving and giving of advise and counsel before major decisions whenever possible is taught by the Bible (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, and 24:6). That means that those who vote by ballot must be free to discuss their voting decision with others, even when those discussions include harsh criticism.

In such a system, authority of those in charge, such as a 12-man ruling board, comes from those under that authority, such as the full body of voting ministers. But to make wise decisions about whether to vote for or against those in power, the voters have to be able to discuss not only the faults of those in power, but they have to be able to discuss and agree on alternative candidates if they choose to replace those in power. Those who vote must engage in discussions about those in authority to know whether to vote for or against them, and if those discussions are honest, there will sometimes be harsh criticism.

The writers of the United States Constitution understood the role of criticism when they included freedoms of speech and press in the Bill of Rights. Those freedoms to criticize government are vital to the functioning of democracy in the United States. It does no good to give the people the authority to vote their leaders out of office if those in office have the power to squelch dissent and free expression. Without the free flow of information and opinion, government leaders can stifle information and ideas critical of themselves or favorable to their opponents. But the price that is paid is that of division and factionalism. We see that in the political arena in the United States. And we can see it in the Church of God.

In the Church of God, we should not undermine the authority of those over us by openly criticizing them in front of others. We should also seek counsel before making important decisions.

You cannot follow both of these principles if you have governance by ballot. It just won't work. You cannot follow the principle of not weakening the office of those over you by openly criticizing them in front of others, and the principle of seeking a multitude of counsel before making a voting decision. Either those in authority will have so much power to squelch dissent that it will be impossible to replace them, and voting becomes meaningless, or those who vote will be discussing among themselves the faults of those they vote for in order to seek counsel and make a wise decision, which inevitably leads to division. And if the voters cannot discuss their choices among themselves, you have a violation of the principle that in a multitude of counselors there is safety.

But these principles work very well together in top-down government because those under the authority of an office never have to discuss among themselves if the person in authority over them should be replaced. In the Kingdom of God, we will not be discussing among ourselves if Jesus Christ should be replaced as King of Kings. Nor will the twelve apostles, each the leader of a tribe of Israel (Matthew 19:28), have to

discuss among themselves if the king over all twelve tribes of Israel, David (Ezekiel 37:24-25), should be replaced. So there will be no need for us to seek counsel about replacing anyone over us in authority in the kingdom of God.

There is a contradiction between principles of respect towards authority and seeking counsel before a decision when voters criticize those they have elected. But there is no contradiction between those principles in God's government. The contradiction is between these two principles and government by voting. In top-down government, the principles of respect towards authority and getting counsel before a decision compliment each other.

Democracy cannot work if criticism is stifled. Having a system where those under authority select who will be over them in authority virtually guarantees negative criticism of those in charge.

But criticism weakens the authority of its target and creates division. Authority is weakened when those under the authority criticize those above them, but such criticism must be allowed in order for voters to exchange information and views to make decisions on how to vote. They must be able to freely discuss their differences, not only differences among themselves, but differences between themselves and those holding elected office. They must be free to criticize, and WILL criticize, the men they elect. This very criticism weakens those in authority and causes division. Then such criticism begets more criticism as those who are criticized retaliate. It is an unstable system of governance that weakens and becomes more divided over time.

It becomes a vicious cycle.

You will always have factions and divisions in a democracy as different sides struggle for control. I think this will become increasingly evident over time.

Fourth, the decision to overturn Mr. Armstrong's judgment was based on human observation and reason more than God's Word. Experiment, observation, and human reason have their place, but not as a substitute for God's revelation to the Church in the Bible. God's word must come first, observation and human reasoning second.

It boils down to how to determine truth. That controversy has been going on since Lucifer disbelieved God and chose to experiment for himself with vanity to see if it brought him greater happiness. God must have warned Lucifer, and all the angels, of the dangers of sin, BEFORE Lucifer sinned. And if Lucifer committed the first sin, then there was no one to tempt him, so he didn't sin from personal weakness. I don't think Lucifer deliberately chose a path that would bring him long-term misery. But he didn't believe God's warnings. He probably wanted to see for himself, to experiment, if thoughts of vanity and self-exaltation would make him happier.

So rather than trust God to tell the truth and to lead him in the way that produces happiness, Lucifer chose the method of experimentation, observation, and interpretation of results. After he sinned, he became Satan, the Devil.

He taught that same method to Adam and Eve. Eve SAW the fruit (Genesis 3:6). She observed that it was good for food and pleasant to the eyes, just as some Church of God ministers observed that Mr. Tkach used his one-man authority to make massive doctrinal changes in Worldwide. She interpreted what she saw, just as these ministers interpreted what they saw happen in Worldwide to mean that government should not be from the top down, but there should be a system of balloting to prevent any one man from becoming too powerful. And Eve disbelieved God, just as many of these ministers did not trust (or did not understand) God's teaching about government in the Bible.

Solomon was another man who experimented. You can read of how he experimented, and observed, and interpreted, in the book of Ecclesiastes. See Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. But his experimenting did not bring him happiness, but frustration and depression, as you can read in the whole book of Ecclesiastes, and he also became unfaithful to God (1 Kings 11:1-13). Contrast this with the example of Abraham, who believed what God told him even when it seemed contrary to what he observed (Romans 4:3, James 2:23, Genesis 15:4-6).

Today, one of the greatest controversies in the United States is the evolution-vs-creation controversy. I have debated this issue in many blogs and forums, and those who are hard-core atheists and evolutionists will not accept any idea or knowledge that cannot be verified by the scientific method of experimentation, observation, and interpretation of results. For them, the scientific method is not just the best path to truth, but the ONLY path to truth.

But God's method for us to learn truth is to trust His wisdom and integrity enough to believe and obey what He says. As we believe and obey Him, he gives us more wisdom to understand His will and the Bible so we can believe and obey Him more.

Because mankind, starting with Adam and Eve, has not trusted and believed God's revelation and rule, God is performing an experiment for mankind, to teach us lessons. That is the purpose of God's 7,000 year plan for mankind.

God Himself is performing an experiment for all mankind. This is not an experiment for God to learn what is true. He already knows. It is a demonstration experiment, to teach mankind what God already knows is true. It is like experiments in high school chemistry labs, where the students perform a textbook experiment so they can see what happens, but the writers of the textbooks already know the results.

The seven thousand year plan of God is a demonstration to show mankind that man cannot govern himself, and that God's way works best. For six thousand years, mankind has been following the pattern set by Adam and Eve and set by Satan before that, of learning by experimentation and observation, and then interpreting the results to decide for oneself what is best. But God's way is different. God reveals by His Word, APART from experimentation and observation, what is best, and He commands us to believe Him. Mankind is writing the lesson in death and suffering that the scientific method, when used as a substitute for God's revelation, does not bring long-term good.

I think the same thing is happening in the Church. When God scattered the Church of God for our Laodicean attitude, He allowed at least one major fellowship to practice governance by the voting of men. I think that just as He is allowing Satan to rule this world for 6,000 years to demonstrate that Satan's way does not work, so He is allowing one major fellowship to govern itself by the voting of men to demonstrate once and for all that democracy does not work, that it causes division, and that it does not prevent doctrinal error.

What happens in a Church of God fellowship that governs itself through voting is a mirror-image of what is happening in the United States Congress. They are both the same system, and as our political divisions are weakening our country, so the political divisions in the Church are weakening the Church.

But we must be different if we are to learn the way of life we will practice in the Kingdom of God.

I have no doubt that God led Mr. Armstrong to name Mr. Tkach as his successor as Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God. God had His reasons, and it seems apparent that it was God's judgment to allow the Church to be scattered, to test and correct the Church of God, perhaps for the Laodicean attitude of most of the members. But whatever God's reasons, it was His decision to allow this. God did not make a mistake. To reject God's teaching in the Bible about government because we do not like God's decision regarding Mr. Armstrong's successor is to reject the authority of Jesus Christ over the administrative work of the Church.

The Church of God is commissioned by God to preach the gospel to the world. We are to teach and represent God's way of life to the world, and we are to announce God's plan to send Jesus Christ to this earth to replace Satan and man's governments under Satan's influence. When Christ comes, He will get rid of the governments of man, including the democracies of the nations of this world, and establish the government of God. For one thousand years there will be peace and happiness on the earth, in contrast to the war and misery that have occurred during the six thousand years of man's self rule under Satan. To preach that message effectively, we have to practice what we preach. We have to live a way of life that shows that we believe in that message of good news and that we agree with God, that God's rule over man is better than man's rule over himself.

We must live as if we believe that God's direct rule over us from the top down is really good news. We must show that we prefer that to our own systems of ruling ourselves.

We are not practicing what we preach if we practice democracy in the Church, governing ourselves by the authority of the ballot box, replacing Christ's rule over the Church with our own man-made system of self rule, and then preach to the world a message announcing the good news that Christ will come to replace man's self rule with

the government of God. We are also not showing trust in Christ to lead the Church of God from the top down.

For those who read this and still think that it is God's way to lead the Church of God through a system of balloting, and that such voting is not necessarily one of the ways of this world that we should come out of, I will close this section with a question to consider. When a major Church of God fellowship set up governance by balloting, where did they get the idea? Where did the idea of voting come from? Everybody in the United States knows what "voting" means. We take it for granted, but how do we know what it means? Where did we learn it? From the Bible? From our own traditions in the Church? Or from the example of our own national government and many other governments of this world? We learned that system from the governments of this world, not from the Bible and not from our traditions in the Church of God. And those governments are about to be replaced by God's government when Christ returns, and voting will come to an end.

For more discussion of the issue of Church of God governance, see Chapter 8 - Government in the Church of God.

Conclusion

Mr. Armstrong taught us by word and example to put the Bible first, as the Bible itself does. I have proved to myself, by looking at creation, that God exists, and I have proved to myself, by looking at prophecy and seeing how it has been fulfilled in history, that the Bible is God's word. I made a decision before I was baptized that I will always believe what God says, and therefore I will always believe the Bible. That was part of my commitment to God. I am determined not to break that commitment for any man.

By supporting the preaching of the gospel to the world and the Ezekiel warning to Israel with my tithes, offerings, and prayers, I am in effect participating in a work that tells members of the public to be willing to make any sacrifice to change their beliefs and practices to strive to believe and do whatever the Bible says. In order that my support of this may be effective and be blessed by God, I must practice what I preach -- I must make sure I am willing myself to learn new knowledge from the Bible. In spite of my human weaknesses and faults, I must make it my goal to strive to believe and do everything God tells me in the Bible, to learn to live by every word of God. I have to let myself be taught and guided by the Bible more than by my traditions, church government, or my own personal opinions and preferences. That is my goal.

CHAPTER 7 - SUGGESTIONS AND STRATEGIES

SUGGESTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD AND THE EZEKIEL WARNING TO ISRAEL

In this chapter I will offer specific suggestions and ideas for preaching our message to the public more effectively. These are ideas that have occurred to me, and I offer them for consideration. This is actually a collection of ideas over a wide range, some spiritual and some physical, but with a common theme of helping the Church and its members to more effectively preach the truth to the public.

Most of the success we have had in the past has been through a weekly or daily half-hour radio or TV broadcast, aired on as many stations as we can afford, principally in the United States, but also in Canada, Europe, and other nations. A monthly magazine is published, with articles on world news and other topics of interest, from a biblical perspective, with books and booklets on various doctrines advertised in the magazine and in the broadcasts, and with the magazine itself advertised in every broadcast. Also, ads are run, such as in Readers Digest magazine, to advertise the Church's magazine and booklets. All these things are still being done, with some effectiveness, though not as effectively as has been done in the past, principally because the Church of God does not have the income it used to have.

I believe that the above approach is a good foundation. My suggestions are meant to offer food for thought on how to build on that foundation and how the resources of the Church can be leveraged to increase our effectiveness in reaching as many people as possible.

Increasing the Audience and Effectiveness of TV Broadcasts

The Church has used the format of a weekly half-hour television program very effectively in reaching the public. Oftentimes to save money, time is purchased for a half-hour time slot very early in the morning on Sunday or Saturday. For example, as

of this writing, Living Church of God currently airs a program at 5:00 am Sundays on WGN in Chicago. More people could be reached at a later time, but that would be more expensive.

My suggestion here is for a way to increase the audience for an early morning or late night time slot -- to effectively reach the kind of audience that a more convenient time slot during the day or early evening would normally reach but at less cost.

Most people are able to view a program that airs at odd times such as very early in the morning, even if they are asleep or otherwise not available to watch it at that time. But they have to know it exists.

Viewers who know the program exists and have an interest can set the timers on their VCRs to record the program when it airs, then view it later. Most households have one or more VCRs.

But potential viewers must first know the program exists and have an interest in viewing it. Once they know about it, the less expensive early morning or late night time slot would be just as effective as a better, more expensive time slot. But how can we let them know that it exists and arouse audience interest?

Right now, the only people who will discover a broadcast that airs at a time when most people are asleep are those who are awake and "channel surfing" at that time. That is a limited number.

I am suggesting that the possibility be explored of purchasing 3 to 6 second spot ads to run prime time during the week to advertise the program on the same station that airs it. You've seen ads of this type. Usually there is a still picture in the background with some captioning that names the program and the day and time of its airing. An announcer's voice urges people to watch the program and announces the day and time it airs. An ad of this type may typically take about 3 or 4 seconds only. Stations use this type of ad all the time to advertise their own programming.

Generally, traditional advertising with 30 second or 1 minute commercials during regular daytime hours or during prime-time evening hours can be very expensive, especially if the ads are run dozens of times a week every week for a year. But I am not suggesting anything like this.

What I am suggesting is that between 5 to 10 of these 3 or 4 second announcements be aired in a particular week to advertise a particular program on a popular topic, such as "How to Have a Happy Marriage". The announcements would be run in the week just prior to the particular program on that topic that would air the next weekend. This could be done for only four weeks in the year for four different programs spaced 3 months apart. This would use only 20 to 40 announcements lasting only 3 or 4 seconds each in an entire year. Even during prime time, that can't be that expensive. I'm not talking about buying time during the Super Bowl.

Would this be effective in increasing the viewership of the program? I believe over time it would be. Many more people will hear these announcements than will discover a late night or early morning program by channel surfing. Those who are interested can set their VCRs to record the program and view it later at their convenience.

To be effective, there must be a close match between the interests of the particular audience that would see the announcement and the topic of the program being announced. For example, a good topic for a daytime audience between 9:00 am and 3:00 pm Monday through Friday might be "How to Have a Happy Marriage".

The announcements can show a picture of the presenter in the still background, and the caption for the still picture can give the topic and the day and time of the broadcast. The announcer can give the name of the program, the name of the presenter, the day and time of the broadcast, and that week's subject.

If any of the Church organizations that have a TV program are able to do this on any of the stations that air their program, the increase in audience that occurs as a result of a one-week airing of the announcements may be permanent. If someone hears the announcement and watches the program one time, if they like it, they will probably continue to view it from then on. So trying this approach for even one week can bring about a long-term increase in the number of people watching the program. Each additional week of announcements during a year may bring an additional long-term increase, so its effect may be cumulative.

This can be tried one or two times as an experiment to see if it works, then continued if results justify the cost.

Card Holder Program

The Church has sometimes used a cardholder program. Display cases are placed in public locations such as restaurants, waiting rooms, etc. with the permission of the owner or manager of the facility, and the display case will hold cards that can be mailed in for a free magazine subscription. The cards are business reply cards, no postage required, and contain the description and promotion of the magazine. The description is general, only saying for example that the magazine contains articles on world news, Christian living, the Bible, prophecy, etc. Sometimes many cards are taken but few actually mailed in, even with the free postage. It is as if people notice that it is free and feel motivated to take a card with them, but later lose interest and are not motivated to actually fill out and mail in the card. It may be that the description of the magazine, by necessity, is too general to hold interest and motivate someone to send in the card.

I suggest that an approach that might grab interest and motivate people more effectively to send in the card. Instead of designing the card to request a subscription, the card can request a particular booklet or book. This can be more effective because the card can

"zero in" on a particular subject matter and arouse interest more effectively. A book on how to improve one's marriage, or what prophecy predicts for the United States, or Bible health laws are examples of particular topics that grab and hold interest, arouse curiosity, and motivate someone to actually send in the card. Once the booklet is requested, a follow up letter or a card in the booklet can offer the magazine.

The cards can be changed periodically to offer a different booklet. An alternative is to use a larger display that can hold two or more types of cards and offer several booklets (one type of card for each) at the same time, thus giving the person a choice. If cards are changed periodically to offer a new booklet, for example once a month, for those who are interested, this may motivate them to stop by the establishment to see the display case and what is being offered, which would be an advantage for the establishment.

Promoting a particular topic of interest can more effectively arouse interest and motivate someone to send in a request than promoting a magazine, because the promotion can be more specific. The same principle is used in designing a magazine cover. The cover is designed to promote a particular article in the magazine. This principle has been used effectively by the Church and by commercial magazine publishers because particular topics are always more interesting than a general description of a magazine.

Suggestion for Preaching to the Jews

Herbert W. Armstrong in his writings and preaching to the public oriented his message to people who were predominantly Protestant or Catholic or non-religious in their thinking. Mr. Armstrong himself came from a Protestant background, so he knew how to speak to people who had the same background. The whole message was oriented towards a people who were familiar with certain Christian ideas. Mr. Armstrong could use the name of Jesus Christ without arousing animosity. He did not have to spend a lot of effort explaining the concept of Jesus Christ paying the penalty for our sins so we can be forgiven. He didn't have to place a major focus on the truth that Jesus is the Son of God and was resurrected from the dead. Outside of the United States the work of preaching the gospel was carried out primarily in nations with traditional Christian backgrounds. In other words, we have begun a work of preaching the gospel to the ten tribes.

But as far as I know, we have never effectively preached a message specifically designed for the Jews.

If I understand Bible prophecy correctly, the Jews will go through the tribulation also. Yet the Church of God in our time has never effectively preached the gospel and a warning message to the Jews, warning them of God's punishment to come, that is oriented towards the Jewish point of view.

Our traditional approach would not work with the Jews. They would reject the very name of Jesus Christ. Yet, in doing so, they are not necessarily rejecting the true Jesus Christ of the Bible because they have never heard about Him. The only Jesus they know of is the false concept of Jesus taught by the mainstream traditional churches, the "second person of the trinity". With the name "Jesus Christ" the Jews associate all the erroneous religious ideas of traditional mainstream Christianity. The Jews are right to reject the wrong ideas they associate with the name "Jesus", and they never heard of the true Jesus.

I suggest that a work could be started that would design, plan, and carry out an approach that would allow the Church to preach the gospel to the Jews and warn them of God's punishment to come, and would specifically speak to them from their point of view in language they could understand and accept. For example, in material that would first be read or listened to, Bible quotes can be from the Old Testament only. The primary thrust of the message would be that the Jews need to repent of the sins God talks about in the warnings in the prophecies of the Old Testament and turn back to God, and that a great punishment is coming from God upon those who have not repented, and that after the punishment the Messiah will come and bring peace and prosperity to the earth and teach all mankind God's law. These things can be shown from the Old Testament only. Those that respond and express interest in the message can be taught the full truth of God through Bible lessons and booklets that would lead the reader step-by-step into all of the doctrines of the Church from both old and new testaments, written with the Jewish perspective in mind.

Such a work would fill a gap that has not been filled by any major Church of God group as far as I know, as of this writing. It would not duplicate the effort of any major group in the Church, and I think it could be started on a small scale, and even if it expands it would always be smaller than the task of reaching the hundreds of millions in the tribe of Joseph. I believe it could probably be done or at least started without a very large organization. But it would require a great deal of study, thinking, planning, and preparation.

Church Government

I believe I have said something about this in a previous chapter, but this issue directly affects how the Church can function efficiently to finish the work of preaching the gospel and the Ezekiel warning to Israel. The Bible teaches us that God's government is hierarchical, not a democracy. There is a direct connection between hierarchical government and the ability of a church organization to make the sacrifices and the hard decisions necessary to preach to the public. I think recent experience has shown and is showing that if the human leader or leaders at the top of an organization, who have the authority to determine the budget and how much money is spent on preaching the gospel to the world and how much is spent on ministers' salaries, are themselves elected

by the ministers, it is unlikely they will make the hard decisions necessary to allocate sufficient resources to really finish the work of preparing Israel for the tribulation. It is just common sense that many ministers will not elect someone who would reduce their salaries or lay some of them off if that were necessary. Besides the budget issue, fast and hard decisions may have to be made to take advantage of opportunities in a rapidly changing environment, and this is more difficult for an organization whose leadership is obligated to a large number of "voters" who may need to be consulted and whose opinions may have to be considered. Strong hierarchical government, led from the top down by Jesus Christ, will be needed to get the job done. I think it is unrealistic to imagine that the job will be finished any other way.

Some may be against hierarchical government because of errors or abuses in the use of that form of government that can occur in the Church. However, the fact that some may not use hierarchical government correctly does not make hierarchical government wrong. Mr. Armstrong often taught that the wrong use of something is sin. He used examples. A pair of dice, he said, was not sin, but the wrong use of a pair of dice was sin. Sex is not sin, but the wrong use of sex is sin. I think a similar thing can be said of hierarchy in church government. Hierarchy is not wrong, but the incorrect use of hierarchy is wrong. Mr. Armstrong submitted to Jesus Christ, and Christ used him to raise up a Church and do a powerful world-wide work. Mr. Armstrong used hierarchy rightly, to keep us on track following the Bible, to protect the Church from heresy and confusion, to keep us speaking the same thing and moving in the same direction so our efforts were so united and focused that we could do a great work. In spite of recent examples of the incorrect use of hierarchical government, the fact is that the positive fruits of what God accomplished through Mr. Armstrong show the practical advantages of hierarchical government.

The lesson of hierarchical government can also help the Church to learn character lessons that we can take with us into the Kingdom of God. Since God's government in the Kingdom will be hierarchical, then it is fitting that we be learning that form of government now. There will be mistakes now in this life because we are human, but God allows that to test us. That is for our good. Rightly used, hierarchy teaches us to submit, within God's law, to those over us, and to exercise compassion on those under us, and these are lessons we can use in God's Kingdom.

I often wonder why a large number of ministers participate in and support a system of voting for a board of directors of a Church of God that claims to be following the doctrines of the Bible that God used Mr. Armstrong to teach us and help us understand. Of course, many may have come to the conclusion that hierarchical government in the Church of God is bad, and they may prefer a more democratic approach based on the idea that human checks and balances are needed to prevent a leader from leading the Church into false doctrine. But others may believe in hierarchical government, yet not see any alternative for themselves except to support, for now, a system of voting for leaders. I have not talked in depth about this with any of these ministers, although I did talk briefly with one pastor. I asked the pastor why he did not join with a certain leader of a major Church organization that was practicing hierarchical government. The minister said that God has not shown him that this leader was the one God would use to lead the Church.

I suppose this can be a dilemma for ministers, especially for those who believe in hierarchical government. If it is not clear who God is working through, some ministers may have felt that there was no alternative but to band together in a group and vote for the ones to lead that group, until such time as God made clear that He is working through a particular individual. While many ministers have organized and raised up their own groups, many others, out of humility or a fear of being presumptuous, or because of knowledge of their personal limitations, may have been afraid to do so and be "independent" of a larger organization. Many may have felt that, though God called them to be a pastor, they were not qualified and prepared to preach the gospel to the world, and so they wanted to support a larger organization that could do that. They may also have felt that to start their own Church of God organization would be creating and furthering division in the body of Christ. However, I have often thought that it is not the separate or individual organizations or administrations of the Church of God that causes division, but the competitive, non-cooperative nature of the relationships between organizations that is causing division. There is a lot of opportunity for cooperation between organizations that is not being utilized today, or is utilized very little among the major Church of God groups.

A corporation is a legal convenience. Being incorporated as a non-profit organization allows member contributions to be tax deductible, allows the Church to take advantage of lower postage rates, simplifies copyright management, and provides a number of other business and legal advantages. But the number of legal corporations the Church of God uses is not an accurate measure of the divisions that exist in the Church. One can be separately incorporated and yet have a policy of organized cooperation with other groups, as it is appropriate (without compromising with God's law and doctrine). Unfortunately, most of the major Church of God fellowships today seem to practice competitiveness in their relationships with other Church of God groups rather than cooperation and organized assistance, even between groups that are nearly identical in doctrine. Paul used the example in his day of those who said "I am of Paul" or "I am of Apollos", and Paul asked "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:11-13, 3:1-4). Today we might say, "I am of David Hulme" or "I am of Roderick Meredith" or "I am of ..." (fill in the blank). Not in those exact words of course. That would be too obvious. But in some of the various groups in the Church of God that adopt a competitive attitude towards others groups, members are sometimes taught to think of their group as being the only group God is primarily working through, or that their leader is the only man God is primarily working through, and that amounts to the same thing.

Is God's Church divided? The answer is, yes, it is. Is it divided because all are not under one man? No. Is it divided because all are not in one organization? No. Should the different Churches of God merge? I say no. The Church is divided because different groups compete with each other instead of cooperating with each other, even in cases where there is little if any difference in doctrinal teachings. I know of two major groups that have come out of Worldwide after the apostasy, and both teach hierarchical government, preaching the gospel to the public, keeping God's commandments, and striving to live by every word of God. They keep the same day of Pentecost and the other holy days, and take the same or similar positions on makeup and other smaller doctrines. There is a difference in strategy for preaching the gospel, but

strategy is not doctrine. Neither group perfectly lives up to everything it teaches, but that is not the issue. The issue is that these two groups seem to compete with each other instead of helping each other, but not because of differences in doctrine. There seems to be a spirit of competitiveness between them, with each trying to vie with the other to get or hold on to the most sheep. I have heard the term "sheep wars" to describe the competitiveness that exists between some groups.

God does NOT always work through only one man at a time. Peter and Paul were distinct administrations, with Peter going to the circumcised and Paul to the gentiles primarily, with neither directing the other in the day-to-day operations, possibly with Peter having primacy only in certain matters that affected the whole Church. But Peter did not direct Paul in Paul's day-to-day administration of the gospel to the gentiles. Both were supervised DIRECTLY by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Also, many Old Testaments prophets were contemporary with each other with no indication that one prophet reported to another, so God must have been working through more than one man at the same time. God worked through king David and the prophet Nathan at the same time. Each man had his respective responsibilities. Nathan was God's prophet and David was king over Israel, and David was also a prophet who wrote many of the psalms. David did not tell Nathan how to speak for God and Nathan did not tell David how to run the country, except when God gave Nathan a message to give to David. Neither supervised the other in the work the other did for God, but rather God directly supervised them both.

God can work through more than one man at a time and still retain hierarchy if each man through whom Christ works faithfully follows Christ and cooperates with the other man who follows Christ. An analogy is a company that manufactures cars. The chairman of the board is like the Father, the president is like Christ, and under the president may be several department directorships with, for example, one man being the manufacturing director and another man the marketing director. The manufacturing director is in charge of purchasing supplies and materials and supervising the factories and assembly lines, with all factory workers under his authority. The marketing director is in charge of all advertising and the dealerships, with all salesmen reporting to him. Neither of these two directors has authority over the other, but both report to the president, and since the president wants harmony in the organization, if the directors are doing a good job of following the instructions of the president they will be cooperating with each other, not competing with each other.

I have attended or visited several major Church of God fellowships over the years since the death of Herbert W. Armstrong. I do not remember any occasion when I heard a guest speaker from one organization speak in another. I do not remember reading an article written by a writer in one Church corporation published in the magazine or newsletter of another Church corporation. During announcements in church services, I do not remember ever being asked to pray for the success of a conference or the success of the efforts to preach the gospel or the success of a co-worker letter in another Church organization. Very seldom have I even heard prayer requests for the healing of a sick member in another Church organization. I don't say this never happens among the hundreds of splinter organizations, but at least among the major groups it must be rare.

Once I attended the Feast of Tabernacles with one group while a different group, which shared the same general doctrinal positions almost exactly as far as I could tell, kept the Feast at a site that was threatened with disruption due to a hurricane. The group that had the site that was threatened with a hurricane was a Church that had brought in a number of new members through their TV broadcast, and a number of these "babes in Christ" were probably attending the threatened Feast site, with some perhaps attending their first Feast of Tabernacles ever, new members just learning how to step out in faith and to trust God. Yet all the time the hurricane was approaching the threatened site, never once did I hear a request for prayers for the safety of brethren threatened by the hurricane in the announcements of the site I was attending. We were never asked to pray that the Feast at the threatened site not be disrupted. They were a different group, so they were treated as if they didn't exist. I couldn't imagine any way that brand new members brought in through a TV broadcast could be blamed for being in the "wrong group" and therefore not deserving of prayers for their safety just because they were attending their first Feast with the group that brought them into contact with God's truth. Yet it seemed that there was no concern for them in the other group.

God says in a multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6). Many top leaders of Church of God organizations practice getting advice before making decisions, but perhaps often do so by listening only to the advice of their own fellow ministers, department heads, employees, and members from within their own group. These are the very people who are mostly in agreement already with the leadership, or in some cases may feel intimidated about telling the leadership it is wrong. It can be a mistake to get advice only from those who agree with you and exclude those who may disagree. I wonder how often the leaders of the Churches of God solicit advice and counsel from those in other Church of God organizations that may have encountered similar decisions or have valuable experience in a certain area. There may be opportunities for sharing of information, advice, and planning in a cooperative way.

I have heard of at least one case where a member of a congregation of one Church was disfellowshipped because of a problem with another member. According to what I have heard, the disfellowshipped member simply went to a congregation of a "competing" Church of God organization in the same city and was accepted. Apparently, there is no coordination between pastors of different organizations in the same city to prevent a member that needs to repent of a problem from dodging the correction by just going across the street. This is not good for the member and is not good for the Church of God. And in cases where a disfellowshipped member may have done harm to members of the congregation he was disfellowshipped from, for another pastor to accept him without talking to the first pastor may present a danger to the members of the congregation the man is going to.

I do not say that a church should compromise with its beliefs or accept a guest speaker who would teach doctrines contrary to the official teachings of the church he is speaking to. I do not say that a church should pray for the success of other churches that have such serious errors that it would be better for God's plan that those groups not succeed in promoting their errors. But it seems that there could be a lot more of a spirit of cooperation and harmony among some of the organizations in the Church of God, without compromise, rather than a spirit of competition and a sense that all other

organizations don't exist or shouldn't be helped. Too much it seems as if anyone who preaches the truth of God is counted as an enemy merely for not being part of one's own organization. I do not see support in the Bible for this approach and attitude.

When Paul became an apostle to the Gentiles, he and Peter agreed that Paul would go to the gentiles and Peter to the circumcised (Galatians 2:7-10). Peter and Paul led distinct administrations of the gospel, yet they cooperated with each other, not only by recognizing their respective responsibilities, but even in seeking doctrinal agreement when possible without compromising (Acts 15). Even in a case where some were preaching the gospel out of a wrong motivation in competition with Paul, Paul rejoiced that their efforts were indeed advancing the cause of the gospel (Philippians 1:15-18). When Jesus was teaching his disciples, the disciples told Jesus that they forbade someone who was casting out demons in Jesus' name because he was not with them (the disciples). Jesus said, "Do not forbid him..." and "...he who is not against us is on our side." (Mark 9:38-40). Too often today, the policy of some Church of God organizations is, he who is not part of our organization is against us.

Is God's Church divided? Yes, it is. That is a fact. God's Church is divided into many pieces. And all the time that the division and a competitive, hostile, unloving attitude exists between the pieces, many pieces boast how much unity that particular piece has with itself! A small piece of a divided Church will say, "What wonderful unity and harmony we had at our last ministerial conference". That piece has "unity", that is, until that piece divides into still smaller pieces. Then each of the smaller pieces can also boast that it has such wonderful unity within itself.

But is there unity between the pieces? Is there unity of the whole? Not now. Not with most of the pieces. Not until different groups and organizations begin to show at least a minimum of respect and esteem for one another.

I think we need to understand that unity within a Church of God organization is not real unity if that organization is hostile to other Church of God organizations that teach and practice the same doctrines from the Bible. Unity within one piece is not unity in the Church. Some ministers want members to identify with the "piece" they are in, but that is wrong. Our identity is with God and with Christ and with the WHOLE body of Christ, every man or woman who has the Spirit of God. Obviously some members and ministers have fallen under the influence of serious doctrinal errors, but if a person has the Holy Spirit, that person is still a member of the Church that we should identify with, and we should help them correct their errors. Competitiveness is not going to correct anything. Some speakers like to use props. I can imagine a speaker bringing his own piece of pottery to the podium, showing the audience how beautiful and unified it is, then smashing the pottery next to the podium and holding up one of the larger pieces and saying, "See what unity this one piece has with itself. There are absolutely no cracks or divisions in this one piece. What a perfect example to show that God's one true Church is not divided" (bring a hammer just in case the floor is carpeted or the pottery is strong, and cover the pottery with a cloth to protect the eyes in the front row).

Some people say that the different groups are divided because of real doctrinal differences, and some say that they are divided because of personality conflicts and an

inability to get along between the leaders. I think that doctrinal differences exist and are a reason why most groups are divided one from another, BUT NOT ALWAYS. Sometimes there is virtually no discernable doctrinal difference between two groups, and the competitiveness exists between them only because the leaders are not willing to cooperate with each other.

Not all of the major Church of God fellowships are so divided in doctrine or policy that they cannot cooperate. I can think of two major groups that share the same position on hierarchical government, preaching the gospel to the public, and the general body of doctrine Mr. Armstrong taught us from the Bible, and neither has the problem of an over-emphasis on the authority of a person and adding a lot of doctrines and interpretations of Scripture that are never proved from the Bible. Yet never have I heard a prayer request in one of these two Churches for the success of a ministerial conference in the other Church. That is just a simple example. There are many opportunities for cooperation between organizations, but what is needed is the desire to find opportunities for cooperation where appropriate. If the desire is there, ways will be found, but without the desire, it won't happen.

I am reminded as I write this of the way Mr. Armstrong explained the two ways of life: give and get. The give way is the way of outgoing concern for others, the way of helping and cooperating. The get way of life is the way of selfishly trying to get and take away from others, the way of competition, especially hostile competition. In view of Mr. Armstrong's explanation, would an impartial outside observer say that the various Church of God fellowships are living the give way, the way of cooperation, or the get way, the way of competition, in their relationships with each other?

Is there love between the leaders of the competing Churches of God who share the same doctrines? Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Isn't the converse also true? If it is true that all men will know we are Christ's disciples if we have love for one another, could it also be true that no one will know we are Christ's disciples if we do not have love for one another? What do our competitive attitudes look like to the world? Do they know we are Christ's disciples by the way the different organizations love and cooperate with each other? Do they see Christ in us in the way we behave towards one another? And will Christ empower the Church to preach the gospel to the world more powerfully as long as we have the attitude of hostile competition of each organization towards all the others? I think the answers to the above questions are: no, yes, yes, the competitive ways of this world, no, no, no.

Our motive for preaching the gospel to the world should be to help those who hear the message and to glorify God's name. The competitive spirit among some Church of God organizations seems so strong that I wonder if some may be trying to preach the gospel to the world from a different motive. We have to be careful that we are not like those Paul referred to in Philippians 1:15-17 who preached Christ from a motive of selfish ambition. If our motive for preaching the gospel to the world is to demonstrate to the most sheep that we are the ones God is working through, we have things backwards. Our motive for preaching the gospel should be to glorify God and further His plan and to help other human beings who are about to suffer.

Our motive in preaching the gospel should not be to compete with other groups and try to obtain and hold on to the most "sheep", that is, members, using the gospel as a means for doing so, like advertising campaigns used by this world's business corporations. Our motive for preaching the gospel should be to help the people who hear it and to glorify God's name. If that is our motive, we should rejoice in any group, even those organized separately from the one we attend and support, that has success in reaching the public with the truth. That is the spirit of love and cooperation in action.

As far as I can see, the problem is NOT that the Church exists in several organizations or corporations, the problem is the competition that exists between them, even between groups that share the same doctrines. Among the major groups that believe in top-down government, preaching the gospel to the public, keeping the commandments, and looking to the Bible for correction and doctrine, it is the apparent hostile or indifferent spirit that exists between them that is more of a problem than the fact that they are separately organized and incorporated.

So for ministers and church leaders to be separately organized or incorporated does not, by itself, mean that the Church is divided, but rather the division is the result of either heresy or error in doctrine or policy that cannot be compromised with, or an attitude of viewing any organization other than one's own as a competitor, and therefore not taking advantage of opportunities for cooperation and coordination where they may exist.

I started this section by talking about the problem facing ministers who know that hierarchical government is God's way, yet they don't know who to follow, and they don't want to go "independent" because they think they would cause further division unless they are part of a large group, so they stay in a group that practices democracy. My point about the divisions that exist between the organizations is this. It is not the fact that there is more than one organization that makes the Church divided. It is the fact that the many organizations do not cooperate that makes the Church divided. In the first century, the gospel to Israel was committed to Peter and the gospel to the gentiles was committed to Paul (Galatians 2:6-10). There is certainly a sense in which Peter had precedence in certain situations that concerned both Peter and Paul, such as the event recorded in Acts 15 regarding a major doctrinal question that affected the whole Church, yet in day-to-day operations, they were separate and distinct administrations or organizations with each reporting directly to Jesus Christ. I am sure Peter never tried to tell Paul what cities to go to. Yet though Peter's administration and Paul's administration were different organizations, there was unity because they cooperated with each other. That is what is lacking today, cooperation. Instead, we have competition.

If God wants all the faithful groups to merge together under one leader, God is able to bless and give success to the one He has chosen in such an obvious way that every faithful member in the Church can know who it is by his fruits. If that occurs, a merger of groups under that one man would be appropriate. Many members and ministers may be waiting for that to happen. And if it does, it may be obvious to all. God has ways of making His will known. But I think God has not done that, and I know of no guarantee that He will do that before the tribulation begins. So in the meantime, cooperation will

do more to achieve unity of mind, heart, purpose, and accomplishment than competition or indifference. And if cooperation is not possible, surely mergers are not possible either, and the divided state of the Church will continue.

Going back to the matter of the dilemma of ministers coming out of Worldwide who may themselves believe in hierarchical government, but feel that they are not able to join or support any existing leader for one reason or another, I have wondered what the result would be if more of them had simply organized separately and begun in one way or another to do the work of feeding the flock and preaching the gospel to the world, even if starting on a limited scale, rather than getting together to elect a board by voting. God could then indicate who He is working through by blessing that leader, and he would become known by his fruits (Matthew 7:15-20, Luke 6:43-44, Joshua 3:7), and as this became evident others could then join him. This would be one way God could make his choice known. It seems to me that gathering to vote for a board of directors bypasses this process. I think it would not be causing division for a minister to organize and incorporate separately rather than be subject to and support a democratically elected government of men, provided that minister had a willingness to cooperate with others. And if a pastor is able to feed his flock but feels totally unqualified for taking the gospel to the public, such a minister can still find ways of supporting the preaching of the gospel financially by sharing tithes and contributions with a minister or organization that is qualified to take the gospel to the public, and may already be doing so. He does not have to feel forced to join with another man or organization and come under that man's or that organization's authority before he has confidence about who God is working through.

For more discussion of the issue of Church of God governance, see Chapter 8 - Government in the Church of God.

How Is the Church Organized?

How is God's Church organized? This is important, because some seem confused about how far a minister's authority over the membership goes. I am putting this in this chapter because it seems to fit with the previous section on government in the Church of God. Some ministers and leaders in some organizations seem to claim more authority than I think the Bible gives them. Some claim authority over what members believe, or seem to claim authority over where members attend or what they read.

How is God's Church organized? We know that Christ is the head of the Church as the husband is the head of the wife, as Paul says in Ephesians 5:22-23: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body."

How is Christ the head of the Church? Does Christ lead the Church only through the ministry?

1 Corinthians 11:3 shows how Christ is the head of every family in the Church. Christ is the head of the man, the man is the head of the wife, and the head of Christ is God the Father. In matters of family decisions, Christ does not rule the wife and children directly, but He rules the husband and father, who in turn rule the rest of the family.

Galatians 3:28 shows that in Christ there is neither male nor female. Is this a contradiction of 1 Corinthians 11:3? No. This is not talking about family matters but our personal relationship with Christ and with the Father. Everyone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells is a converted Christian and a member of the true Church of God and has a direct relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-16 shows the offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher in the Church for the administrative work of the Church. This work includes preaching the gospel to the world, the feeding of the flock, taking care of the poor in the Church, anointing the sick, and resolving disputes between brethren. Because the work of the ministry includes the preaching of the gospel to the world and the feeding of the flock, the ministry does have authority over what doctrines are officially taught by the Church.

Christ is head over each one of us directly in matters pertaining to our relationship with God the Father, our salvation, our faith, our repentance, and our obedience to God's law. We do not report to any man or minister in any of these things. But in matters of family decisions such as where to live, how the family budget will be managed, how the children will be supervised and disciplined, the wife does not report directly to Christ. Instead, she reports to her husband who reports to Christ. The husband does not have authority from Christ over his wife's faith, but he has authority from Christ over how she manages the household.

Then with the work of the Church, the organized ministry has authority from Christ. Individual members do not report directly to Christ in matters of deciding official Church doctrine, what will be taught to the public as part of the preaching of the gospel, what will be taught to the brethren as part of feeding the flock, distribution of third tithe funds to the poor, etc. Instead, members take direction from their pastors, who take direction from an evangelist, who takes direction from the leading evangelist or an apostle or pastor general, who takes direction from Christ, who takes direction from the Father. In the organized work of the Church, Christ's authority flows through the ministry to the members, not to the members directly.

In other words, there are overlapping authority structures. But this does not lead to confusion because each authority structure is for a particular area of responsibility and all authority structures are under Christ.

It is important to understand this because it shows the limitations of the authority of the ministry. The ministry does not have authority over our salvation, our faith, and our relationship with God (2 Corinthians 1:24). Only Christ has that authority, and He exercises it over us for our good directly, not through the ministry. Neither can the ministry command us what to believe. We must believe the Word of God. As Mr. Armstrong taught, the Bible is the word of God in print and Christ is the Word of God

in person, the same word. But the ministry can help us by teaching us, and they have the authority to make binding decisions on the official doctrines that the Church will teach. Whenever there is a conflict between the teaching of the ministry and the teaching of Christ through the Bible, we must believe and obey Christ first.

It is Christ who will judge us as far as our faith is concerned, our obedience, what we believe, what we read, where we attend, where we send our tithes, etc., not the ministry. Christ will judge us by what is written in the Bible, not by the teaching of the ministry.

For more discussion of the issue of Church of God governance, see Chapter 8 - Government in the Church of God.

Final Push

As we get closer to the end, there may come a time for a final all out push of great intensity but short duration. This may occur only a year or less before the end of the Church's work. This would be the final chance to reach everyone who has not yet heard our message before the tribulation begins.

Only God can provide the resources and opportunities for a final push that will truly reach everyone in Israel with the gospel and the Ezekiel warning. We also have our part to work as hard and as intelligently as we can to plan and prepare for such a push as God enables us. Although God can work things out in ways we do not expect and cannot anticipate, nevertheless we can strive to do our part to think about how this may occur and to do what we are able to do with the means God gives us.

Here are some thoughts and ideas I have had that I want to share about how this may come about. I do not say this is how things will happen, but only that this may be a possibility.

God is able to bless and prosper the Church of God and the work that He wants us to do far beyond what we can imagine (Ephesians 3:20). If at some time God provides the financial resources we need to really finish the work with a final last "push" to reach everyone who has not been reached so far, how would we use those resources?

I don't think buying time on TV in half-hour segments on more and more TV stations to boost the magazine circulation will do the job. That is because most people will just tune out. It won't matter how often our program runs or how much time we buy. The typical TV viewer will not pay attention long enough to hear the message. If I am "channel surfing", it takes me about 2 seconds or less to recognize a religious broadcast and switch to the next channel, and during that time I don't even hear one complete sentence. I believe this would be the typical reaction on the part of the majority of the population. We could run half-hour programs in prime time every day of the week on every TV station in the country, and most people will just switch channels. We just

won't reach everybody that way. Some people are willing to listen, and we can reach those now, but later we will have to reach more.

As we are doing the work now, our TV programs generate responses that translate into magazine subscriptions. It is primarily the magazines, books, booklets, and Bible study lessons that a TV viewer requests that teach our message. Typically, when the Church purchases TV time, we buy time in half-hour segments. Why is that?

When someone is willing to start to listen to our program, how do we speak to them? What is our approach? How do we persuade someone that most of the religious beliefs they grew up with are wrong and that the Bible teaches things very different than they previously thought? How do we break through people's misconceptions? How do we change their views? In other words, how do we lead them into new knowledge they never had before and may be prejudiced against? How do we correct them?

I remember hearing one minister describe an approach to persuading people. I think this description comes from Mr. David Hulme, though I do not remember if I heard him speaking or if I got this from a third person describing how Mr. Hulme explained this. Basically, the principle is, you talk to the person from their point of view. An analogy is crossing a bridge. If you are on one end of a bridge and someone is on the other end of the bridge, and you want him to come to your side, you first cross the bridge and go over to him, then you lead him step by step back across the bridge to your side, the side you want him to be on. In practice, this means you acknowledge your audience's point of view and speak to them in their language in terms they can accept. That is the starting point that enables you to connect with your audience and establish a sense of trust and rapport. They are then ready to listen to you. Then you lead them to the truth one step at a time at a pace they can handle. I may not be explaining this as well as I originally heard it, but this is the basic idea.

I think this has been the approach, to one degree or another, that the Church of God has used in our communication with the public. This approach can be very effective, but it takes time. This is one reason we have used half-hour programs, each on a different topic, along with a monthly magazine. We want to persuade people without offending them, so we approach our conclusions gradually.

The Bible also endorses this approach. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, "For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some." Also, the book of Acts records how Paul approached the Athenians. "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth,

does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring" ' ' (Acts 17:22-28). Here, Paul tries to find points in common with his audience, referring to their altar to the "unknown God" and to the writings of their own poets.

I think this is the best approach when one has time to persuade people, and when people are willing to listen. But I think the Bible shows that there is another approach possible.

When Jonah preached to Nineveh, did he try to persuade the Ninevites by speaking their language and bringing them to the truth step by step in terms they could accept? Did he try to establish common ground with them? "And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' " (Jonah 3:4). This sounds pretty blunt. Perhaps this is just a summary, but considering Jonah's attitude towards Nineveh it seems unlikely that he was very concerned with persuading them. He was actually angry because they repented and God spared them (Jonah 3:5-4:3).

Yet the interesting thing here is that, as blunt and direct as the message was, and as unsympathetic towards the Ninevites as Jonah was, the message got results! Nineveh repented and God spared them. There are not many examples like this in the Bible.

I don't say that this is the right approach at this time. But before the tribulation actually starts, there may come a time when we have to be blunt and direct. Even if we come across as being somewhat harsh, we will be gentle compared to the tribulation itself. It doesn't make sense to me that we go right up to the time when the tribulation begins, with all of the death and agony associated with it, and never talk strong language. And it does not have to take a half-hour TV message to get the point across.

When we get close to the beginning of the tribulation and the time comes for a "final push", the objective at that time would NOT primarily be to convert people. The objective would be to give every person a chance to respond so they know that they had a chance. It doesn't matter if almost everyone rejects it. They will know that they heard it. The "payoff" will be during the tribulation when these people will repent. However, for the opportunity to be genuine, there will need to be a way that those who wish to respond and learn more can find the details and the proof from Scripture and to do so in a very short amount of time. This is where the Internet can come in. We can give a short, direct message on TV, radio, and in print, then provide the scriptural proof and more details on a website for those who wish to act on the message, or at least look into it with an open mind.

The short message can be conveyed through a series of 1 minute television and radio commercials and display ads for magazines and newspapers. There might be six or seven varieties of the one minute commercial. Taken together, they will get the

message across. At the end of each commercial will be a lead-in to the website for more information. This will reach those that will normally change channels to avoid a half-hour TV program, but would probably hear the commercial if it comes on when they are watching a regular program.

Is six or seven minutes divided into six or seven commercials sufficient to preach the gospel and the Ezekiel warning to Israel? Let's ask the question this way. If we knew the tribulation was about to occur, that there was no more time, and we had just six minutes to tell someone what they needed to know, what would we say? I think we could say a lot.

We could tell our audience in just two or three sentences the identity of the United States and Britain in Bible prophecy and what prophecy says will happen to our nations. We can itemize in one summary sentence the major sins of our nations that we need to repent of. We can briefly state a number of truths about the second coming of Christ, the millennium, God's law, and the plan of God for mankind, and other doctrines. We can explain that the Bible is God's word, and that a person with an open mind can prove from fulfilled prophecy that the Bible is the word of God. We can state these things, briefly, without trying to prove them from the Bible.

Then we can conclude by stating that further information along with the scriptural proofs can be found on our website.

Could we cover these things in six or seven minutes? If we try to prove and expound on them and tactfully persuade the listener step by step, of course not. But if we just briefly announce these things, yes we can.

Would this persuade anyone? Not directly. It will only challenge people and arouse curiosity. But it would provide the name of the website, and the website can be prepared to thoroughly explain the entire gospel and Ezekiel warning, the proof from fulfilled prophecy that the Bible is God's word, all of the Church's doctrines, and all the supporting scriptures and proofs that what we teach is true. This is where we can persuade people, if they are willing to learn.

The combination of this kind of announcement message and providing a website that can really teach and prove what we say in a comprehensive way will accomplish the job of making sure no Israelite who goes into the tribulation can say, "I never had a chance." Everyone who hears our message will remember it and will remember whether they checked the website or not, and whether they were willing to believe and obey the Bible or not.

The website should be carefully organized and prepared to teach all the doctrines of God. It can be organized hierarchically. It can start with the same message as announced in the commercials and print ads, but provide links in the message to other pages that will prove and expound on the things stated. For example, in the top level message, in a statement about God's law, the word "law" can link to a page that can expound on the law of God being the law of love and an expression of God's nature and the give way of life, with supporting scriptures. That page can state that the two great

commandments are to love God and to love neighbor, with supporting scriptures, and that the Ten Commandments teach us how to put love into practice, with the first four commandments teaching us how to love God and the last six how to love neighbor. The term "Ten Commandments" can link to a page that lists the Ten Commandments, gives a paragraph or two on each one explaining how one can apply them to our lives today, and then each of those commandments will link to a page that expounds that one commandment in detail, teaching from the scriptures. This is what I mean by a hierarchical organization.

Likewise, from the main page, the statement that the United States is part of Israel can link to pages that teach and prove from history and from Scripture our identity in prophecy. The statements about the tribulation can link to articles that will teach the details about the tribulation and prove everything from the Bible.

Even without the short commercials and advertisements, a well-organized website designed to teach the doctrines of the Church of God and to get our message across and prove what we say from the Bible can play a vital role in finishing the work. God can provide favorable publicity for the Church and our message in ways we cannot imagine right now, and if that occurs, we need to be ready with a website so that people who want to know more can access the information they need in a tight, well-organized way.

On the technical side, provision would have to be made to allow the capacity of the website to provide access for a huge number of people, many of whom may be accessing the site just out of curiosity, but some of whom may be sincerely trying to prove if what we say is true. If God gave the Church favorable publicity for a few days and many people became curious about us, the number of "hits" on the website would increase dramatically in a few hours. If the site is just set up for normal volume of traffic, it would be quickly overwhelmed. The site would have to be able to handle a huge volume of traffic for a few weeks, and this would have to be prepared and even tested somehow prior to the time when it would be needed. This can be called "surge capacity", and it needs to be planned for and prepared BEFORE it is needed, and it needs to be able to be implemented with just a couple of hours notice.

What the Church could do now is to prepare a website that can hierarchically and logically teach and prove all the doctrines of the Church. Right now, a number of churches provide websites that are extensive and well-organized, but most of them are merely designed as "containers" for sermon recordings and articles. That is, the sermons are prepared and given as sermons, and the articles, books, and booklets are written as articles, books, and booklets for print, and then the website is put together to help advertise and distribute these sermons, articles, books, and booklets. The teaching material itself is not designed for the Web, it is designed for print or for audio recording. This is fine, but it doesn't fully take advantage of the Web's hierarchical linking ability. Rather than write articles for print, or take articles and books already written and then make them available for browsing or download on a website, articles should be written FOR the Web specifically with a hierarchical plan for the links designed from the beginning. Such a website can be supplemented with articles and booklets written for print as well as audio recordings, but the main site should be

specially designed for the Web to take full advantage of the ability to use links to organize the material in a hierarchical format.

God may bless the Church with financial resources to run a large advertising program or God may give the Church favorable publicity in a way we do not anticipate. If that were to occur, public interest in the Church and our message may vastly increase -- for about a day or two. Then the mind of the public will shift its attention to some other news item or the latest fad. We have to be ready with a website that can get a short, powerful message across on the first page, then teach the truth in a logical, well-organized way to those who are willing to take the time to follow the links. And that site would have to be prepared, and business and technical arrangements prepared, so that the capacity of the site to absorb and respond to a high traffic volume can be vastly increased on a moments notice, so that the site will not be overwhelmed and unable to respond to everyone who accesses it. This would be a challenge and an opportunity that cannot be handled "ad hoc". It would take advance preparation time to construct such a site. Once public interest is aroused, we are either ready for it or not.

MAKING OUR WAYS PLEASING TO GOD - OVERCOMING SIN

How to Obtain More of God's Help in Breaking Bad Habits

As part of the principle of practicing what we preach, we need to individually be striving to live God's way of life and to be obedient to all of God's commandments as we preach to the public. We need to make sure that our ways are pleasing to God so He will answer our prayers and help us to preach the gospel to the world more powerfully.

When we were first coming into the true Church of God, when we were responding to our calling, we learned from the Church and from the Bible that there are two requirements for baptism: repentance and faith. We must repent of our sins and our sinful nature and have faith in God and in Jesus Christ. After fulfilling the requirements of repentance and faith, a prospective member is ready for baptism. He or she is baptized by a minister, and then hands are laid on the person by the minister and the minister asks God to give that person the Holy Spirit. Upon receiving the Holy Spirit, that person becomes a member of God's true Church and part of the spiritual body of Christ. From that point on the new member is a begotten son or daughter of God and is to live a lifetime of spiritual growth and overcoming, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. Those who overcome and endure to the end in this age will be in the first resurrection and will be born immortal into God's Family when Christ returns.

We are taught that the Holy Spirit empowers us with spiritual understanding so we can comprehend spiritual truth from God, and that it empowers us to overcome sin. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

We are taught that to overcome sin we need to pray and ask God for His Holy Spirit and for the help we need to resist temptation, overcome sin, and break bad habits. We are taught to use the tools of Bible study, prayer, fasting, and meditation to help us draw closer to God and to grow spiritually. We are sometimes encouraged to go to the ministry for counseling if we need help in overcoming sin.

Ministers in the Church know that some members, after baptism, whether they have been in the Church for only a short time or for a long time, sometimes come to them for counseling about a bad habit, some reoccurring sin, that the member seems to be unable to overcome, even after many years of trying, even after baptism.

Why is it that some baptized members of the Church seem unable to overcome certain sinful habits, even after years of trying, even after prayer, study, and fasting? How can a member in such a situation overcome sin?

What about the problem that some members face with a habitual sin or an addiction that seems to hold the person in its grip, whether it be alcoholism, gambling, illicit sex, drugs, over-eating, smoking, or any other addiction or bad habit that violates the letter or the spirit of God's law? Such people may clearly recognize that such actions are wrong and may sincerely desire to break the habit and stop sinning, and yet find themselves in a seemingly endless and hopeless cycle of sinning, repenting, resolving never to do it again, crying out to God for His Holy Spirit and the help and strength they need to resist temptation, striving to stay close to God through prayer and Bible study, then caving in to the next temptation that comes along in spite of every effort and every determination to resist.

For people in this dilemma, this can be very discouraging. They may wonder if they are really converted. They may feel totally trapped in a situation they feel they cannot even understand much less solve. They know their eternal life may be at stake, yet they find no way out. They feel they don't understand themselves, and sometimes they feel they don't understand God and His promises.

Mr. Armstrong wrote a couple of articles that were published as a reprint. Both articles were published together in one physical document of a few pages. I don't remember the titles exactly, but they covered this exact subject. I believe the titles may have been "How to Avoid Sin" and "How to Be an Overcomer". Also, ministers occasionally talk about this problem in their preaching. But by and large, the Church of God does not talk about this subject much. Except for the articles Mr. Armstrong wrote, there are few articles published by the Church that tackle this problem head on.

As I recall, Mr. Armstrong taught in these articles the necessity for drawing close to God in prayer, then diligently staying close to God so that one may have the strength to resist temptation when it comes. He also explained the importance of avoiding even

entertaining the thoughts of sin in the mind, of pushing the thought of the sin out of the mind instantly as soon as it comes into the mind. These are valuable principles.

The Bible itself stresses the need for overcoming and avoiding sin, and the importance of the Holy Spirit and that God works in us through the power of His Spirit (Philippians 2:13). I have already mentioned the scripture that says that God has given us a Spirit of power and a sound mind. I have heard ministers explain that the term "sound mind" can also be translated as "disciplined mind" or "self-controlled mind". If there is one thing someone enslaved to an addiction would want, it would be more self-control and self-discipline. There is an encouraging passage in Romans 7:13-25 where Paul describes the struggle against human nature, and he concludes by asking "Who will deliver me?" and then gives thanks to God. The implication is, "God will deliver me." There is also the scripture in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*."

Nevertheless, there are not many passages in the Bible that directly address this issue. I do not find a lot of examples of prayer, for example, in the Psalms or elsewhere, where the person praying is asking God for help to resist temptation and to overcome sin. I do not find passages that directly state that the way to overcome sin is by prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation, or passages that tell members to go to the ministry for counseling if they need help overcoming a bad habit. I believe the Church is correct in teaching these things, and these are principles of Christian living that can be put together from principles taught in the Bible, but I am merely pointing out that there is not a lot of direct and clear instruction in the Church or the Bible that tackles this problem head-on. What we know and what we learn has to be put together, here a little, there a little, from Scripture and from spiritual principles we can learn from Scripture.

What is the answer?

Some people who have this problem may remember God's promise not to allow us to be tempted more than what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13), and other scriptures in which God promises us the help we need, and some may be tempted to doubt God's faithfulness. Some may be tempted to conclude that they have done their part by repenting, having faith in God and in Jesus Christ, and being baptized, but God has not been faithful to do His part by giving them the strength they need to resist temptation. But this itself is a temptation we have to resist. We have to have faith in God's truthfulness and righteousness, that He never violates His promises no matter how the situation looks.

In this respect, it is like any other trial. We have to learn to trust God and believe in His perfect righteousness in all circumstances. For example, God promises to provide us with the necessities of life, food, water, clothing, if we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:31-33). But sometimes God tests our faith to the limit. We might be unemployed, trying to find a job, watching our money run out, wondering if God will really come through. God may let this go on for a while to see if we continue to trust Him and believe His promises. James and Peter talk about the

value of our faith being tested, if we endure (James 1:2, 1 Peter 1:6-8). Mr. Armstrong explained that faith includes not just believing that God exists, but believing what God says. This is confirmed by the accounts in the Bible that say that Abraham, the father of the faithful, believed God, and God counted it as righteousness (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, James 2:23).

God IS faithful. He never lies to us. His word is true, and He always keeps His promises. God can be trusted, always. If there is a promise in the Bible from God, and circumstances make it appear that God has not kept His promise, either we have not fulfilled the conditions, or we have misunderstood the terms of the promise, or God is delaying fulfilling the promise for a time to test our faith or for some other reason. But God is ALWAYS faithful. We have to believe that, and we have to continue to believe that through all trials no matter if they be physical trials or spiritual trials. That is a test we must pass. It is the test of faith.

So one must resist the temptation to blame God for not giving him or her the power to overcome sin. God is not at fault. The problem, whatever it is, lies elsewhere. We may not always understand God's actions and decisions, but we must learn to believe that God is righteous, that all his decisions are fair and just, and that there is no fault or imperfection in Him at all. Satan may tempt us to be angry with God for our trials and problems, whether the trials be physical, mental, spiritual, or emotional. Satan knows that we know that God has all power, that all things are possible for Him, so Satan can put the thoughts in our mind that God is unfair for not removing a trial or solving a problem, no matter what that may be. A member of the Church can become angry with God over trials that the member does not understand. There is an example in the Bible of one of the Old Testament prophets becoming angry with God over God's decision that he didn't agree with (Jonah 4:1-9). But we need to learn to repent and overcome and get rid of any anger we may feel towards God, just as we need to do with any other sin.

God may test our faith in Him by doing things we don't understand or by withholding the understanding of what He does for a time to see if we will continue to trust Him and believe in His perfect righteousness. Part of our job is to pass the test, to not find fault with God.

Satan wants us to be angry with God, to find fault with God, to blame God for all our troubles, and to conclude that God is unfaithful and does not keep His word.

Satan would also like us to stop trying to overcome our sins.

There are two ditches one can fall into. We have to avoid both of them.

For a person enslaved in a bad habit, one ditch is to say, "God understands that I can't overcome, and He forgives me, so I don't really need to overcome, and I am not going to be trying so hard, because I can't do it anyway. God will accept me as I am." This ignores all of God's powerful warnings against sin in the Bible, including Jesus' warnings about the consequences of sin in the sermon on the mount: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that

one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:29-30). One cannot drift into an attitude of accepting sin, thinking we are not guilty when we sin because somehow it is not our fault.

The opposite ditch is to say, "I cannot overcome, so I am lost, I'll never make it into God's Kingdom, so what's the use of trying?" Someone falling into this ditch is in danger of giving up on the Kingdom of God altogether.

What both of these ditches have in common is that both of them cause a person to quit trying. We cannot allow ourselves to do that. We must continue to strive to overcome and obey every commandment and every word of God. No matter how many times we have failed, we have to keep trying, even while we are seeking more answers and understanding about our problem from God in Bible study, prayer, fasting, meditation, and counseling with a minister when appropriate.

I have one possible suggestion for an approach that might help. This is in addition to, not replacement of, the things that Mr. Armstrong and the Church have taught and continue to teach. We need to continue in prayer, Bible study, fasting, meditation, staying close to God in prayer, putting the thoughts of sin out of our minds as soon as they come into our minds, counseling when appropriate, and all the other biblically-sound teachings of the Church. But there is one more suggestion I can add.

The problem of addiction to a bad habit is not unique to the Church. It is a common problem in society. But not everyone has this problem. Some people seem to have more self-discipline, more self-control, more "will power" than others, even in the world. By "will power", I mean the mental power to make a decision, then "force oneself" to follow through with the decision no matter how painful it may be. It is a matter of refusing the immediate short-term pleasure (or relief from pain) for the sake of sticking to a decision for a long-range goal. Even in the world, among those without God's Spirit, even among those with absolutely no interest in the things of God, this quality of will power, of self control and self discipline, varies widely among people. Some people have very little of it and some people have a lot. There are even jokes about it. I saw a sign someplace (or bumper sticker or T-shirt or greeting card) that said, "I can resist anything except temptation." Yet, it is serious, and many people in the world know it is serious. People struggle with it. There are weight-watchers groups, alcoholics anonymous, and clinics where people go to be hypnotized to stop smoking. These are things people in the world do, outside of the Church. I am pointing this out to show that the problem of wanting to break a bad habit, but not having the will power to do it, is a problem in the world even among those who have no interest in God and His way of life.

But not everyone in the world has this problem. Some are very disciplined and have a lot of will power. I knew of a woman who smoked heavily and seemed absolutely unable to kick the habit. But her husband, who also smoked heavily, was diagnosed by a doctor with emphysema. He was told by the doctor to stop smoking. He said, "I can't quit." The doctor said, "You'll quit, one way or another." Then he took it seriously. So

he quit cold turkey, pretty much. Maybe it took about two weeks till he finally quit once and for all. Then about 6 months or a year or so later he tried one or two cigarettes sort of as an experiment to see if they still tasted the same, but that was it. He didn't smoke after that. He broke the habit. He had will power. He could do it. But his wife could not, and eventually she died from lung cancer. These are people outside the Church of God.

Some people are very self-disciplined and can forgo spending time doing the things they enjoy so that they can work longer hours or study for an advanced degree to be able to earn more money. Some athletes make short-term sacrifices and endure suffering to train their bodies so they can reach a goal. They have will power. They restrict their diets and give up many foods they enjoy. Some people will work out at a health club and starve themselves to obtain a thin, sexy looking body so others will admire them on the beach for their good looks. Some people in the world can be very self-disciplined and make sacrifices towards long-term goals. They can make a decision and stick to it no matter how hard it may seem at times. They don't cave in to short term temptations. And they do this without God's Spirit.

I heard or read a story about someone, I think it was Gordon Liddy or someone else associated with Watergate, who was able to hold his hand or arm in the flame of a candle till he was burnt without flinching. Someone asked him what the trick was. He said the trick was "not minding the pain". But most people could not do this. Also, history shows that in war, some captured soldiers or officers were able to withstand torture without giving the enemy the information the enemy wanted, while others broke quickly.

The point I am trying to make is that this quality of will-power, the ability to force oneself to do what one has determined to do, is a quality that varies widely among people even among those who do not have God's Spirit. It is a quality of mind separate from morality and righteousness. One can even have self-discipline towards an evil goal. Factors that determine how much self-discipline a person in the world may have could include genetics, environment, past experiences, and past choices. The fact is, it varies.

Some people in the world who do not have much self discipline become enslaved to bad habits. And some of these people come into the Church of God.

When those who are weak in self-discipline and "will power" come into the Church and cry out to God for help to overcome a sinful habit or addiction, they are asking for more strength to be given to them miraculously. They are asking that God, through His Holy Spirit, give them more self-discipline, more will-power, so they can resist temptation and stop sinning. They have already agreed with God that the sin is wrong and they need to stop. They are trying to stop. They are asking for more power.

One of the things God requires of us is repentance. People caught in this trap may be sincere in their repentance. To the best of their knowledge, they have repented of the sin they are trying to overcome. The fact that they are trying to overcome, that they are struggling and suffering in the struggle, may be evidence of the seriousness of their

repentance. They have set their minds in the direction of stopping the sin. Now they want the power so they can do it.

But God does not want us to repent of just one sin. He wants us to repent of all sin. He wants us to give ourselves to Him 100%, not 99% (Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength"). Those who are struggling with a bad habit may indeed have repented of that particular sin in the sense of coming to agreement with God that they need to stop and setting the mind to try to stop. But what about other areas of a person's life?

To a person who is struggling with a bad habit, that one sin can seem so large that it is bigger than all sins. Yet it can overshadow other problems in the person's life or mind or attitude or character that may seem small in comparison, yet may seem large to God. And it may be in some other area, a different point of God's law altogether, that the person may NOT have come to agreement with God that it is wrong and he or she needs to stop. The person may not even be aware of the problem. That doesn't necessarily mean the person hasn't repented and his or her baptism is invalid. But it may mean the person has to examine his or her whole life and thinking against all of the points of God's law and all of God's commands in the Bible, even the ones that may seem small. God wants one hundred percent submission. Part of our jobs as Christians is to live by every word of God (Deuteronomy 8:1-3, Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4).

We are reminded by the ministry before every Passover, and often on many other occasions, that we are to examine ourselves to see where we may be falling short of God's way of life (2 Corinthians 13:5). But for a person enslaved to a sinful addiction, the reaction might be, "I don't have to examine myself. I know I have a big sin. My problem is not that I don't know that I have a sin. I need more power to overcome." Thus, people in this situation may not seriously examine themselves in all areas of their thinking and behavior. They cannot get their mind off of their "big sin" long enough to consider that there may be other problems in their thinking, behavior, or character that God wants them to acknowledge and start to work on.

Someone who is struggling to overcome a bad habit knows he or she has a problem. Church members in this situation want to be right with God, but they know something is missing. They are trying to find answers. Now, suppose such a person has another area in his life in which he is sinning but he is not even acknowledging to himself or to God that he is wrong and needs to stop. He is not in agreement with God. He doesn't think it is wrong. It may be something that seems small. I will suggest some examples later. Now here is a question. In that condition, would God be doing that person a favor by giving him the gift of more will-power?

If God gave a person so much will-power and self-discipline that he could force himself to do whatever he set his mind to do, but his mind is not fully submitted to God's law in every point, would God be doing him a favor? He would indeed overcome his bad habit because he has already set his mind to do so. But what about other areas? Would such a person not tend to become self-satisfied and think he is perfectly fine with God when in fact he is not?

If God does not give a person more will-power to go in the direction he wants to go, might that be a warning from God that he needs to examine EVERY area of his life and make some course corrections to make sure where he wants to go is 100% exactly the direction God wants him to go in every area?

If a person is given more power to overcome, would it not be a normal tendency for that person to be more self-satisfied? For example, if someone is struggling with smoking, and God gives him more will-power and self-discipline, and he finally breaks the habit, would it not be a normal, natural thing for that person to say, "Now finally I have a clear conscience with God. Now finally I am okay in God's sight." Would that make the person more or less humble? Would that make the person more or less likely to realize he has a long way to go and there are other areas where he needs to make some changes? I am sure some people in this situation might think that if they can just overcome "the big sin" it will be easier for them to then go on to work on other areas, but I am not so sure.

There is a difference between will power and the submission of the will. One has to do with power or strength. The other has to do with direction. The direction of our will has to be right with God. God can give us the power, but we need to choose the right direction in which to use that power. That is a matter of choice. God can lead us and encourage us to make that right choice, but He won't make it for us.

Also, submitting the direction of our will to God is a learning process. As we continue to study and read the Bible and compare our lives with God's law and with the perfect example of Jesus Christ, if we are doing this honestly, we will continuously notice more and more areas where we need to change. Each time, we must submit our will to God, agree with him that we need to change, and set about doing it. This process of learning where we fall short and coming to acknowledge it and coming to agreement with God in more and more areas cannot be put on hold just because there are one or more bad habits a person is struggling with. God is able to supply the power, but we need to submit our will to God's will in EVERY aspect of our thinking, speaking, and acting.

So my suggestion is that a person who is struggling to overcome a sinful habit or addiction should examine his or her life in all areas of God's law, using the Bible as a study guide, and for each area where one falls short of God's law and the perfect example of Jesus Christ, come to agree with God, acknowledge that one needs to change, and then go to work on changing, even in the small things.

We have to continue the process of studying God's Word, the Bible, to examine ourselves in every area of life. Jesus said that those who continue in His Word will be set free: "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' " (John 8:31-32). In this context, being made free refers to being made free from sin, for He later said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). So we have to CONTINUE to study God's Word, the Bible, and be corrected by it where God shows us we fall short, and to continue to learn from the Bible.

Here is an example. Suppose one reads in Isaiah 33:14-15, "The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil". Note how this verse equates those who walk righteously with those who avoid hearing of bloodshed and seeing evil. Could this refer to our time? Could the hearing of bloodshed and seeing evil refer to the violence that is so prevalent on TV and in movies in entertainment today? Could this passage be addressed to Church members who watch violent TV shows and movies?

Would it be unreasonable to apply the spirit and intent of God's law to today's entertainment and say that it is not God's will that we be watching fiction movies and TV shows that contain violence and killing for entertainment, even in small amounts? Would it be unreasonable for us to conclude that if Jesus Christ were living as a human being on earth today, He would be watching little or no TV and movies?

To one struggling with an addiction to a big sin, this may seem like a small thing. Yet it may be an area in which the person has not submitted his or her will to God and has not come into agreement with God one hundred percent.

Some other examples may be possible problems. Some people may be in a habit of judging others, thinking about the sins of others, dwelling on them, turning them over in their minds, evaluating others. Or, maybe a person has not truly forgiven someone who has wronged him in the past. That person may think he holds no grudges and has forgiven, but has not really forgiven completely with ALL the heart.

Maybe there is an area in which a person is lying to someone, deceiving another person. If the person who is lying stops lying, then there will be consequences, and the person is more afraid of the consequences than of God. God is taking second place. It may be something small. It may involve a "white lie". Nevertheless, God is not being placed first. Fear of man becomes greater than fear of God.

God wants us to submit our wills to Him and to come into agreement with Him one hundred percent in every area of life, without reservation, without holding anything back. Some may feel they don't have the will power to force themselves to overcome some major sin, but part of the problem may be that they are not yet in an attitude of being willing to agree with God and strive to obey him in the spirit and letter of every commandment and point of His law, without exception.

And if a person is only 90% or 99% in agreement with God, is only partly willing to follow God's way of life, to do God's will in everything, to obey every commandment in the spirit and the letter, and God gives that person more will power and self discipline so that person can force himself to follow through on his resolution to break the bad habit he has, would that not just encourage him to think that he is on the right track and really okay with God? So it may be that the real problem is not just a lack of will power. It may be a lack of a willingness to submit one's will to God in everything. And

the person may not even realize yet that he is not submitted to God and in agreement with God in everything.

It may not be the POWER of the will that is the root problem, but the DIRECTION of the will that needs a course correction to come into alignment with God's will.

I am suggesting that a person who needs more power to overcome a sin needs to continually examine himself or herself in light of the Bible and learn to submit completely to God's will and come into agreement with God in every area of life and with the spirit and intent of every point of God's law, not just in the area of the one or two "big sins" represented by the bad habits the person is trying to overcome. And this must be done while the person continues to strive to overcome the bad habit. Because once the direction of the will and the attitude of the person is aligned more perfectly with God, God can supply more POWER of will so the person can move in the right direction.

But a person may easily be deceived and not even realize the areas where he or she falls short. So it takes effort, Bible study, prayer, asking God to show us EVERY area where we fall short and need to come more fully in agreement with God's will, and to submit our will to Him, even at the same time as the person continues to strive diligently to overcome the problem he or she already knows about.

If we do this, if we make the effort to uncover even the secret sins we do not realize yet, and then God shows us more areas where we need to change, and we begin to make those changes and strive to obey God in everything, that may clear the way for God to give us more power to overcome the sins we already know about.

But while we are doing this, we must always be diligently trying to overcome our problem with all our strength and all the power we have.

I have heard some speakers say that a problem some people have in trying to overcome addictive sins is that they are not able to do it because they are trying to do it by their own power. When I hear this, I am never quite sure what the speaker means. Sometimes the speaker may say that we need to quit trying to overcome sin by our own power. But I find no verse in the Bible that says, "Don't try to overcome sin by your own power."

Certainly we should ask God for help to overcome. But we must also do our part by trying as hard as we can. It is not a matter of doing it by God's power or our own. It is both. God helps us in our trials by giving us power and help in ADDITION to what we are able to do for ourselves. For example, if I am unemployed, I may pray and ask God to help me find a job, but then after praying I should do my part by diligently looking for a job.

God wants us to make the maximum effort we can. Jesus Christ said, "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It

is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire" (Matthew 18:8-9). Jesus is speaking figuratively. He does not want us to physically mutilate or injure our bodies, for the Bible also says, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are" (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Our bodies belong to God, and we should protect and take care of our health. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus is speaking figuratively to illustrate how great our effort should be to overcome sin, even to the point of giving up things we may love to avoid the temptations of sin. An example of how to apply this might be a person who has a problem with over-drinking giving up alcohol altogether, because trying to drink alcohol in moderation is a temptation for that person to drink in excess.

When Jacob wrestled with God, God refused to bless him until Jacob proved his willingness to strive with all his might to obtain the blessing, even when in pain (Genesis 32:22-31).

An example of the balance between our effort and the additional power God gives us can be found in the life of Samson. After he lost his strength because his hair was cut and the Philistines put out his eyes, he was in the temple of the Philistines where they were assembled. "Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, 'O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!' And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' And he pushed with *all his* might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who *were* in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life" (Judges 16:28-30). Note the sequence. First Samson asked God to give him strength. Then he pushed "with all his might". He asked God for help, then he made maximum effort to push on the pillars.

Did Samson do it by God's power or his own strength? I think the answer is, both. Most of the actual physical power came from God, but I don't think God would have supplied that power if Samson was not trying as hard as he could. And part of it was Samson's strength, even if it was only 1%. Samson did his part with whatever strength he had, and God supplied the additional strength that he needed to succeed.

There may also be a lesson in this for preaching the gospel. As a Church, we need to strive with ALL our might to preach the gospel to the world, and then God can give us the extra help we need to succeed. When God sees that individual members are striving hard to sacrifice to support the preaching of the gospel and the Ezekiel warning to the public out of a motive of love, He can bless us with more power to do so. But if we are only making a half-hearted effort, I think God will help us less until our attitude improves.

For those who may be discouraged and are tempted to think that God has abandoned them and there is no hope, I offer the following encouraging scriptures to encourage those with problems to keep trusting God and keep striving to overcome. Paul

describes the problems faced in our struggle with human nature in Romans 7:14-25, which I have already referenced. Jesus said that no man can come to Him except the Father draws him (John 6:44). He said that it is the Father's will that of all that the Father gives Him He should lose none (John 6:39). He further stated that it is His food to do the Father's will (John 4:34). And He further stated that of all the Father had given Him, He had lost none, except the son of perdition (John 17:12, see also John 18:8-9). This means that Christ has a desire to please the Father and do His will by saving EVERYONE that the Father calls. It is not just Christ's love for us that motivates Him to work with us and save us, it is also Christ's love for the Father that motivates Him to lose no one that the Father calls and draws to Him. This does not mean we do not have free moral agency or that we cannot be lost, but that Christ will do all He can to work with us and try to save us.

Also, look at the miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Father did a miraculous work through Jesus Christ by multiplying the food to feed the thousands, and considering that the Father has all power over the billions of galaxies, I do not think this was a difficult task for Him, and He could have created millions of tons of bread and fish whenever He chooses. Yet Jesus said to gather the pieces so that nothing would be wasted (John 6:10-13). If Christ was so concerned for partly eaten pieces of food, so that nothing the Father provided was wasted, even though that food could easily be replaced, would not the Father and Christ be concerned not to waste the work they have started in each of us? If Christ did not want pieces of food to be "lost", would He not also do everything possible to save every one of us in which He and the Father have worked in the past? I think just about all of us in the Church have made some progress in some areas. God has invested a lot in us and He is not about to cast us aside. Christ wants to finish the work begun in us so that nothing is wasted (Philippians 1:6).

Finally, we have to exercise faith to believe God and to trust Him to keep His promises and cleanse us from our sins (1 John 1:9).

I would like to add one more scripture to this section on overcoming because it speaks directly about those who overcome and how they did it and because it fits in with an overall theme of this book. I have quoted this before in chapter 5 to show the importance of preaching the gospel, which can be included in the phrase "word of their testimony". "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Revelation 12:11).

CONCLUSION

The challenge for the Church of God and its members is immense, but so is the reward of eternal life as firstfruits that God offers us. I believe that preaching the gospel to the world as a witness and the Ezekiel warning to Israel is a responsibility God has assigned to the Church of God and all of its members in our day. The responsibility and accountability is ours, and we are being judged in our fulfillment of this responsibility

just as we are being judged in all points of God's way of life. We should strive to do the best we can in fulfillment of this responsibility out of a motivation of love towards God and man. The more we succeed, the better it will be for mankind during the suffering ahead, and the more it will glorify God's name by demonstrating His fairness. Success will require a combination of our sincere effort and God's help and empowerment. We cannot do it by our own power alone (Zechariah 4:6). God will not necessarily do for us what we are able but unwilling to do ourselves, and He may wait before giving us more power until he sees that we are really putting forth the effort we are capable of and submitting to His Word. God can make up for our human limitations, but not necessarily our spiritual laziness or lack of love. But if we do our part I believe He will give us the help we need and do for us what we are not able to do ourselves, to finish the Work.

I notice two patterns in the Bible of how God deals with those who fail or do not want to carry out an assignment and do a job that God gives them. One, He may correct those he gave the job to and make them do it despite their reluctance (Jonah 1:1-3:4, Exodus 4:10-17). Or two, he may reject those who refuse and give the job to someone else (1 Samuel 15:23 and 16:1, Matthew 21:33-44). I am convinced that supporting the preaching of the truth to the public at this time is a responsibility from God that every member of the Church of God shares in. Everyone is able to contribute and support in some way, and even if a person has no money and limited ability, that person can pray fervently for the success of the gospel. And I am convinced that if we collectively or individually refuse to carry out God's will in this matter, God will either correct us or reject us and give the job to someone else. But the pattern in the Bible is, when God assigns a job, one way or another the job will get done. If we prove ourselves unworthy, we will be left on the sidelines and God will use someone else. We then would suffer loss of reward and would not have the physical protection promised to Philadelphia -- the new group would receive it. See also Luke 14:16-24, Matthew 22:1-14, and Matthew 21:33 for parables illustrating the general principle of those who refuse God's invitation being counted as unworthy, and others chosen in their place.

In this matter of such importance, for the sake of the millions in Israel who will go through the tribulation, and for the sake of God's name and reputation for fairness, justice, and mercy, I am sure that God will make sure the job gets done, either with our cooperation and participation or without it.

Everyone must make his or her own choice in this. My choice is that I want to help and support the preaching of God's truth to the public as much as I can.

CHAPTER 8 - GOVERNMENT IN THE CHURCH OF GOD

Introduction

Following the death of Herbert W. Armstrong, Worldwide Church of God made massive changes in doctrine that scattered the ministry and members of the Church. The Church of God remains scattered and divided as I write this today (2011).

God allowed this to happen, probably to test the ministers and members, among other reasons. I believe Christ led Mr. Armstrong to appoint his successor to accomplish God's purpose to test the Church ministry and members and to teach us lessons. And we have been tested and continue to be tested. We had become Laodicean, probably while Mr. Armstrong was still alive, and God allowed the Church to be scattered and our power to preach the gospel weakened (Revelation 3:16, 19).

The scattering into many fellowships has allowed brethren to choose among many options in doctrine and policy. This has allowed God to test us to see where we stand on many issues. Different groups, while sharing a certain doctrinal base (the Sabbath, the holy days, the nature of God and His plan and purpose, etc.), differ in a number of doctrines and policies. Those differences often divide the Church and motivate some groups to compete with each other instead of cooperate. Examples of questions in doctrine and policy that divide include: can Mr. Armstrong's doctrines be changed? What priority should be assigned to preaching the gospel to the public? I have covered those subjects earlier in this book.

Another issue that divides the Churches of God is the form or structure of Church governance.

This chapter explains the subject of Church of God governance. Specifically, I will explore what the Bible teaches about the structure of governance in the Church of God, what some might call the form of governance. The structure has to do with how leaders of the Church are chosen.

There are two basic forms, though there are varieties within each form. One is top-down governance, what some might call one-man rule. In this form, there is one man who is the leader of a Church of God organization, and he has total authority, subject

only to Christ, over decisions made involving the work of that organization. The only exception is that he does not have the authority to tell someone to sin - in such a case, a member must obey God rather than man. That one leader is accountable only to Christ. You can have one or more organizations with this form, and if there is more than one, the leader of each organization only has authority over the work of that particular organization, not the whole Church of God. All such leaders report to Christ like department heads reporting to the president of a company, and they should cooperate with each other for the common good of God's work.

This is the form of governance that existed in Worldwide Church of God when Mr. Armstrong was alive, and this is the form practiced by Living Church of God (Roderick Meredith) and Church of God an International Community (David Hulme), just to mention a few examples.

The other form is governance by voting, what I call ballot-box governance. In this form, the leaders are chosen by ballot of those under the authority of the leaders, and the leaders are accountable to those who vote. They are also accountable to Christ, as we all are whether we are part of the governance structure of an organization or not, but leaders elected tend to feel accountable to those who voted for them and to those whose future votes they need to remain in office. United Church of God is an example of this type of governance. Periodically, the entire ministry is able to vote to elect members of a ruling council, and that council governs the organization. Council members must be reelected when their terms expire or they will be replaced.

There are those in both systems that strongly feel that their way is best, and this difference of opinion has been an issue that has divided the Church of God.

This chapter will explore what the Bible teaches about government in the Church with a focus on the controversy between the two forms of governance I have described.

The Heart of the Issue

What is the real crux of the governance issue? That is what I have been asking myself as I have debated this issue with Church of God members in the Preaching the Gospel blog (see link at top of ptgbook.org website or go to <http://ptgbook.blogspot.com>). What is the heart and core of the reason why governing by balloting in the Church is wrong?

One aspect I have been maintaining is that we are to do more than just what God commands. We are also to do what God wills. That is part of loving Him with all our being. And we learn what God's will is by the examples in the Bible, not just His commandments. And the examples universally show that in God's way authority always flows from the top down, never from the bottom up. God shows us many

examples of his leaders chosen by appointment from above but never election from the bottom up in the Bible. By this we can know God's will.

But there is more to it.

Here is what I see as the heart of the issue.

It is clear in the Bible, and people on both sides of the voting issue will agree, that there are positions of authority in the Church. There are apostles, evangelists, pastors, local elders, deacons, etc. (1 Corinthians 12:28). Every office has its authority, some with greater authority and some with lesser authority, and there is organization. Even in Churches of God that use balloting in their governance, such as United Church of God and Church of God, a Worldwide Association, there are offices and positions such as president, board members, council members, operation managers, pastors, etc. Each of these offices represents a position of authority, and each position of authority has its scope and limitation. Operation managers are expected to follow the direction of the president for example. And in all these things, everyone must obey God before man, so for example a command to tell a lie should not be obeyed, nor should any command or instruction to break God's commandments. Everyone agrees with these things, at least outwardly even though not every person lives up to that standard in actual practice, and God is the judge.

The issue of controversy is, who decides who will hold these positions of authority and how is it decided?

To me, the heart of the issue is this. If authority is from the top down, no voting, then Christ appoints those in the highest offices. If authority is from the bottom up, that is, leaders are elected by the voting of men under the leaders, then men make the decision on who the leaders will be. So do we want God to choose our leaders, or do we want men to choose our leaders?

Should a leader be chosen by those who will be under the leader and will have to obey that leader, or should a leader be chosen by someone who will have authority over that leader?

Why should we prefer to choose our leaders rather than have God choose our leaders? Do we trust ourselves more than we trust God? Who is better qualified to make the decisions, God or us? If we trust God, we must acknowledge that He knows best and is best qualified to make the decisions, not ourselves and not the ministry.

In any authority structure, those who are the most competent should hold the highest positions. It does not make sense for those less qualified to rule over those more qualified. Thus, God the Father, who is greater than Jesus Christ (John 14:28), rules over Jesus Christ, not the other way around. Christ who is greater in wisdom and righteousness than any man rules over His apostles, not the other way around. In the parable of the talents, those who had greater ability were given more authority to start (Matthew 25:14-15), and in the parable of the pounds or minas those who demonstrated more ability and effort were given more in the end (Luke 19:15-19). It is this way in

any organization. Corporations try to promote those who are the most competent to the highest positions. Those who have greater wisdom, faithfulness, and ability in making decisions are given greater authority, those who have less are given smaller authority.

Why should those who are less competent make decisions rather than those who are most competent? Shouldn't the wisest and most competent decision makers choose leaders? When you have balloting, it is those who are the least competent who try to choose someone more competent than they are to govern them. But they lack the wisdom to know who is best. It doesn't work. When you have top down government, those at the top are the most competent and are qualified to choose their immediate subordinates. In the Church, the highest authority is God the Father. He has already chosen Christ as head of the Church. Christ chooses those who will be in positions under him. Not the pastors and ministers by voting. The ministers may vote who they want, but they cannot read the minds and hearts of the people they vote for or against, nor do they necessarily have the wisdom to choose even if they could read minds. The fact that in so many cases there is great division in voting results proves this point. But Christ has all wisdom and righteousness to choose the best person to hold office to accomplish his purpose in the Church of God. Not the majority of the ministers. The majority can be wrong (Matthew 7:13-14).

Some may say that Christ guides the voting. But on what basis can anyone make that claim? Is there any precedence for that in the Bible? Is there any account that shows God or Christ guiding the voting of men to elect the best people in an institution governed by voting, either in Israel or the Church? Is there any promise from God to support and guide institutionalized voting in a Church of God fellowship? And if not, then how can anyone be sure Christ guides the voting in UCG, or COGWA, or any other Church of God organization?

What does the Bible teach about using the voting of men to choose leaders in the Church of God? Is it God's will that organizations be set up that determine who the top leaders will be by the choice of the majority of those who will be under the authority of those leaders? Does Christ promise to guide the voting to put HIS choice for leader into office? And if we are to look to Christ to know whom HE has chosen, how can we know? By the voting of men?

Let's look at the Bible teaching on this issue. And a primary question must be, is there any indication by statement or by example that Christ will guide the voting of men to indicate HIS CHOICE, not man's, in a Church of God fellowship governed by a system of institutionalized voting to choose the top leaders in that fellowship.

Two Principles of Bible Study

A principle of Bible study that is particularly important with this issue is the principle that we learn from the examples in the Bible, not just explicit commands and

instructions. Another important principle is that we must seek to know and do God's WILL, not just what He commands.

Christ is our example. He did what His Father commanded Him (John 15:10). But He did more. He did God's WILL (John 4:34, Luke 22:42) and taught his disciples to do likewise (Matthew 6:10, 7:21). Doing God's will is part of obeying the first and greatest commandment, to love God with all our being, because we express that love by doing those things which please Him. Doing God's will is also a prerequisite for receiving answers to our prayers. Notice in 1 John 3:22 that we receive what we ask because we keep God's commandments **AND** because we do those things that are *pleasing* in His sight.

Before we can do God's will we must learn what that will is, and we do that not only by studying God's direct commandments and instructions in the Bible but also by learning from the examples God has given us (John 13:15, 1 Corinthians 10:6). We are to live by EVERY word of God (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4), and that includes the examples of how God has made His choices for leaders known. ALL scripture is profitable for correction and instruction in doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and much of scripture is history full of examples God wants us to learn from.

If we want our own will more than God's, we will selfishly try to do the minimum we must do in order to obtain eternal life. We will do only what God explicitly commands us to do, no more. We will not seek to understand and do His pleasure beyond the letter of the law. But that was not the way Jesus Christ, our example, lived. He LOVED the Father. He wanted to please God in everything. So He sought to know God's will and to do it.

We are instructed to live by EVERY word of God. This certainly includes all the history in the Bible that shows how God has acted and how God thinks. From this, with honest study combined with a fervent desire to learn how God thinks, to learn what pleases Him, to learn His will in other words, and to do it, we can understand the principles of government God wants us to follow in the Church of God. We can learn God's will regarding the structure of governance. We can learn it from the examples of the governance God has set up in the Bible both for Israel and for the Church of God.

Do the examples in the Bible show that it is God's will and God's way that leaders be chosen by appointment from above or by election from below? Is a leader to be chosen by the one over the leader in authority or by those under the leader's authority? Or, does God show by instruction or example that He will make his choice known through the voting of men? Those are very basic and very important questions to answer if we are to understand God's will concerning the process for selecting leaders.

Moses

Before Moses, God primarily dealt with His servants as individuals, not leaders of groups, except that these men, like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, led their own families. But starting with Moses and Israel in the wilderness, we can see some examples of how leaders over Israel were chosen.

You can read the account of the appointment of Moses in Exodus chapters 3 and 4.

Israel grew into a multitude in Egypt, but they were slaves oppressed by the Egyptians. They cried out to God for deliverance, and God heard their prayers and moved to save them from their slavery (Exodus 2:23-25). God appointed Moses as a leader over Israel. Moses was never elected by the Israelites, nor did God inspire the Israelites to vote for Moses. This is obvious, but it needs to be mentioned.

God chose Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. But for Moses to be able to do this job, it was necessary for God to make known both to Moses and to Israel that Moses was God's chosen leader. God did this first by speaking to Moses directly from the burning bush. God TOLD Moses he was to lead Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3:4-10). God also appointed Aaron to help Moses as a spokesman (Exodus 4:10-16). Then Moses and Aaron gathered Israel and told them, in effect, that God had appointed Moses as leader to lead the people out of Egypt (Exodus 4:29-31).

God also backed up Moses and Aaron and gave them credibility with the people by several miraculous signs to prove that God had indeed appointed Moses and Aaron, and that this was not something Moses was making up (Exodus 4:1-9, 30-31).

In this account, we see the first example of what will be a reoccurring pattern in the Bible. God appoints the leaders, and God makes known his appointments by one or a combination of two methods: announcement from a higher authority, and tangible fruits of some kind, in this case miraculous signs. In the appointment of Moses, God was the higher authority that announced to Moses that he would be leader. God also showed Moses miraculous signs that it was really God speaking to Him: the burning bush, the rod that became a serpent, and his hand becoming leprous when he put it in his bosom. The appointment of Aaron was made known to Moses directly by announcement from God. But God did not speak to Aaron directly about his job, rather God spoke to Aaron and told him to meet Moses and it was Moses, a higher authority over Aaron, who announced to Aaron what Aaron's job would be. Moses also did the signs in front of Aaron to confirm the announcement (Exodus 4:27-28).

Then Moses and Aaron made the announcement to the people. God did not speak to the people directly about the positions Moses and Aaron were appointed to. But the announcement to the people came from higher authority, in this case the authority of Moses and Aaron which God had given them. It was also shown by the fruits of

miraculous signs with which God backed up Moses and Aaron so the people could know this was really from God (Exodus 4:30-31).

We will see this pattern often in the Bible. God makes known his choices either by announcement from one already in authority, or by fruits or miracles of some kind, or both. With Moses it was both.

Later in the wilderness, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and 250 leaders in Israel challenged Moses' authority. So God killed them (Numbers 16:1-35). After that, the people still complained against Moses and Aaron, so God did a miraculous sign. The leader of each tribe was to write his name on a rod, and Aaron's name was on the rod representing the tribe of Levi. God caused Aaron's rod to grow flowers and almonds, but not the rods of the other leaders. God showed again whom He had appointed by backing them up with miraculous power and signs, a kind of fruit (Numbers 17:1-11). In fact, in this case, the "fruit" was literal! Aaron's rod produced almonds! Perhaps Christ had this example in mind when He said, "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20, KJV).

Exodus 18 - Leaders in Israel under Moses

Exodus chapter 18 describes how a large hierarchical organization was set up in Israel and how the leadership authority God gave to Moses branched out to other leaders under Moses.

Moses was judging and ruling Israel according to God's laws, but he was facing the workload alone with no one to help him (Exodus 18:13-18). Jethro suggested to Moses that he appoint leaders in Israel to help judge the people. There would be rulers of groups of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. They would handle the easy cases but the hard cases they would bring to Moses. Moses would handle the big decisions, but the smaller decisions would be delegated, in other words. And Moses would be the one to SELECT the leaders according to their qualifications, men who were capable, God fearing, and honest (Exodus 18:19-23).

Did God approve this plan? Yes. Notice verse 23: "If you do this thing, and God *so* commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace". Jethro qualified his advice, if "God *so* commands you". Verse 24 says that Moses heeded Jethro's advice in all that he said, and that would include the qualification that God would approve it. Apparently, after hearing Jethro's advice, Moses went to God and asked, do You want me to do this, and God said yes. Then notice especially in Exodus 18:25 that it was Moses who CHOSE the leaders and that it was Moses who MADE them rulers over the people. The decision as to who was selected was Moses' decision and the authority came from Moses. Ultimately the authority came from God, but it flowed through Moses, from the top down.

Now, did Moses know all these people personally? The fact that the smallest division was rulers of tens indicates that there were many thousands of men who were made rulers. Moses was away from Israel and Egypt for 40 years before God called him from the burning bush (Exodus 2:11-15, Acts 7:23-30, Exodus 7:7). He could not possibly have known the qualifications of these men. But Aaron must have known some of the men, and Moses and Aaron worked with some of the top leaders during the events that had just transpired, and these men know other men, and so on. Moses probably consulted with Aaron and chose those of the top men who would report directly to him, and those leaders who also knew men in their tribes and families would recommend the men who directly reported to them, and so on down the line. These men could make their recommendations to Moses who had the authority to approve or overrule those recommendations. There is not a hint of voting or balloting. But if there was any voting or balloting, it would really be a form of "polling", not the kind of voting that exists in government today.

The Difference Between Voting and Polling

What is the difference between "polling" and "voting"? Voting carries authority. Polling does not. A poll can give a leader information about how other people see an issue before he makes a decision. Voting on the other hand IS the decision. It is binding, while polling is not. "Balloting" is just another word for voting. Those in favor of ballot-box governance in the Church of God often try to justify it by saying they are following the principle of getting advice and counsel (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6). No, they are not. Voting is not counsel.

There are two differences between voting to make a binding decision and getting advice or counsel. One, getting advice does not carry authority. The decision maker can ignore the advice if he knows it is wrong, and sometimes that is what a wise leader must do, as David did when some of his men gave him bad advice (1 Samuel 23:1-6, 24:1-7, 26:7-11).

The other difference is that counsel usually is not just a recommendation for a particular decision, but can include the reasons for the recommendation. There is give-and-take discussion involved. That does not exist in voting, though it may or may not precede the voting. The actual vote cast does not include the reasons for it so there is no opportunity to examine the reasons to see if they are sound.

For a leader in the Church of God to measure the collective opinion of those under his authority by taking a poll is not wrong, but neither does it carry authority. Polling is not necessarily the best way to get counsel, but it can be quick and convenient for making minor decisions. A pastor might ask for a show of hands in his congregation to see if the members prefer morning or afternoon Sabbath services. But the decision is his.

Joshua

Let's continue with the example of Joshua. Remember, we are applying the principle of learning from every word of God, including from the examples God has given us in the Bible, whether it is God's will that the Church of God choose their own leaders by voting or submit to top-down government with God choosing the leader, and if God is to choose the leader, how does God make His choice known.

When the time came near for Moses to die, it became necessary for a new leader to lead Israel into the promised land. Who chose the leader and how was the choice made known?

After God told Moses to go up Mount Abarim to see the land God promised Israel and then die, Moses asked God to appoint a new leader over the people (Numbers 27:12-17). God then announced to Moses that Joshua was His choice and commanded Moses to inaugurate him in front of the people, and he did so (Numbers 27:18-23). See also Deuteronomy 1:37-38, 3:26-28, 31:1-3, 34:9, Joshua 1:1-2.

But that was not all.

God did not just leave it to the announcement from Moses to show the people that Joshua was God's choice for leader. God began to back Joshua up with power (Joshua 1:5). God performed a miraculous sign by parting the waters of the Jordan river for Joshua as He had parted the waters of the Red Sea for Moses. God did this so that the people would know that as God was with Moses, so He was also with Joshua.

The pattern is the same with Joshua as with Moses. Appointment is from above. God chooses who will report directly to Him in the organization. God then makes the decision known by announcement, by fruits, or by both. God chose Joshua, not man. God had Moses make the announcement. Then God showed by the fruits that He was backing up Joshua with power to do the job He had given him.

Joshua was not elected by the people.

But he could have been. God could have had Joshua elected by the people, if He wanted to, but He didn't. God inspired these examples to be written for our learning (1 Corinthians 10:6). Some of these events may have occurred as they did so that they would be recorded for our learning. God, who knows the end from the beginning, must have known that Church governance would be a controversy in our day. If God wanted to show His approval of voting as a structure of governance in the Church, he could have instructed Moses to hold an election. That would be a perfect way to show us that voting has His approval. Not only that, but God could have used the opportunity to give many instructions about voting so that we would know how to set up such a system properly in the Church of God. And if God was determined to appoint Joshua but wanted to use voting to make His will known, God could have inspired and moved all

the people to elect Joshua in the balloting. That would have been easy because Joshua was well-known as Moses assistant and it was known that he was faithful to God in the matter of the spies sent into the land of Canaan (Numbers 14:6-9). At the time, the people wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:10), but that generation had died out, and the people alive at the time Moses died only knew Joshua as a faithful leader.

But it was not God's objective to teach His people a system of voting.

God's objective is to teach us at every opportunity the way of life we will practice in the Kingdom of God, and God is teaching us to submit to authority from above, not to seek our own will by selecting our own leaders. It is Satan who believes in government from the bottom up because he does not want to submit to God's authority from the top down.

Samuel

In the selection of Samuel as prophet and judge, we see an example of God showing His choice by the fruits but not by an announcement by a higher authority.

Samuel was not of the descendents of Aaron, nor even of the tribe of Levi. He was of the tribe of Ephraim (1 Samuel 1:1-2, 20). But it was God's intent to make him a prophet and judge in Israel.

His mother Hannah was barren, but she prayed for a son and vowed that she would give him to God (1 Samuel 1:9-11, 2:11). God answered her prayer and she kept her vow, giving him to the high priest Eli who then raised him (1 Samuel 1:19-28).

Samuel was to be God's prophet. But how did God make known His choice? These are the examples we are looking for to determine if it is God's way to make His choices known through the voting of men.

In the cases of Aaron and Joshua, the announcement was made to the people by a higher authority, Moses, then backed up with the fruit of power and signs. But in the case of Samuel, there was no announcement. The highest authority in Israel at that time was Eli the high priest, but there is no record that God spoke to Eli directly announcing that Samuel was to be prophet so that Eli could in turn announce God's choice to the people. Instead, God showed by the fruits that Samuel was prophet. God began to give Samuel prophetic messages to give to Israel and backed up those messages until all Israel knew that Samuel was God's prophet (1 Samuel 3:1-21).

So the pattern remained the same. God chose the leader, not the people through balloting. And God made His choice known through announcement, or fruits, or both, but not by the voting of men.

Israel Asks for a King

The next important event was the establishment of a monarchy in Israel.

Samuel judged Israel and appointed his sons as judges in Israel, but they, like Eli's sons, were not faithful to God and his ways. They were dishonest, accepted bribes, and perverted justice. Here is a case where appointments to leadership positions were made by Samuel, but the men holding those positions were unfaithful to their responsibilities (1 Samuel 8:1-3). There is a lesson here, which I will come to in a moment.

The people knew that Samuel's sons were dishonest, and they asked Samuel to make a king for them so they could be like other nations and their king could lead them in battle (1 Samuel 8:4).

Samuel didn't like their idea, but God told him that the people were not rejecting Samuel by making their request, they were rejecting God as their king, and God told Samuel to make a king for them but to warn them about the negative consequences of having a human king instead of having God as their direct king (1 Samuel 8:6-9).

Now here is the lesson I mentioned.

One could look at Samuel's appointment of his sons as a mistake because they were bad judges, and all the people knew that they were bad judges. They did not want that to continue and they did not want one of them to become judge of the nation after Samuel died. So they wanted a king. God certainly knew that Samuel's sons were bad judges, but from God's point of view, that did not justify Israel asking for a king. The way God looked at it, the people were rejecting Him. They knew Samuel was God's prophet and that God put Samuel in his position of authority. The fruits of Samuel's life and work as a prophet proved that. But they saw that things were not going well with the top-down appointments Samuel had made, so they wanted a change in the system.

Does any of this sound familiar when you think about the history of God's Church in modern times?

God showed by the fruits that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was His servant. God backed up Mr. Armstrong with power and effectiveness in doing God's work of restoring lost doctrines, preaching the gospel to the world, and building the Church. Mr. Armstrong before he died named Joseph Tkach as his successor as pastor general of the Worldwide Church of God. But Mr. Tkach did not continue the work that Mr. Armstrong had done. He turned away from the doctrines that the Church of God believed from the Bible. The ministers who remained faithful to those doctrines did not like that. They rejected the doctrinal errors Mr. Tkach made, and they had to leave Worldwide and organize over again.

Then, many of them rejected not only the wrong doctrines but the whole system and form of governance that had put Mr. Tkach into power in the first place. Just as Israel did not agree with Samuel's appointments of his sons as judges, many ministers did not agree with Mr. Armstrong's appointment of Mr. Tkach as pastor general of Worldwide. They could not see that God had a purpose in it. So when they reorganized, they changed the whole system. They rejected the pattern of top-down governance taught in the whole Bible and replaced it with ballot-box governance.

There are many parallels between the two events. Like Samuel, Mr. Armstrong was known in the Church to be God's servant by his fruits. Like Samuel, he had authority from God to make appointments. Like Samuel, he appointed someone who did not do a good job, and God's people knew it. Like the people in Samuel's day, some of them wanted a new system to be like the world. They wanted a system of "checks and balances" as exists in many democracies of this world, so they set up a system of balloting to govern the Church. And like the people in Samuel's day, they were not rejecting the one who made the appointment (Mr. Armstrong) - they were rejecting God as their ruler. "... they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Samuel 8:7).

But even though it was wrong for Israel to ask for a king, God gave them their request. God is teaching the human race lessons, and sometimes if we want wrong things God gives us what we want to teach us by hard experience that they are wrong. God had anticipated that Israel would want a king and made provision even in the days of Moses by giving instructions for the behavior of a king. Notice that God told Israel that if they make a king they are to make the one God chooses king over them (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). It was not to be Israel's choice! The choice was God's. It was only a matter of knowing God's will to discern that choice. Also, you will not find a list of qualifications in God's instructions, except that he is not to be a foreigner. That is because it was supposed to be God's choice, not the people's choice. It was not up to the people to judge who was qualified and who was not. That is the exact opposite of a system of voting where the people must try to figure out who is the most qualified candidate so they can vote for him.

Notice how Samuel followed God's instructions regarding the making of a king.

First he warned Israel, but Israel still wanted a king (1 Samuel 8:10-22). God chose Saul to be king and arranged events and circumstances so that Saul would come to Samuel, then He told Samuel that Saul was the one (1 Samuel 9:1-17). Later Samuel told Saul he was to be king and he anointed him with oil, but he did this in private, not in front of Israel. Samuel predicted several signs to show Saul that God had chosen him to be king, and those signs came to pass. So Samuel and Saul knew Saul would be king, but Israel did not yet know (1 Samuel 9:25-27, 1 Samuel 10:1-13).

Then Samuel gathered the people, and after reminding them that they were rejecting God by choosing to have a king, he apparently used the casting of lots to show the people whom God had chosen (1 Samuel 10:17-24). Later, Samuel again reminded Israel that they had sinned against God by asking for a king, and God gave Samuel a sign in front the people to back his words up (1 Samuel 12:16-18).

Notice that even though Israel rejected God in asking for a king, God still did not leave the choice of king up to them. He could have done so. He could have instructed Samuel to have the people vote to elect their king. But God is not in the business of teaching his people Satan's way of government from the bottom up. God made the choice for them.

There is a right and a wrong way to do things. God did not abandon Israel because they asked for a king. He gave them what they wanted. But it was still wrong for them to choose to have a king instead of letting God be their only king. God let them make that choice and through Samuel promised to continue to bless Israel if they and their king obeyed His commandments (1 Samuel 12:13-15).

Likewise, I do not say that God has abandoned any Church of God fellowship that chooses to reject God's top-down leadership of the Church in favor of choosing their own leaders through balloting. But it is still a wrong form of governance according to the examples and principles taught in the Bible.

Notice again that God did not have Saul elected into office by the people, though God certainly could have done that. He did not allow the people to choose their own king, nor did God make His choice known by the voting of the people. Instead, God decided who the king would be and told Samuel and Samuel told Saul. Then Samuel cast lots apparently to show the people the choice was from God.

This is an important principle for God's Church today. We are to submit to leaders whom GOD chooses. **WE ARE NOT TO CHOOSE OUR OWN LEADERS** (Deuteronomy 17:14-15). The Bible gives us a clear pattern for knowing whom God has chosen. That pattern is announcement from one having the authority to make the announcement, by fruits, or by both announcement and fruits.

David

In a short time Saul proved unfaithful to God in two ways: he offered a sacrifice which was only lawful for the priest to do (1 Samuel 13:5-14), and he failed to fully obey God's command to totally destroy Amalek (1 Samuel 15:1-3, 7-31). He thought he was obedient because he did attack Amalek, but he spared the livestock and the king of Amalek, contrary to God's command. Notice this is another case where the person God had chosen went wrong. God does not always choose faithful men to hold positions, but God always chooses the men who will best work out His will to do His work and teach us the lessons we need to learn in the long run. Why did God choose Saul? If you look at the events that followed, it seems apparent that many valuable lessons were written for our learning from the events in David's life when he was fleeing from Saul, lessons that required that the first king be unfaithful to God.

Likewise, I believe that the appointment of Mr. Tkach to be pastor general of the Worldwide Church of God was NOT a mistake on God's part. Mr. Tkach was God's choice, and God inspired Mr. Armstrong to announce that choice, but God had a good reason for putting into office a man who would make doctrinal errors and reverse all the important doctrines Mr. Armstrong had taught. It was time for God to scatter Church of God to test us and to chastise us for being lukewarm as He said He would do in Revelation 3:15-19.

God determined to replace Saul as king with David, a man after God's heart (1 Samuel 13:13-14).

It was God who chose David to be king after Saul, not the people. David was not elected to office through the ballot-box. Nor did God use the voting of the people to make His choice known to Samuel and to the nation.

Instead, God sent Samuel on a secret mission to Jesse to anoint one of his sons as king over Israel (1 Samuel 16:1-3). God had told Samuel that He would tell Samuel which of Jesse's sons God had chosen to be king. Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel was sure that Eliab was the one (1 Samuel 16:4-6). But there is a lesson here. Only God can look on the heart and know who was qualified. Samuel could not (1 Samuel 16:7).

Samuel was a righteous man. He was God's prophet. He must have had God's Spirit because he is listed among the faithful in Hebrews along with Abraham, Moses, and David (Hebrews 11:32-40). Yet he could not discern who was the one who was a man after God's own heart. Why? Because though Samuel was a righteous man (Jeremiah 15:1), he could neither read minds nor did he have God's wisdom. God gives a principle in the second half of 1 Samuel 16:7: "For *the LORD* does not *see* as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart". As Mr. Armstrong pointed out, man receives information through the five senses. We can only perceive outward appearance. We can hear what a man says and see what He does. Over time we can perceive the fruits, but we cannot immediately read minds as God can. Many support ballot-box governance because they think that the ministers, having God's Spirit, will have the wisdom to know which man can work out God's purpose for the Church best if made leader. But Samuel had God's Spirit, and he would have voted for Eliab!

I mentioned Mr. Armstrong's naming of Mr. Tkach as his successor. He made the correct choice, because it was God's will to scatter the Church, but Mr. Armstrong didn't know that. He made the right decision but for the wrong reason. He thought Mr. Tkach would be faithful to teach the same doctrines Mr. Armstrong taught. He was wrong. With all the wisdom and power he had been given by God to do the work of restoring doctrine, preaching the gospel to the world, and building the Church of God, he could not discern Mr. Tkach's mind and heart to know that Mr. Tkach was NOT well grounded in the doctrines Mr. Armstrong taught.

Now, if Mr. Armstrong could be wrong about that, what chance is there that the majority of a hundred voting ministers, or five hundred, many of whom may be unconverted tares, would know better than God who would be the best leader?

When David the youngest of Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, God told Samuel that David was the one to be king and Samuel anointed him (1 Samuel 16:11-13). But though David was anointed as king, he had yet to take that office. Saul was still king. So now David had the rank of king in God's eyes and Samuel's eyes, but he did not yet have the office.

God had told Samuel David was to be king, and Samuel anointed David in the presence of his family. But now God was to show the nation by the fruits that David was to be king. God did this through a remarkable series of events and circumstances that not only showed by fruits that God had chosen David but also put David through a series of experiences that both tested him and prepared him for being king.

First, God arranged for Saul to send for David to play music to help lift Saul out of his bouts of depression brought on by a distressing spirit (1 Samuel 16:14-23). This brought David into contact with Saul and the headquarters of the kingdom. Then God gave David victory over Goliath in battle. This brought him to the attention of Saul and the nation as a mighty warrior (1 Samuel 17:1-57). Saul made him an officer in the army, and God gave David wisdom in all his dealings, and people began to notice David's successes and wisdom (1 Samuel 18:5-7, 13-16, 30). But this only made Saul jealous and eventually he sought to kill David because he feared him, and David had to flee from Saul. David became a leader of a small band of men, about 400 at first, but it grew to 600 later (1 Samuel 18:8, 12, 28-29, 19:1, 11-18, 20:30-33, 22:1-2, 23:13).

During this time David had at least two opportunities to kill Saul, but he showed respect towards God's government by refusing to strike God's anointed king. He determined that he would wait for God to deal with Saul but he would not take the matter in his own hands (1 Samuel 24:1-22, 26:1-25). David's actions were recorded in the Bible as a lesson for us today and an example for us to follow. Though Saul was an unrighteous king, David respected the office and waited for God to act.

Eventually Saul died in battle and the house of Judah made David king, and later the whole house of Israel recognized David as King (2 Samuel 2:1-7, 11, 3:1-2, 2 Samuel 5:1-5). Part of the reason Israel accepted David as king after Saul was that it was David who led them in battle, and they could see from the fruits that he was successful, but also it was known to the people of Israel that God had said that David would be king (2 Samuel 5:2, 2 Samuel 3:17-18, 1 Samuel 25:30-31).

Who chose David to be king over Israel, and how was he chosen? God chose him and appointed him to be king. How did the people of Israel know that God had appointed him to be king? They knew two ways. They knew that God had said that David would be king. Between the time that Samuel anointed David in front of his family and the time of Saul's death, and later when David was to become king of all Israel, it had become common knowledge as the statements by Abigail and Abner indicate. They also knew by the fruits that God was with David and had blessed him with wisdom and

success in his endeavors from the time David killed Goliath through all of David's battles with the Philistines.

So the pattern is the same. God appointed the leader and made His choice known by announcement (from Samuel when Samuel anointed David in the presence of his brothers) and/or by fruits (David's wisdom and success in all his efforts).

Solomon

God told David through the prophet Nathan that God would set up one of David's sons to be king after him. We see here the beginning of a succession of a line of kings, the house of David. David had many sons including his firstborn son Amnon (2 Samuel 3:2-5, 1 Chronicles 3:1-9). It is apparent from this list and from the sequence of events that there were several sons who were older than Solomon and had "seniority" you could say. There were at least six born in Hebron older than Solomon including Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, and there were probably at least three more born in Jerusalem older than Solomon if they are listed in order of birth.

So which of David's sons was to be king, and who decided? Who made that judgment?

There was no election. The decision would not be based on who was most popular with the people.

In time, Absalom killed David's firstborn son Amnon because of a grudge he had against him (2 Samuel 13:23). Absalom fled into exile, but later was reconciled to his father David and the nation (2 Samuel 13:34-39, 2 Samuel 14:21-33). Then Absalom plotted a revolution to seize the throne for himself by force. He knew one of David's sons would be king after him, and he wanted to be the one. He started first with a public relations campaign to get most of the nation on his side (2 Samuel 15:1-6). According to God's word, he succeeded. Verse 6 says that he, "stole the hearts of the men of Israel".

If there were national elections to choose one of David's sons to be king, Absalom would have won. He was the most popular of David's sons.

Absalom engineered a conspiracy to make himself king (2 Samuel 15:10-12). David and his loyal supporters had to flee Jerusalem to save their lives (2 Samuel 15:13-14). There ensued a civil war, and Absalom led his army to attack David and his forces. But Absalom lost that war and was killed (2 Samuel 18:6-15). It was God's will that Absalom be defeated (2 Samuel 17:14).

After this, Adonijah decided to be king. He exalted himself and received help from some of the top office holders in the nation. You could say he "campaigned" to be king (1 Kings 1:5-10). But before he could make himself king, David became aware of it,

and David announced that Solomon would be king. He not only announced it, he made him king right then (1 Kings 1:11-35). That settled the matter.

How was Solomon chosen and how was the choice made known? David APPOINTED him. The last part of 1 Kings 1:35 quotes David speaking of Solomon saying, "For I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah". Was this David's own judgment? God had told David that the name of his son who would be king after him would be "Solomon", and God named him before he was even born (1 Chronicles 22:6-10). This was God's call, but David announced the appointment.

Here is a case where God made the choice, but made it known not by fruits but by announcement from one who had the authority to make the appointment: David.

The pattern remains the same. God makes the choice and makes it known by fruits only (as with Samuel), by appointment or announcement by one in authority only (as with Solomon), or by both (as with Aaron, who was announced to be God's priest by Moses and was backed up with signs and wonders including the budding of his rod, and as with Joshua who was announced by Moses to be leader and God also backed him up with miracles such as the parting of the Jordan river).

Rehoboam, Jeroboam, and Jehu

Though Solomon was wise, he did not remain faithful to God, and God decided to take ten tribes from the house of David and give them to Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:1-13, 1 Kings 11:26-40). Who made the choice of Jeroboam to be king over Israel? It was clearly God who made that decision. How did God communicate that decision? Was it through an election with the voting of the people? No, Solomon would never have permitted such an election. Neither would Solomon's son Rehoboam. Any effort to hold an election to see if ten tribes should reject the house of David and select their own leader by balloting would have been crushed by the king. God communicated that decision to Jeroboam through a message from God's prophet, the prophet Ahijah, who met Jeroboam on the road. Until then, Jeroboam was a faithful and loyal servant of king Solomon.

Now, did others know? They must have, because after the meeting between Jeroboam and the prophet on the road, the Bible says "Solomon therefore sought to kill Jeroboam" (1 Kings 11:40). The prophet knew God's pronouncement, Jeroboam knew, and Solomon knew, and it is likely others knew also. Jeroboam fled to Egypt to save his life.

Then when Solomon died and the time came to make Solomon's son Rehoboam king of Israel, Jeroboam returned. They all assembled at Shechem. At that time, Jeroboam had become de facto spokesman for the congregation of Israel in asking Rehoboam to

reduce their burdens (1 Kings 12:1). He had become a kind of unofficial leader or spokesman for much of Israel. How did this happen? The Bible doesn't say.

But there is certainly no reason to assume it was by election with binding decisions made by casting ballots. Such a system simply did not exist in Israel and no king would have permitted it. If Solomon knew what the prophet said to Jeroboam on the road, word must have spread. The prophet must have told others, or Jeroboam told others, or there were others with Jeroboam and Ahijah who witnessed what the prophet said and spread the word. Solomon knew because he tried to kill Jeroboam and Jeroboam had to flee. By the time Solomon had died, knowledge of this thing probably was widespread. Jeroboam himself may have taken certain actions in rebellion against the king (1 Kings 11:26-27). So it would be natural for the people to look to Jeroboam for leadership, particularly since he was known to be a capable man (1 Kings 11:28).

The ten tribes of Israel rejected Rehoboam as king (1 Kings 12:12-19). Then the ten tribes of Israel made Jeroboam king over them (1 Kings 12:20). This whole series of events was arranged and orchestrated by God to fulfill the prophecy he gave through the prophet Ahijah (1 Kings 12:15).

How did Israel make Jeroboam king? Was it by voting? There is no record of that. In any case, God has not shown us accounts of voting in the Bible as examples for us to follow, and He doesn't give us an example of voting here. Jeroboam was chosen by God to be king over the ten tribes of Israel as a judgment against the house of David for Solomon's sin. God announced through his prophet His decision and He arranged events to bring it to pass.

After this, Rehoboam prepared to go to war to reestablish the authority of the house of David over all Israel, but God through the prophet Shemaiah told Rehoboam and house of Judah that this matter was God's doing and they should not go to war, and they obeyed (1 Kings 12:21-24).

How was Rehoboam selected to be king? The Bible doesn't say, but it is likely that Solomon made the decision and the announcement just as Solomon became king because David made the announcement.

There follows in Israel and Judah a succession of kings, which you can read about in 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, and 2 Chronicles. In Judah, the kings were all from the line of David, and some were righteous and some were not. In Israel, there was a succession of dynasties, but none was righteous.

In at least one case, God used a prophet to name a king in Israel. God sent a message to Jehu telling him he would be king. The message was sent from Elisha the prophet through a young man he sent to deliver the message. But the message may have come from Elijah originally and Elijah delegated it to Elisha (1 Kings 19:15-16). I will cover more about Elijah and Elisha in the next section. It is interesting how Jehu became king. The young man (who is unnamed in the account) delivered the message to Jehu that he would be king and anointed Jehu with oil in the name of the Lord, then ran out of the house. When Jehu came out of the house, his officers wanted to know what it

was about. Jehu may have thought his men set it up as a practical joke, but they denied it, so he told them what the messenger said. Then his men blew the trumpet to announce that Jehu is king (2 Kings 9:1-13). How's that for a consensus! But there was no balloting. No constitution, no bylaws, no procedures for counting votes, and no commitment to follow the will of the majority. God made the announcement through a prophet then worked events to bring it about.

Elijah and Elisha

The story of how Elisha succeeded Elijah as prophet is very instructive for the Church today. Unlike with most prophets, the Bible gives indications that Elijah and Elisha supervised a group called the "sons of the prophets" (1 Kings 18:7-13, 2 Kings 2:5, 7, 15-18, 4:38-41, 6:1-7, 9:1). With most prophets in the Bible, they either did their jobs alone or God does not give us information about how they interacted with a group they supervised. In this, Elijah and Elisha could be compared with leaders in the Church of God in modern times such as Mr. Armstrong who supervised a staff and a Church which supported him and supported the work God did through him and recognized him as leader. The "sons of the prophets" could be likened to the Church of God and the field ministry.

God told Elijah to anoint Elisha as prophet to replace him (1 Kings 19:16-17). Elijah threw his mantle over Elisha and Elisha followed him and became his servant (1 Kings 19:19-21). Then later, Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into the atmosphere in the presence of Elisha, and God was with Elisha to give him power, and he struck the Jordan with the mantle of Elijah and the waters parted (2 Kings 2:1-14). The sons of the prophets saw this and said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha", and they bowed down before him (2 Kings 2:15). They understood by the miracles Elisha did that he was the successor to Elijah and they respected his authority.

Who chose Elisha to replace Elijah? God did.

How did God make his choice known? He announced it to Elijah who in turn informed Elisha and probably told the sons of the prophets also. Then God demonstrated with the fruits that He was backing up Elisha just as he did with Elijah, with power to perform miracles. He backed up Elisha's words, just as He backed up Samuel's words till it was known in Israel that Samuel was God's prophet. God showed by announcement and fruits that Elisha was His prophet to replace Elijah. The sons of the prophets did not hold an election and cast ballots to choose Elisha and God did not show His choice by inspiring the sons of the prophets to vote for Elisha.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist's role and office was announced by God through an angel to his father Zacharias before John was born (Luke 1:11-17). The pattern continues. God, not man, chose John to be a prophet and announced it by an angel. John was not elected by the people or the priests by the casting of votes. John was in the wilderness preaching a message of repentance and baptizing in the Jordan river (Matthew 3:1-12, Luke 3:1-20). It was commonly known that John was a prophet, though there is no record that John performed any miracle (Matthew 21:26, John 10:41).

How did the people know he was a prophet if John did not perform miracles? Part of it might have been that the information given to Zacharias by the angel had spread, probably by Zacharias talking to people. But no doubt the people recognized the positive fruit of John's message. They knew from the fruits of his preaching that he was a prophet of God though he did no miracles.

John was appointed from above, not elected to office. God announced through an angel the appointment of John as a prophet, then God confirmed this and showed by the fruits that John was a prophet. No balloting was involved either to choose John or to make known God's choice.

Jesus Christ

There is a multitude of prophecies in the Old Testament about Jesus Christ that show His authority, the nature of His work, His sacrifice, and the time of His appearing. I will reference only a few of them here.

That a Messiah was to come was made clear. It was also clear that His appointment was from God (Psalm 2:1-12, Psalm 110:1-2, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:41-44, Acts 2:34-36). A prophecy in Daniel showed when the Messiah would come, so Israel knew the general time of His coming and expected Him and was looking for Him (Daniel 9:24-27, John 4:25, Luke 3:15, John 1:19-20).

There were announcements made around the time of the birth of Jesus indicating that He was the promised Messiah. The angel Gabriel spoke to Mary and told her that she would be the mother of the Messiah, though the term "Messiah" was not specifically used in this passage (Luke 1:26-38). Mary was told that her son would be conceived miraculously and that He would be the Son of God and that He would reign over Israel forever. The description can only fit the Messiah. Elizabeth under inspiration of the Holy Spirit also spoke to Mary about her Son (Luke 1:39-56). Joseph was told in a dream that Mary's child was conceived miraculously from God and that He would save

His people from their sins (Matthew 1:18-25). The wise men also knew the general time and place of the birth of Christ, and it was divinely revealed to them where He was and they saw Him shortly after He was born (Matthew 2:1-12).

Shortly before Jesus began His public ministry, He came to John to be baptized. To John it was revealed that the one upon whom he saw the Holy Spirit descending was the Christ, and he testified that Jesus was the Son of God (Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-37).

During His ministry, Jesus performed a multitude of miracles. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons. He miraculously fed the multitudes. And He preached the gospel to the people and taught His disciples. He pointed out that the works He did testified that His ministry was from God (Matthew 4:23-25, Mark 1:32-34, Luke 4:40-41, Luke 7:20-23, Matthew 11:2-6, John 3:1-2, John 10:37-38, Mark 6:35-44, Matthew 14:15-21, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-14). Finally, He fulfilled the sign of Jonah and was resurrected after three days (Matthew 12:38-40, Matthew 28:1-7, Luke 24:33-42, Acts 1:1-3). God also revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 16:15-17).

The pattern is the same. God appointed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ. God revealed this by announcements from angels and prophets and by the fruits of the works that Jesus did, the miracles, the preaching of the gospel, and the resurrection from the dead. God did not reveal this by inspiring His disciples to elect Him into office by balloting.

Announcement by one in authority, by fruits, or by both - that is the pattern of how God reveals whom He has chosen to hold office.

The Twelve Apostles

Jesus Christ chose and called His twelve apostles (Matthew 4:18-22, 10:1-4, Mark 1:16-20, Mark 3:13-19). Before choosing them, He spent all night in prayer to the Father, apparently to know the Father's will (Luke 6:12-16). The apostles did not choose Christ but Christ chose the apostles (John 15:16). This is obvious, but needs to be repeated - the apostles did not come into office through any popular vote of men.

With the apostles we have an example of the kind of hierarchical organizational structure that will exist in God's Kingdom in the millennium. God does not give us much information about who will hold what positions. But the Bible does say that David will be king over Israel (Jeremiah 30:7-9). And Christ told his twelve apostles that each of them would be a leader of a tribe of Israel (Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:29-30). This is a concrete example of the principle taught in parables of the pounds (or minas) (Luke 19:11-26).

Since David will be ruler over all Israel, all twelve tribes, and since the apostles will be rulers over the individual tribes, then David will have authority over the twelve apostles in the Kingdom of God. God gives us this one example in the Bible to show that the pyramid structure that is described by Jethro in Exodus 18 will be the same kind of structure in God's Kingdom, not necessarily exactly the same structure, but similar. It will be top-down government.

It is also a reminder that, just as God chose the apostles to hold the offices they had on earth, so God will choose who the leaders will be in the Kingdom of God and exactly what offices they will hold in that kingdom. No one will be elected by popular vote, but God in His perfect wisdom, love, and justice will make perfect decisions to put everyone where they best fit for the good of His family forever.

Since we are being prepared for that kingdom, we should be practicing the way of life of that kingdom at every opportunity, and that includes following that way of life in the selection of leaders in the Church of God. Leaders should always be chosen by those best qualified to make the choice, which are those higher in authority than the office being filled, not by those who will be under that authority and who are the LEAST qualified to make those decisions.

Christ's appointment of His apostles was also demonstrated by fruits. He gave them power to heal the sick, cast out demons, and preach the gospel (Matthew 10:1, Mark 6:7, 12, Luke 9:1-3, 6). Later, Jesus also appointed seventy to do likewise (Luke 10:1, 9, 17). In effect, the fruits that showed that they were appointed by Christ was the power to do God's work.

We see here the same pattern as we have seen in the whole Bible so far - appointment from above indicated by announcement by one in authority or fruits or both.

Usefulness of the King James Version

Before going on, I want to point out something useful about the King James Version that some might not know about, because it will be needed for the section that follows.

Generally, many people prefer the New King James Version or some other modern translation over the King James Version because the language of the King James Version with its "thee's" and "thou's" sounds archaic. I myself primarily use the New King James Version in my personal study and reading most of the time. But sometimes the King James Version's archaic language actually gives more information, information that is lost in our modern translations unless you access the original Hebrew and Greek texts and understand those languages.

In modern English, the plural and singular forms of "you" are the same. If I say, "you look nice today", I could be talking to one person or to a crowd of people - the word

"you" is the same. It is both singular and plural and you can only tell which it is by the context. But sometimes in the Bible the context doesn't clearly show the speaker's intent. You cannot always tell if "you" is one person or more than one. But in the King James version, you can sometimes tell, even in cases where it is not clear just from the context. "Thou" is the singular form of "you". "You" is the plural form.

One exception: In King James English, "you" might sometimes singular if it is used as an expression of formality rather than in a familiar way. So while "you" and "ye" are usually plural, "thou" and "thee" are always singular.

So in the King James Version, when you see "thou" or "thee", it refers to one person, singular, but when you see "you" it is usually referring to two or more people, a group. In the case of "you" in the New Testament, if you need confirmation, you can check in the original Greek.

This is important when we study the role of Peter.

Peter

Peter was a leader over the other eleven apostles. He was not the "chief apostle". The chief apostle is Christ (Hebrews 3:1). His authority comes first. But Peter did have a position of authority that the other apostles did not have. He was the human leader of that group of twelve. Like all human authority, it was limited. He did not have the authority to order someone to sin. But he had the authority to take the lead and to make administrative decisions, but in consultation with the other apostles, which I will explain in a section farther on.

Who appointed Peter to this leadership position? It was God the Father who made that choice, though it was Jesus Christ who announced it to Peter and the other apostles.

Jesus asked his apostles who they said He (Jesus) was. He asked this of ALL the apostles. In the King James Version, the word "ye" is used, which is a form of "you", which in King James English is plural. Matthew 16:15 (KJV) says, "He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?". Notice He was speaking to "them", not just to one of them. The account continues, "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:16-19, KJV). We know that the "rock" upon which the Church of God is built is Christ, not Peter (1 Corinthians 10:4). But notice that from the point at which Peter said that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is talking directly to Peter, not to the

twelve disciples. The words "thee" and "thou" are singular, not plural. Who was given authority to bind and loose? "Whatsoever *thou* shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" (verse 19, emphasis mine). It was **Peter** who was given authority in this passage to bind and loose, not the twelve apostles collectively. Jesus was speaking to Peter alone when He said this, as translated into the English, because He used the singular form of you - "thou" is always singular. If Jesus was speaking to all the apostles, the original Greek text inspired by the Holy Spirit would have used the plural form of the Greek word for you and the King James translators would have used the plural form "you".

But this account suggests that even Jesus did not know who would be leader until Peter showed that God the Father revealed to him that Jesus was the Christ! That was how Jesus knew! Jesus knew that one had to be leader so there was no confusion in the Church after Jesus ascended into heaven and was no longer with the disciples in person to supervise them. But He did not know which one His Father had chosen. How did He find out? BY THE FRUITS! Peter's answer showed that God the Father revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, and this was the fruit Jesus needed to see to know that Peter was the Father's choice. "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (verse 17).

So here, even Jesus Christ sets an example for us to show us how to know who the leaders in the Church are. We know by fruits, not ballots. Jesus did not call for an election with ballots cast by the 12 apostles to vote one of themselves into office. Jesus did not say, "My Father will inspire the balloting and that is how I will know."

Jesus Christ did not give binding authority to the twelve apostles collectively with them acting as a ruling board or council to vote among themselves to make decisions. Nor did He have the twelve vote to see whom they would elect by popular vote. Instead He looked at the fruits to see whom the Father had chosen. Asking the disciples who they thought He was was a test question.

Peter might not even have been Jesus' first choice. John was the apostle who was especially close to Jesus, the apostle that Jesus loved. See John 13:23-24, 20:2, 21:7, 20-24. All four of these passages mention a disciple "whom Jesus loved" and verse 24 of John chapter 21 shows that this disciple was the author of the book, John. But interestingly, even if we didn't know who he was from verse 24, we would know he was not Peter because, in every place the disciple whom Jesus loved is mentioned, Peter is also mentioned as a different person. John was the disciple Jesus loved, but Jesus did not name as leader His personal favorite. He submitted to the Father's will and let the fruits show whom the Father had chosen.

After Jesus named Peter as a leader of the apostles, He sometimes spoke to all the apostles but addressing His remarks to Peter, showing that Peter was a leader of the other apostles. Christ spoke to Peter but intending what He said to apply to the other apostles.

Here is an example of what I mean.

We remember the passage in which Jesus told Peter that Satan wanted to "sift you as wheat". But whom did Satan want to sift? It was not just Peter.

Here is the passage in the King James Version: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Notice, the plural "you" in "Satan has desired to have you". It was not just Peter that Satan desired to have and to sift like wheat. It was all the disciples, the group. But notice that Jesus was speaking to Peter as if Peter was the leader and represented the whole group when He used the singular form of you, "thee", in "I have prayed for thee". In modern English, it is as if Jesus said, "Peter, Satan has desired to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you in particular Peter that your faith doesn't fail, and when you Peter are converted, strengthen the other apostles."

Also, notice that when Christ gave instructions to "feed My sheep", the instructions apply to the whole ministry and all the apostles, but He gave the instructions personally to Peter, because as leader Peter was to pass on those instructions to the rest of the apostles (John 21:15-17). It isn't only Peter alone who was to feed the flock - if that was the case, the ministry in the Church of God today would have no obligation to feed the flock and there would be no reason for God to record this passage in the Bible. But Peter was leader so Christ gave the command to him to give to the rest of the apostles and the Church as a whole.

As you read the history of the Church in the New Testament, you will find that Peter was leader in many events. It was Peter who stood up to speak to all the disciples to take the lead in finding a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15-26). It was Peter who took the lead in speaking to the crowd on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41). It was Peter who healed the lame man at the gate of the temple (Acts 3:4-8), and it was Peter who took that occasion to speak to the people (Acts 3:11-26). It was Peter who spoke to the rulers and authorities (Acts 4:8-12). It was Peter who rebuked Ananias for lying, and it was Peter who pronounced a death sentence on the wife of Ananias for also lying (Acts 5:1-11). And it was to Peter, not to Paul the apostle to the gentiles, that God revealed that salvation was opened at that time to the gentiles (Acts 10:1-18).

How was Peter appointed leader? He was chosen by God the Father, not by the voting of men. God revealed it to Jesus Christ by the fruits: Peter was the one to whom the Father revealed that Jesus was the Christ. When Jesus understood that, He announced it to the other apostles and to Peter. Then God continued to back up Peter with the fruits of power to do God's work even after Christ ascended to heaven.

The pattern: God appoints the leader. God shows who the leader is by announcement by one having the authority to name the leader, or by the fruits, or by both announcement and fruits. Never by voting or "balloting" to see who is the most popular in the eyes of those who will be under the leader.

The Replacement of Judas

In Acts 1 is an account of the selection of Matthias as apostle to replace Judas. How was Matthias chosen? Who chose him and how was the choice made known?

Peter spoke to the disciples and explained that someone who was among the disciples from the time Jesus was baptized by John right up to the time when Christ ascended into heaven must become a replacement for Judas and a witness to the resurrection (Acts 1:15-22). The Bible says they proposed two: Joseph also called Barsabas and Matthias (Acts 1:23).

Who did the "proposing" and how was it done? The Bible does not say.

Those who believe in ballot-box governance for the Church of God sometimes suggest that they must have voted to elect two. That is total nonsense. There is no indication of any balloting. For them to hold an election would be contrary to every example in the rest of the Bible. But those who believe in balloting would like you to believe that they **MUST** have voted because there is no other way they could have "proposed" the two. But that is wrong. There is more than one way this could have been accomplished without balloting.

First of all, the qualifications Peter required narrowed the field enormously. The person would have to have been with Jesus and the disciples continuously throughout Jesus' entire ministry. Most of the disciples would not fit into that category. Jesus' ministry lasted three and a half years. He would have been making disciples continuously as He traveled throughout the region. Some would have been with Christ for three years, some two and a half years, some two years, some six months, etc. It is likely that very few of the 120 besides the eleven apostles would have been with Him from the beginning. There was also a point part way through Christ's ministry when many disciples He had made left Him over His statement that unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you have no life in you (John 6:35-66). That account says that **MANY** of His disciples left him (verse 66). Notice that in the very next verse, Jesus asked the **TWELVE** if they also wanted to leave Him (John 6:67). The implication is that **MOST** of his disciples, other than the twelve, left Him at that time. Verse 67 does not say that Jesus spoke to a hundred, or fifty, or "those who did not leave him". He spoke to the twelve. There were probably very few others besides the twelve. At one point, even John the Baptist wasn't sure if Jesus was the Christ, even after seeing the Holy Spirit come upon him (John 1:29-34, Matthew 11:2-6, Luke 7:19-23), so it is not surprising if most of the disciples were offended at Jesus' words and left Him.

By the way, this is a little bit off the subject of this section, but while we are in John chapter 6, take a look at verses 70-71 where Jesus said that He chose the twelve, yet one of them (Judas) was a "devil". Besides reaffirming that Jesus chose the twelve, it brings out an important point. The leader or leaders that God selects to lead His people are always the best choices to work out God's plan and purpose, but they are not always the

most competent or righteous choices. Sometimes God appoints a leader with serious shortcomings, NOT the most qualified man, because it works out God's purpose to have such a man. If you are looking for a righteous, competent man to serve as apostle, Judas is not the right choice. Yet Christ chose him. Why? Because it worked out God's purpose. It was God's purpose that Jesus be betrayed by one of His apostles. Likewise, God chose Saul as king of Israel before David. Did God not know Saul's heart? Of course He did. But he chose Saul anyway because it worked out His purpose. Many valuable lessons were written in the Bible about respect for the authority of God's anointed because David had to flee from Saul, and the experiences David went through were important tests for David, and many of the Psalms David wrote came out of those experiences.

I bring this up because some in the Church of God may think that the appointment of Mr. Tkach to replace Mr. Armstrong was Mr. Armstrong's mistake and not God's will at all because Mr. Tkach made doctrinal errors, but I disagree. God wanted Mr. Tkach to be pastor general after Mr. Armstrong died because it worked out God's purpose for the Church.

Getting back to the proposing of two to replace Judas, there was probably an open discussion and inquiry about who were with the disciples from the beginning and continuously to that time. Eliminate those who were not there from the beginning, eliminate the women, eliminate the elderly and those who removed themselves from consideration for one reason or another, and there were probably only two. Or, it could be that only two were suggested, and no others were even mentioned. There is no record of voting at all.

Then they cast lots for God to show whom HE had chosen (Acts 1:24-26). This was an acceptable practice at the time, for lots were cast as a way of inquiring of God in Israel from the time of Moses (Numbers 27:21).

It doesn't make sense that they would submit ballots and only cast lots for two who received the most votes, as if God's role was that of tie-breaker. If there were three candidates, or four, or ten, why wouldn't they cast lots for all of them in order to know God's will? Remember the selection of Saul as king of Israel? After Samuel already knew that Saul was God's choice, he used the casting of lots to show the nation that Saul was God's choice. By lot the field was narrowed first by tribe, then by family, and finally to Saul himself (1 Samuel 10:19-22). God had no problem making His will known by lot to narrow down a large field to a single individual. Likewise, it was the same in the discovery of the man who sinned against God by taking the accursed thing in the book of Joshua (Joshua 7:10-22).

Look at what the disciples said when they prayed before they cast lots for Judas' replacement: "You, O Lord who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen" (Acts 1:24). Do you really think they could pray like that and yet rely on their own balloting to narrow the field to two? In this prayer is the recognition that only God knows the hearts of men, and there is also the recognition that it is God who chooses, not man. How could they acknowledge those two things and yet rely on their own voting before casting lots? If they knew that only God, not they, knew the hearts

of men, there could be no balloting. For to ballot is to claim that you can know someone's heart. How else would you know whom to vote for?

The Appointment of Deacons

After the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost the Church grew very rapidly. That very day, about 3,000 people were added to the 120 disciples (Acts 2:41). That is an increase of about 2,400 percent in one day! Growth continued on a daily basis (Acts 2:47). There were organizational problems in handling the distribution of food and whatever else the widows needed. So the apostles appointed deacons to handle these physical matters. They could not know everyone personally, so they delegated the selection of these men to the congregation (Acts 6:1-6). This does not mean that Peter and the other apostles had nothing to do with organizing and managing the selection, but most of the judgment in selecting of these deacons was done by the membership. Could there have been balloting to select the deacons? There could have been. The Bible does not say. It could be that there were leaders already in place in a structure similar to that recommended by Jethro in Exodus chapter 18 and that those leaders asked those they supervised for a discussion of who to recommend, then passed those recommendations up. But there could have been balloting.

But there was no balloting of the kind that exists in Churches of God today that govern by balloting. There were several differences.

First of all, the balloting itself carried no authority. In this sense, it would have been actually a form of polling, of seeking recommendations. See section "The Difference Between Voting and Polling" earlier in this chapter. Notice Acts 6:3: "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business". The apostles were to APPOINT these men as deacons after the congregation recommended them. The authority still flowed from the top down. After the people chose seven, the apostles appointed them and prayed and laid hands on them. Then they were deacons. The apostles did not have to ask the members to do the selecting, but it was a good idea because the Church had grown so fast that the apostles could not have known these people well enough to know who was qualified.

But there is no record of setting up an organization based on balloting for its authority. The authority came from Christ through the apostles. There were no yearly or bi-yearly elections to vote into office new deacons or to remove from office those deacons already appointed by the apostles. The authority flowed from the top down as in every other example in the Bible. The deacons were responsible only to the apostles, who had the authority to remove them. There is no indication they had to stand for re-election every two years. The apostles delegated the selection of deacons to the people as a one-time solution to a special situation arising from the explosively rapid growth of the Church in a very short span of time.

And there is no assurance that balloting was used at all. There could have simply been open discussion among those in several ethnic and language groups with the men who were the natural leaders speaking up and leading the discussion till there was general agreement. When a deacon was proposed for an ethnic group and dissenting voices ceased, that was their choice.

Have you every worked in an office where a group of five or six friends go to lunch together every day but go to a different restaurant each day? Have you observed how they decide where to go? Do they set up an election process and cast votes? Well sometimes they may vote with a show of hands. But more likely than not, then just talk about it till they agree. And it doesn't usually take very long.

"Where are we going today?", someone asks. "Let's go to Sammy's Place", someone will say. "I can't afford that today", someone else will answer. "I have a taste for Mexican food." "I can't eat Mexican food", replies another.

So they talk till they come to an agreement and find a answer that is acceptable to everyone. They keep making suggestions till they find a place no one objects to, or until someone compromises and drops their original objections. When dissent stops, the choice is made.

You don't have to cast votes to make a group decision.

Church leaders do not have to set up a constitution, bylaws, yearly elections, and vote counting to get input, advice, and counsel from the ministry and members.

Paul

Peter was leader of the twelve apostles. He was the human leader, under Christ, of the Church of God when it was entirely made up of Jewish converts. He was the one to whom Christ revealed that conversion was being opened up to gentiles, and he passed on that decision to the rest of the Church (Acts chapter 10).

But God appointed Paul, formerly named Saul, to be apostle to the gentiles. At some point, there was a division of labor between Peter and Paul. Peter supervised the preaching of the gospel in those areas and to those congregations that were mostly Israelite and Paul supervised the preaching of the gospel in areas that were mostly gentile (Galatians 2:7-10).

How did Paul receive his commission?

He was not elected by the voting of the people. In fact, his case is a perfect example of WHY God does not use the voting of men, even men in the Church of God, to select

leaders. Paul, who was Saul who persecuted the Church, would not have won any popularity contests in the Church of God. He could not have won any elections. See Acts 7:57-59, 8:1-3, 9:1-2, 22:4-5, 26:9-11, 1 Corinthians 15:9, and Galatians 1:13. When God gave Ananias a vision to heal Saul of his blindness, Ananias was at first afraid and reluctant even to go to Saul until God reassured him (Acts 9:10-16). See also Acts 9:21, 26.

Who chose Saul who became Paul? God chose Him (Acts 9:15, Galatians 1:11, 15-24).

How did God make His choice known? First, Christ miraculously spoke to Saul on the road and struck him with blindness (Acts 9:1-9). That got his attention. Then God announced to Ananias in a vision that Saul was to be a chosen vessel to bear Christ's name before gentiles, kings, and Israelites (Acts 9:10-16). But even after Paul was accepted into the Church and had begun to preach the gospel and do God's work, he was not immediately recognized as an apostle. That came later. How was it known? God showed it by the fruits.

God through the Holy Spirit inspired the Church of God at Antioch to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work (Acts 13:1-2). There were prophets in the Church at Antioch, so it is likely that God through the Holy Spirit gave this communication to one or more prophets who in turn gave it to the whole congregation. Notice that Barnabas is listed first before Saul. Acts 13:3 says that the congregation sent them away. Some have said that this indicates that the congregation had authority over Barnabas and Paul because they sent them, but this is not how that word is used. The statement that someone sends someone on their way does not imply authority of the sender over the one sent, as this language is used in the Bible. Look at Genesis 18:16 where it says that Abraham sent "them" on their way towards Sodom, them being the Lord and the two angels. Obviously this does not mean that Abraham had authority over them. In the case of the Church at Antioch, the brethren probably sent Barnabas and Saul on their way by provisioning them with supplies, giving them emotional support and encouragement, praying for their safety, and perhaps by some of them accompanying them out of the city and part way on their journey. They did not have authority over them. They certainly did not cast votes about whether they should go or not.

Read Acts 13:6-13. This is where God began to show by the fruits that Paul was the leading apostle to the gentiles. When this account starts, Barnabas is listed first (verse 7). But then something happened. In a confrontation between Barnabas and Paul and a sorcerer named Elymas, God inspired Paul to take the lead and backed him up with a miracle. Paul rebuked Elymas and pronounced blindness upon him, whereupon God struck him with blindness (Acts 13:8-12). From that point on, Paul is often mentioned first before Barnabas, and they are called "Paul and his party" - see Acts 13:13, 43.

When Paul met with the other apostles as recounted in Acts 15, Barnabas and Paul (here, Barnabas is mentioned first) recounted the miracles God had worked through them (Acts 15:12). They told the apostles this because the apostles were to judge by the fruits, and the miracles were fruits that showed that God was working through Paul and Barnabas.

While Barnabas is mentioned first in Acts 15:12, perhaps indicating that those present had more regard for Barnabas's authority at the beginning, later Paul is mentioned first after they recounted the miraculous works God had done through them (Acts 15:22).

At some point, it became commonly recognized that Paul had become God's leading apostle to the gentiles as Peter was to Israelites (Galatians 2:7-9).

Who chose Paul as apostle to the gentiles? Was he appointed from above or elected into office by the balloting of the ministry? He was appointed from above, by God through Jesus Christ. How did God make this known? By announcement in a vision to Ananias, by inspiring the prophets at Antioch to separate Paul and Barnabas for the work, and by showing by the fruits of miracles and effectiveness in speaking that God had empowered Paul to do that work (Acts 9:22). You can read the book of Acts from chapter 9 to the end of the book to see how many miracles accompanied the work that Paul was doing.

So the pattern continues. God appoints the top leaders in the Church. He makes His choices known by announcement from one in authority, in this case by Christ through visions to Saul and Ananias and by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the Church at Antioch probably through the prophets that were there. And He also makes known His choice through fruits, in Paul's case through miracles, effective speaking, and general effectiveness in preaching the gospel and raising up Churches of God.

Resolving a Controversy - Acts 15

Acts chapter 15 describes a meeting of the apostles to resolve a disagreement about the law and about Church policy concerning teaching the law to gentile members. Unlike most of the events I have reviewed, this had nothing to do with selecting a leader. It had to do with the making of a decision regarding policy. The policy was about what to teach gentile Christians about circumcision and various matters in the law of Moses.

Though this is not about selecting leaders, I bring this up because some who advocate ballot box governance seem to think there was some kind of vote taken and the decision was made by counting ballots. There is no indication of that at all.

The controversy started when some men from Judea taught gentile Christians in areas that Paul supervised that they had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas did not agree and went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and ministry about this. In the meeting there was "much dispute" over this (Acts 15:1-7). I take it that means there was heated discussion with views strongly expressed on both sides. Then Peter, who was leader of the work the Church did towards Israelites, and may have been leader over the Church overall in matters where his work and Paul's work overlapped, stood up to speak. He basically said, no, gentile members of the Church do not have to be circumcised. That silenced the disputing, and everyone listened to Paul

and Barnabas speak about how God backed up their work towards the gentiles with power and with miracles. That seems to have silenced their critics even more (Acts 15:7-13).

Then James spoke. Now if Peter was the leader of the Church in areas that were predominantly Israelite, and Paul was the leader of the Church in areas that were predominantly gentile, what was James' office? He was an apostle, that much is clear (Galatians 1:18-20). He was not James the brother of John, one of the original twelve apostles. That James was killed early in New Testament history (Acts 12:1-2). This James was the brother of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:18). Since he was in Jerusalem and that was an area that Peter supervised, he was probably under Peter's supervision. He may have been the pastor of the Church of God at Jerusalem. I believe I remember that Mr. Armstrong said that James was pastor (and an apostle) of the headquarters congregation at Jerusalem and was therefore chairman of the meeting, though Peter had greater authority. I tend to agree with Mr. Armstrong, though I have not found definite proof. If that is the case, then James as chairman of the meeting basically summed up the decision Peter had made and pronounced it his judgment, or in other words, made it official. He backed up Peter, and that was the end of the decision making process.

But by that time, everyone was in agreement. Why? How do we know? Because by the time James summed up the decision and closed the discussion, everyone who had previously disagreed with Paul and Barnabas had shut up. They were silent. They did not continue to argue. Either they had been persuaded by the evidence that Paul was right and they were wrong, or they simply submitted to Peter's decision (Acts 15:13-21).

After Paul and Barnabas finished speaking, no one spoke up to disagree with them anymore. The disputing had ended. So James summed it up and made it official. That is how they reached a decision. Not by voting, casting of ballots, counting the ballots, and having a nationally recognized accounting firm audit and certify the results of the voting, all under the watchful eye of and in consultation with church attorneys who made sure they were following the constitution and bylaws of the Church. And in the discussion and in the decision that occurred, I have no doubt that Christ through the Holy Spirit inspired them and helped them reach the right decision.

This meeting is an example of how decisions can be made and agreement reached without balloting. Because in the final analysis, balloting does NOT produce "agreement". Balloting is agreement to disagree. It is the majority forcing its will on those who do not agree with the majority. That is not God's way. The process that the disciples followed was to talk things out as much as possible till one side or the other was persuaded or until the ones having the authority to decide made the decision.

It appears that Peter was the decision maker, but he did not just dictate a decision. He let everyone have their say. He listened to all sides. He probably tried to have an open mind. But then he spoke, and after he did, those who disagreed became silent. He used persuasion as much as possible, helping everyone understand the REASONS for the decision.

"If Two of You Agree..."

Jesus Christ gave some useful principles to follow concerning how leaders should lead in the Church of God. This does not have to do with the selection of leaders but has to do with how leaders should lead. And there may also be some application to the governance issue as far as understanding what "agreement" is. These principles can also explain why we do not see Peter giving a lot of orders without discussion, but rather Peter was more mild-mannered in his exercise of authority than some others might be. It was not because he did not have authority. It was because he was using that authority in a gentle way as Christ instructed.

"But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many' " (Matthew 20:25-28).

Leaders and ministers in the Church of God should exercise their authority with love, humility, and restraint. They should govern first of all according to God's instructions and their first loyalty must be to God. But secondarily, they should govern in a spirit of loving concern for the good of those they lead, even to the point of being servants of those they lead, not servants in the sense of lacking needed authority for edification (2 Corinthians 13:10), but servants as Christ was a servant, sacrificing themselves for the good of those they serve. Parents understand this when they sacrifice for the good of their children.

What does this mean in practice? It can include many things. It means that a godly leader will be a good listener. He will consider the views of those under his authority before making a binding decision. If he is humble, he will not assume that he has all wisdom and cannot learn something from those under his authority. He will be gentle and willing to yield, as the NKJV puts it, or easy to be "intreated" as the KJV puts it (James 3:17). In other words, he is open to being persuaded by those under him, without compromising of course with God's law. He will seek to lead when possible by teaching and persuading those under his authority, not just commanding them. In that way, he will try to obtain genuine agreement whenever possible.

In the world, leaders do not always explain their decisions. But in the Church of God, leaders and ministers should understand that all of us are being taught by God and prepared for God's kingdom, and a wise and loving leader will usually explain decisions, teaching the reasons for them (unless those reasons must be confidential), and persuading those under his authority, not just dictating. A wise and loving leader would rather win subordinates over to his point of view, persuading them of what is right, whenever that is possible, rather than just dictating and enforcing decisions. Sometimes that is not possible, but it should be the preference of godly leaders.

That is why Peter was more inclined to lead a discussion and try to have people talk out their differences of opinion until they came to agreement whenever possible, as he did in Acts 15, rather than just shut off discussion and immediately dictate a decision.

Christ wants leaders in the Church to seek agreement whenever possible. This is encouraged and reinforced by His statement to His disciples that if two of them gathered in His name agree on something, it will be done for them (Matthew 18:19-20).

But let's not confuse agreement with disagreement. A vote of 60 to 40 is not agreement. Jesus did not say, "if two out of three of you agree, it will be done." He did not say, "if a majority of you agree as determined by a count of ballots cast according to the requirements of the constitution and bylaws of the corporation and certified by an independent accounting firm, it will be done".

Instruction Concerning Appointments in the New Testament

God has created a number of offices in the Church, such as that of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher, each office having its own rank and authority (Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 12:27-28).

There are instructions in the Bible regarding the qualifications in those who are appointed as leaders. Peter gave instructions to the people that the ones they should seek out among them to be deacons should be men of good reputation and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:1-4). Paul told Timothy that those who are bishops (that is, overseers or rulers) should be blameless, temperate, sober-minded, hospitable, able to teach, gentle, not a novice, etc. and that deacons should be reverent, holding the faith with a clear conscience, but should be tested first (1 Timothy 3:1-12).

To Titus Paul wrote that he should appoint elders and bishops who are blameless, hospitable, lovers of what is good, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the truth as they have been taught, each a husband of one wife (not multiple wives), having faithful children in subjection (not insubordinate), etc. (Titus 1:5-9).

These qualifications are not generally a controversy. The controversy arises over who is to apply these qualifications to choose men for office. In other words, who evaluates which men are blameless, temperate, sober-minded, hospitable, able to teach, gentle, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, etc.? Is it those who will be under the authority of such men who should evaluate and judge who has these qualifications, or is it those higher in authority than the ones being evaluated who should decide? The multitude of examples in the Bible shows that it is those higher in authority, God himself or those in authority over the office being filled, who are best qualified to judge this matter. Only in the case of the selection of deacons did the apostles delegate the recommendation for

men to fill these offices to the people, and that no doubt is because the Church had grown so fast that the apostles did not know all the people well enough to know their qualifications without the advice and counsel of the people. And even in this case, the authority came from the apostles, not the people.

Those who argue in favor of ballot-box governance sometimes like to ask the question, which is important, character of leaders or structure of governance. Or they might ask, which is more important, righteousness or the form of governance. The question itself is wrong because it is phrased to mislead. The question is designed to frame the issue as a choice between right character or a particular form of governance. But that is not the choice. Right character is mandatory, but so is the right form of governance. It is both, and in fact, the wrong form of governance suggests that those who choose that form of governance either fail to believe and submit to what God teaches in the Bible or they lack the knowledge and wisdom to understand what the Bible teaches about government.

The issue is, I repeat, who is best qualified to evaluate candidates for office in the Church as to whether they have the qualifications for an office, those who will be under that office or those who will be over that office. I believe the Bible shows that it is those who will be over that office who are best qualified to make that judgment. In the case of the top leader of a Church of God fellowship, it is Christ who is best qualified to choose the leader, not the ministry.

Organization of the Church and Limitations on the Authority of the Ministry

The last section discussed the qualifications for appointment to office in the administrative structure of the Church, or in other words, the qualifications for the ministry. But there is more to organization in the Church of God than just the administrative structure of a Church of God organization or fellowship. And it is important to understand that in order to understand the limitations of the authority of the ministry.

The ministry has authority (Matthew 16:18-19, 18:15-18, Hebrews 13:7, 17, 2 Corinthians 13:10). But what are the limits of that authority?

Does the ministry have the authority to tell members what they can say concerning doctrine? Do they have the authority to tell members what they can read or not read? Do they have the authority to tell members what to believe and what to think?

To answer these questions we must understand how the Church of God is organized.

Jesus Christ is head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18). As head of the Church, Christ has all authority over everything we think, say, and do. But that authority does not all flow through the ministry.

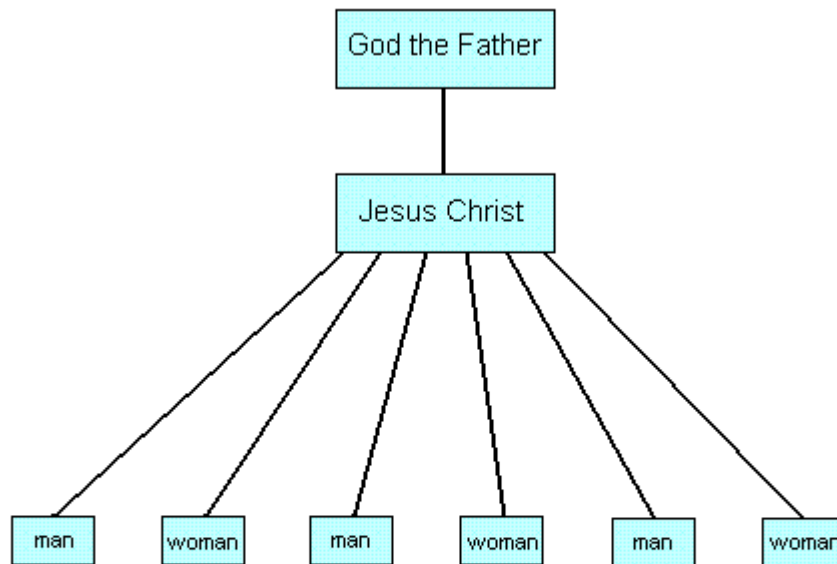
If you look at certain vital scriptures, you will see that Christ's rulership over the Church flows through three different channels determined by three areas of a Christian's life. It is important to understand those three areas and the chain-of-command by which Christ leads the Church in those three areas. It all has to do with how the Church is organized.

Notice the following scriptures:

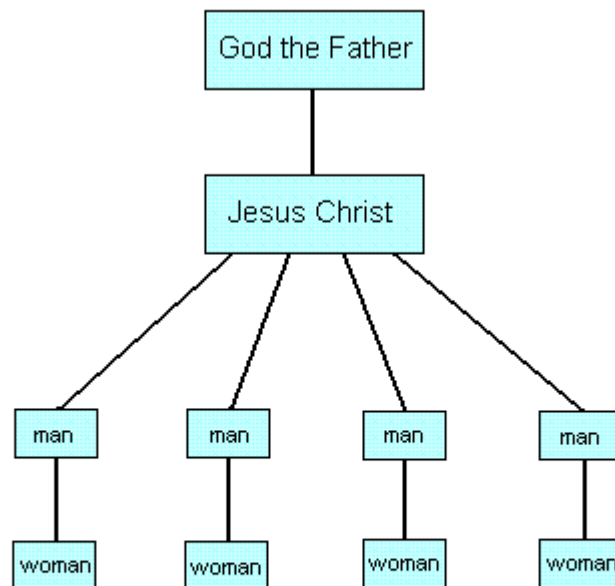
- 1) 1 Corinthians 11:3: "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God."
- 2) Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
- 3) Ephesians 4:11-16: "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

If you try to draw an organization chart based on the above, you can't without a lot of overlapping dotted lines. But you can draw three organization charts:

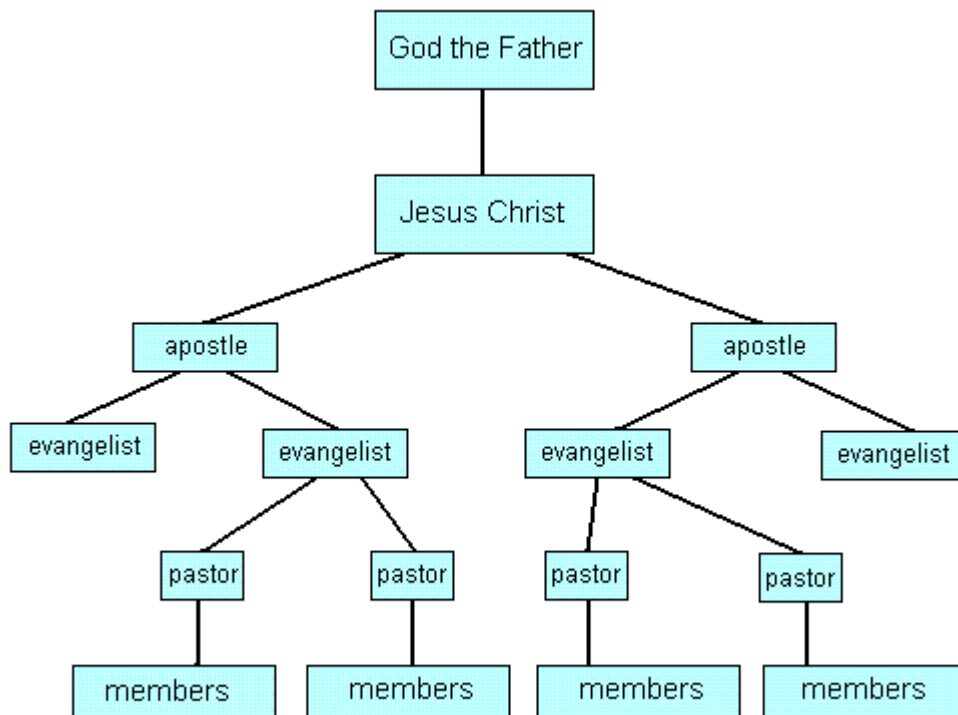
- Chart one: Combining 1 Corinthians 11:3, which says that the head of every man is Christ, with Galatians 3:28, which says there is neither male nor female, we see that there is a direct relationship between Christ and every Christian, and that God the Father is the head of Jesus Christ. So the organization is, God the Father is at the top of the hierarchy, Jesus Christ is under the Father's authority, and Christ directly supervises and leads every member of the Church as head of the Church.



- Chart two: Using 1 Corinthians 11:3 alone, we would draw a chart showing God the Father at the top, Jesus Christ under the Father and over the man, and the man having authority over his wife.



- Chart three: Using Ephesians 4:11-16, we could draw a chart with God the Father at the top, Jesus Christ under the Father, next apostles, then evangelists, then pastors, then the members under the authority of the pastors.



Which chart is correct? I think each chart accurately reflects the intent of the particular scriptures it is based on. Since God does not contradict Himself, these various levels of organization must complement each other, not contradict each other. Each applies under particular circumstances.

Can there be overlapping structures within one organization, that is, within the entire body of Christ? Yes there can. Can a person have more than one boss? Yes. Doesn't this lead to confusion? Wrongly applied, yes, but rightly applied and administrated, no.

I will illustrate the concept of overlapping structure with two examples, one from business and the other from the military.

In business, I might be a computer programmer that is part of a staff of about 10 programmers, all under the authority of a staff manager. The staff might be part of a larger programming department, and the staff manager is under the authority of the department head. The reporting relationships can go up to the very top of the organization. My primary boss is my staff manager. He hires me, gives me raises (or doesn't give them), gives me my annual performance appraisal, corrects me for bad performance, rewards me for good performance, and has the power to fire me if necessary. But in the course of my work, I may be assigned to a project team for six months that is made up of employees from many departments. Perhaps I have other projects to work on also, so my work for this team only involves part of my time. But to manage this project, a project leader is assigned. He has authority over me and over the other members of the project team in matters pertaining to the project. Because the project involves employees from many departments, the project leader's authority crosses department lines, but his authority is limited. He cannot fire me, demote me, or interfere with my other work. If I have questions concerning this project, I go to the project leader, but if anything major comes up (like getting days off for the Feast), I go to my staff manager, who is my "real" boss. And if there is any real conflict, the staff manager has greater authority over me personally, and he can resolve problems. This is an example of overlapping structures, and it is used in business all the time because it is often necessary and it works extremely well when rightly applied.

Here is an example from the military. During World War II when allied armies invaded France by landing on the Normandy beaches, the allied armies were made up of soldiers from many nations, with most belonging to the United States or Great Britain, who were bound together by an alliance. Each soldier's and officer's primary loyalty and obedience was to the government of his own country, but to create and maintain close coordination and mutual support among the forces of the various nations both in the preparation and execution of the operation, a joint commander was appointed with authority over everyone involved from all the nations. That commander was General Dwight Eisenhower, an American. Though he was an American, he had temporary authority over British officers and soldiers participating in the invasion. But it was temporary and limited authority granted by the British government. Had the alliance between the United States and Britain broken down at some point, the British forces would have obeyed their own government first. This is another example of overlapping structures. The loyalty each officer and soldier had to his own country and government was absolute. The obedience given to General Eisenhower was temporary and limited, but it served an important purpose. It enabled the operation to go forward with unity and effectiveness that would not otherwise have been possible.

In the matter of the Church, the primary organization structure is that every man and woman reports directly to Jesus Christ in matters of obedience to God's law, faith in

God and His Word the Bible, and character development. Christ is in charge of the salvation of each one of us individually. Christ supervises each one of us directly, day-by-day, even minute-by-minute in everything we do, and we are always responsible to Him. That responsibility we have directly to Christ takes precedent over every other reporting relationship we have with other human beings. Jesus authorizes us to pray directly to the Father, and we speak to God in prayer, and Christ speaks to us through the Bible, and God uses the Holy Spirit to help us remember the verses we have read and to help us to understand how to apply the Bible to make the decisions we have to make. Christ is the head of the whole Church of God because He is the head of every man and woman who has the Spirit of God.

For those who are married, in the family relationship, God has placed the man in charge of the woman. A woman is to obey her husband in everything, but only when it is consistent with what God commands in the Bible. Her relationship with Christ comes first. This is shown by that fact that scriptures say she is to obey her husband "in the Lord" (see Colossians 3:18). If her husband tells her to break God's commandments, she should obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). So the first two charts overlap, but the first is the more important of the two.

In the third chart is shown the organizational structure for doing the work of the Church and covers the preaching of the gospel to the world and the feeding of the flock. If you study the instructions in the Bible given to the ministry, you will notice that their responsibility primarily focuses on teaching (feeding the flock and preaching the gospel to the world), resolving disputes between members, praying for God's work and the flock, anointing the sick, making sure that the needy in the Church are cared for, and setting a right example for the membership. You can do a study of the instructions given to the ministry by Christ in the gospel accounts and Paul's instructions in the epistles to Timothy and Titus. The ministry has authority over the members in matters pertaining to setting official doctrine that would be taught in the organization, resolving disputes between members in the Church, disfellowshipping or marking those who cause division or can harm the body by their sins they have not repented of, conducting services, preaching the gospel to the world, and similar matters. Notice the context of this organization in Ephesians 4:11-16: "for the work of ministry" and "that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" and "according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." The context is the organized work of the Church such as the teaching of doctrine. But always the lay member reports to Christ first. If matters come up where the member is not sure if he should obey what the ministry instructs, he should go to God in prayer, asking for guidance to know God's will, then look to the Bible for God's answer. The authority of the ministry over the membership is real, but it is limited, while God's authority is unlimited. There may be biblical principles for example that would require a member to withdraw from fellowship with a Church organization, temporarily or permanently. A member may need to leave an organization for his own spiritual protection and to preserve his relationship with God. A member may have to stay home until God's will becomes clear or until circumstances change. In such cases, it is Christ who will judge the member, not the ministry, and Christ will judge the member based on what is written in the Bible, not according to what the ministry says.

In matters of doctrine, there are responsibilities on the part of members and ministers. Ministers should teach the members from the Bible and help members find the answers in the Bible, but they should direct the faith of the members towards God and the Bible, not towards themselves. At the same time, ministers must teach the members to be corrected by the Bible and should set the example for the members by being willing themselves to be corrected by the Bible. So if a member brings a doctrinal disagreement to the leadership and ministry, they should examine the issue in the Bible with an open mind and be willing to change doctrine if they are wrong. Members have the responsibility to study the Bible, to believe the Bible first, but at the same time to respect the ministry of the fellowship they attend. They should listen to the ministry with an open mind and respect the office of minister and the authority God gave to the ministry by not openly criticizing them and their teaching in front of other members in that fellowship.

When ministers teach, they should teach from the Bible so that members learn to put their faith in God and His word, not in the minister. They should use the scriptures honestly, getting God's intended meaning out of the scriptures, letting the Bible interpret itself, not twisting scriptures just to support their teaching.

Who places a member in a particular church organization? Does God place us where we are or do we place ourselves where we are? God indeed places members where he sees fit, as the Scripture says (1 Corinthians 12:18), but God can also move members around and re-assign them as He sees fit. Part of this process involves the decision making and the free moral agency of the member also, and we in the Church are being both tested and judged on the decisions we make. God sometimes places members where He wants them to be through circumstances, or through opening the understanding of the member to know where he should go, or both.

I mention this because too often I have heard people say "God placed me here", meaning they will not leave an organization regardless of other factors. Saying "God placed me here" does not mean that God wants me to "stay here". If I always stayed where I was, on the principle that I should never leave where I am at, I never would have left the Catholic Church, or I would not have left Worldwide, or I would not have left Church A or Church B afterwards. God is judging me and testing me on my ability and willingness to make godly decisions according to His Word, and He creates circumstances that force me to make choices. I better strive to make the right choices for the right reasons, even if those choices mean leaving an organization. I am being judged now. To pass the tests God gives me, I have to make the right decisions, even if it means leaving one organization to go to another.

Where and with whom I attend, where I should send my tithes, if and when I should stay home for a time, these are all decisions I must make according to many overlapping principles in the Bible, and those decisions are between me and God, not between me and the ministry. Ministers can sometimes help with advice and instruction, but the instruction and advice of all ministers is not always sound, and they cannot make the decisions for me. The Bible is the ultimate authority and I must look to it for answers, not primarily the ministry. I try to respect the office of the ministry and consider what

they say with an open mind, checking the scriptures, but as I said before, the Bible must come first.

I have written elsewhere in this book on the importance of the principle that the ministry does not have dominion over a Christian's faith (2 Corinthians 1:24). That is, a member must believe what God says in the Bible more than what the ministry says. So in matters of what a Church of God member believes, in other words the area of faith, every member reports directly to Christ and to God, not to the Church or the ministry. But the ministry is over the organized work of the Church and that includes official teachings of the Church. God is not the author of confusion, and the Church should speak with one voice, all speaking the same thing consistently, without public disputing and contradiction (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). If a member is exercising faith to believe what he sees (or thinks he sees) in the Bible and that faith leads him to be in disagreement with the ministry, he must keep his disagreement with the ministry private, discussing it with the minister alone or discussing it with God in prayer until such time as the disagreement can be resolved. He should not contradict the ministry in conversation with other members in the organization he attends. This allows the member to obey Christ directly by believing the Bible, yet respect the authority of the ministry to carry out their role as teachers without contradiction.

So Christ's authority as head of the Church flows through three channels. It flows directly to every member of the Church in matters of faith in what God says in the Bible and in obedience to God's law, and no human is an intermediary in that area. It flows through the husband to the wife and children in matters of family decisions. And it flows through the top leadership of any Church of God organization to the ministry and to the members in matters of the work of the Church including decisions regarding what doctrines the Church will officially teach with one voice. And if a minister or member cannot support a particular doctrine the leadership of the Church teaches (because of his obligation to obey Christ directly), let him respect the authority of the leadership by keeping silent on that particular doctrine. If a minister is questioned about a doctrine which he personally disagrees with, he can simply report, "the Church teaches that..." without endorsing or contradicting the doctrine.

Arguments and Answers

There are a number of arguments often made in favor of ballot-box governance. I will answer some of them here.

Argument: Balloting is based on the godly principle of seeking wisdom for making decisions from a multitude of counselors.

Answer: No, it isn't. Counsel is the giving and receiving of advice and information. There are two differences between counsel and the kind of balloting that occurs in Church of God organizations governed by balloting. First, counsel almost always

includes the sharing of REASONS why a counselor is advising a certain decision. There is give and take discussion. In counsel, people talk over their reasons, and sometimes in this way they reach agreement, but if not, the decision maker can evaluate the reasons for various recommendations and base his decision on sound reasoning. A ballot is just a name, or a yes or no, without the complex thinking that may have gone into that recommendation. Second, counsel is advice a decision maker hears before making a decision. It is not binding. Counsel carries no authority. But in ballot-box governance the balloting carries authority. Everyone commits ahead of time to submit to the votes of the majority. It is mandatory. The balloting is not counsel about a decision to be made, balloting **IS** the decision.

If non-binding votes are cast, that is, the leader can follow the vote or not, that process is better termed "polling". In a poll a decision maker wants to know the preference of the majority, but is still not bound to follow it. It is a form of counsel, but without discussion, and is best used when the number of people is so great or the issue so small that it is not worthwhile to take the time for everyone to give reasons. As an example, a pastor may ask for a show of hands among three hundred people to see if they prefer morning or afternoon services. That is not ballot-box governance.

Argument: Since the death of Mr. Armstrong and the scattering of the Church, God has not made clear who the leader is, and until then we should cooperate with each other.

Answer: Certainly we should cooperate with each other, but placing ourselves under the authority of the majority is not the right way to cooperate. Governance by the ballot-box isn't necessary. There is a better way, a way that is consistent with principles taught in the Bible, even in cases where God has not yet made clear whom He has chosen as leader. And that way will most readily LEAD to knowing God's choice more quickly and more directly and more surely than voting.

When God chooses a leader, if He does not make His choice known by announcement from one higher in authority or by the leader's predecessor who had been appointed by God, then God will make known His choice by the fruits. That may take time. In that case, each pastor can function independently of other men, reporting directly to Christ, or he can report to another minister whom he knows is faithful and competent, until such time as Christ makes known by the fruits whom He has chosen. To properly recognize the fruits of such a man requires spiritual discernment, and that requires conversion and staying close to God. Those who do not seek God and the wisdom that comes from God may never recognize the one God has chosen, but that is God's way.

Argument: There are many forms or structures of governance in the Bible and God does not give specific instructions for any one form or structure to follow.

Answer: There are only two forms or structures of governance, though there can be many varieties within those two forms. The statement that there are many forms seeks to confuse the issue. The two BASIC forms are top-down or bottom-up, and the Bible ALWAYS teaches top-down. Within each of those forms there can be a variety of

implementations, and the details of each implementation can vary enormously, but every implementation is just a variety of one or the other of the two basic structures.

This may be obvious to most but it needs to be stated. In the Kingdom of God, of the two basic forms of governance, top-down or balloting, we will be governed by top-down government, and that will be the only form of government for all eternity. Neither Christ nor any of the saints will ever run for election to determine by the votes of the majority what office He will hold.

Argument: Character of leaders is more important than structure of governance. Righteousness is more important than form. If we have righteousness, any form of governance will work. If we do not have righteousness, no form of governance will work.

Answer: Try this. Righteousness is more important than which day we worship God. Love is more important than which day of the week we rest on. If we practice righteousness, any day of rest and worship will work whether it be the seventh day of the week, the first day of the week, or any other day of the week. Righteousness is more important than the Sabbath.

So what is wrong with that? If you see the error in the statement about the Sabbath, you will be able to see the error in the statement about governance. The main problem is the same.

Righteousness and godly character are not defined by us humans. They are defined by God. It is not up to us to decide what is right and wrong. Adam and Eve made that choice when they took to themselves the knowledge of good and evil. Mankind has been deciding for itself what is right and wrong ever since. But God has not given man that authority. It is God who decides what is righteousness and what is sin, not man. We can only decide whether to practice righteousness, not what righteousness is.

Righteousness is obedience to God's commandments (Psalm 119:172). That includes the commandment to love God with all your heart (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:36-38, Mark 12:28-31, Mark 12:28). That commandment, to love God, in turn requires that we live by every word of God (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4, 2 Timothy 3:16-17), including the scriptures written for our examples (1 Corinthians 10:11), and it requires that we seek not only God's commandments but His WILL (Matthew 6:10, 7:21, 26:39, 42, John 4:31-34) and those things that are *pleasing* in His sight (1 John 3:22). We can learn from the examples in the Bible that seeking to place ourselves under the authority of the majority of men as determined by ballot rather than Christ is NOT God's will, and therefore it is not "righteous".

The principle is the same as with the Sabbath, although with the Sabbath there is a specific command. But disobeying the Sabbath command is always an unrighteous choice. It is not loving God with all our hearts. So the argument that you can break the Sabbath and it is ok as long as you practice righteousness is a false argument because the fact that you break the Sabbath shows that you are not making righteous choices according to God's standard as shown in the Bible. Likewise, to say that as long as you

practice righteousness you can use a form of governance that the Bible shows is not God's will is a false argument because going against God's will is never practicing righteousness, according to God's standard.

Moreover, the argument that righteousness is more important than structure throws a smokescreen over the important issue of how righteous leaders are chosen. Leaders should be righteous, agreed, but WHO DECIDES WHO THEY WILL BE? That is the whole issue here. Who can read men's hearts, God or man? Is righteousness important? If it is, then we better have righteous leaders, or we are in trouble. But who chooses those leaders? Can you read a man's mind to know if he is righteous or not? Can the majority of voters read the minds of the candidates? And even if the majority can read minds, does the majority have the wisdom to recognize what they see? God can read hearts and minds and He has the wisdom to recognize righteousness when He sees it - He is the one who puts it there. God must choose the top leaders, not man.

One can examine recent history in the Church of God and judge if ballot-box governance has put righteous leaders into office.

The most popular men are not necessarily the leaders God chooses (1 Samuel 16:7).

To have good results you need BOTH the right structure and righteous leaders. It is not one or the other, but both. You need to follow God's pattern of selecting leaders from the top down and you need leaders who are filled with God's Holy Spirit and make decisions based on God's word, the Bible. The following chart illustrates this:

		Leaders	
		are NOT filled with the Holy Spirit or do NOT make decisions based on God's word, the Bible.	are filled with the Holy Spirit and make decisions based on God's word, the Bible.
Biblical-based structure - top-down authority		BAD RESULTS	GOOD RESULTS
Non-biblical-based structure - ballot-box governance		BAD RESULTS	

If you have top-down government but the leaders are not filled with God's Spirit and do not base their decisions on the Bible, results will be bad. Likewise if you have government by balloting and the leaders are not filled with God's Spirit and do not base their decisions on the Bible, results also will be bad. But if you have top-down government and the leaders are filled with God's Spirit and base their decisions on the Bible, you will have good results.

What about the fourth combination I left out of the diagram, ballot-box governance with leaders who are filled with God's Spirit and make decisions based on the Bible?

Does that combination exist? I ask the question. If the Bible teaches top-down government in the Church, can Spirit-filled leaders support a contrary system and still be basing their decisions on the Bible? And if they do not base their choice of the structure of governance on the Bible, will they base their other decisions on the Bible?

A tree is known by its fruits. You cannot separate the choices of the structure of governance, whether those choices be right or wrong, from the godliness and wisdom of the men who make those choices. Wise and godly leaders make wise and godly choices and will choose the right structure of governance, the structure the Bible teaches, if they are basing their decision about governance on the Bible.

For best results, the Church needs top leaders who are filled with the Holy Spirit and live by every word of God in the decisions they make. But how can men filled with God's Holy Spirit and deeply committed to living by every word of God, the Bible, choose a system of governance based on the principles of this world and not based on the pattern God gives us for governance in the Bible? And if such men do not follow the pattern of the Bible in the form of governance, what assurance is there that they will follow the pattern the Bible teaches in other matters of leadership?

Sometimes a person defending ballot-box governance will selectively quote the Bible where the Bible specifies character attributes, as if the Bible says nothing about structure. One passage that can be quoted is Matthew 20:20-28. In this passage, the mother of James and John asked Jesus to grant that one would sit on His right hand and the other on His left. Jesus then taught the lesson that whoever is to be great must be a servant (verses 25-28). But did Jesus say nothing about structure? Quite the opposite. Structure was the FIRST thing He talked about, even before character or righteousness. Before He talked about having the attitude of a servant, He said this: "...to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father" (second part of verse 23, KJV). Jesus did not have the authority to grant their request. It was the Father who would make that decision. No voting. The decision came from the top down. I suppose after this incident the ten other apostles would not have voted for James or John anyway.

Look at Paul's instructions to Titus in Titus 1:5-9. What does Paul talk about first, structure or character? STRUCTURE! Before Paul explains the character requirements for an elder, he says "appoint elders" (verse 5). Appoint means top-down structure.

Titus was to appoint, not hold elections. It makes sense that God would inspire this to be written this way, because before the qualifications are discussed it is important to know who these instructions are addressed to and who is to examine candidates in light of the qualifications. These qualifications are not instructions to be used by ministers in deciding who to vote for. They are instructions for Titus so he would know who to appoint.

Argument: There is no commandment in the Bible against using balloting to select leaders in the Church of God.

Answer: It is true there is no direct commandment against balloting. Neither is there a direct commandment against celebrating birthdays, participating in this world's politics, or smoking. There are a number of doctrines of the Church of God taught by Mr. Armstrong and taught by many Churches of God today that are not based on direct commands. They are taught on the principle of knowing God's will from the Bible and doing it. They are based on the *spirit* of the law, not just the letter. And the spirit of the law shows that it is wrong for a Church of God organization to place itself under the authority of the majority of ministers by using balloting to select the top leaders.

Argument: "One man" governance will not solve all our problems.

Answer: Of course not. Having the right structure does not guarantee that men in that structure will make right decisions. Even when God appoints the leaders, He may give us the leaders we deserve if we have become lukewarm (Isaiah 3:1-5), and God sometimes gives us leaders with problems because He wants to test us, as He did in Worldwide after Mr. Armstrong died. And not every top-down leader of a Church of God claiming to be a faithful servant of God really is what he may claim. But that doesn't change the fact that top-down government is God's way of doing things. You need the right form (top-down) and you need personal righteousness and godly character in the leaders, BOTH, to have the best governance in the Church of God.

I could go back to the example of the Sabbath and say, "keeping the seven-day Sabbath will not solve all our problems". Of course not. But breaking the Sabbath will create all kinds of problems, and ballot-box governance will create all kinds of problems.

We need to follow all of God's ways, both with the structure of governance and in every other matter of thinking, speaking, and acting, if we want the best results. Keeping any one point of God's law will not solve all our problems if we break the other points of God's law. We have to obey everything.

Argument: Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and He therefore controls everything. Thus, if we have balloting to select our leaders, it is God's will that we use balloting, and if certain men are elected by ballot, it is God's will that those men receive the offices to which they are elected, because everything that happens is God's will.

Answer: Christ has the power to control everything if He wants to, but He does not use that power to take away our free moral agency. We can choose to do wrong, and if we do, our doing wrong is not God's will, though He may allow it. This is true in the

Church as it is in the world. Christ lets us make mistakes, He lets us sin, He lets us make wrong choices, and then He sometimes brings the consequences of our wrong choices on our heads to teach us lessons (Galatians 6:7, Hebrews 12:7-11, 1 Peter 2:20, 4:15-16).

You cannot say that Christ controls everything and therefore everything that happens is His will, and then use that as an excuse to make wrong choices and say, "It is His will". Using the ballot-box to select as leaders those men who are the most popular with the majority of men is not God's way. But if you are so inclined to do so, Christ may let you have your way for the purpose of testing you and teaching you through bitter experience that your way is wrong. That is how God dealt with ancient Israel when they rejected God as their king and asked for a human king. God did not refuse them, but He warned them of the bad consequences, then He let them have their way (1 Samuel 8:1-22).

God gave us this physical life to test us and teach us lessons. Sometimes that means He lets us do stupid things and reap unpleasant consequences. It also means God tests us by forcing us to choose between right and wrong - then letting us do wrong if that is what we choose. That is how God knows if He can trust us for eternity.

Also, God is not only testing the ministry to see if they choose to be governed administratively by the ballot box rather than Christ. He is also testing the membership to see what fellowship they choose to support and whether they support ballot-box governance contrary to the Bible with their tithes and offerings. So for the purpose of testing the membership, Christ may allow Church of God organizations with ballot-box governance to exist. In that sense, it may be His will that this option exist as a possible choice that members can select. But that does not mean He is pleased when ministers and members choose to be ruled by the ballot box. Ballot-box governance is, in its essence, the majority forcing its will upon the minority. Those who choose to be ruled by the majority of men rather than by Christ are making a wrong choice.

Argument: Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and therefore is the head over a Church of God organization that uses balloting to select leaders and is the head of every congregation in it.

Answer: This argument is very similar to the previous one, but more directly speaks of Christ's authority over a Church of God organization that uses balloting to select leaders.

I have previously shown that Christ's authority over the Church of God flows three ways. See last section in this chapter titled "Organization of the Church and Limitations on the Authority of the Ministry".

If you have a Church of God fellowship that uses balloting to select leaders, is Jesus Christ the head of that organization? Is He the head over the administrative work that organization does in doing the organized work of the Church?

As I have explained in the previous section, "Organization of the Church and Limitations on the Authority of the Ministry", Christ is head over each Christian directly in matters of faith, the spiritual law of God, and our personal salvation. Christ's authority in this matter does not flow through the ministry but flows directly from Christ to every individual who has God's Spirit dwelling in him or her. Christ is also the head over every family unit through the husband in decisions regarding family matters. And finally, Christ is head over the administrative, organized work of the Church of God through the ministry.

So the question, "is Christ the head over a Church of God fellowship that practices ballot-box governance?", is not about Christ's authority over each of us individually as Christians, nor is it about Christ's authority through the husband over each family. Christ is ALWAYS the head over each one of us in the matter of our personal salvation and faith, and Christ is ALWAYS the head over each family in the Church through the husband. The question is only about Christ's authority over the administrative work of the Church through the ministry in matters such as preaching the gospel, feeding the flock, resolving disputes between brethren, distributing Church assistance to the poor, and similar matters.

So what is the answer?

If we mean, does Christ have authority over the organized work of a Church of God fellowship that practices ballot-box governance, the answer is yes. But if we mean, is such a fellowship OBEYING and SUBMITTING TO that authority, I think the answer may be no.

You could ask the same question regarding the family unit or an individual Christian. I said before that Christ is ALWAYS the head of each Christian and each family unit in the Church. But even that presupposes that each Christian is submitting to Christ as head and each husband is submitting to Christ as head in making family decisions. But if we are not obeying Christ, is Christ still our head? It can become a matter of semantics. The authority is there, but the obedience to the authority is missing. So if Christ has authority over someone, but that person is not obeying Christ, do you say that Christ is the head of that person because Christ has the authority, or do you say that Christ is not the head of that person because the person is refusing to submit to Christ?

Christ certainly has authority as head over every ordained minister and local pastor in the work that pastor does regarding his congregation. When the top leadership is chosen by God rather than the balloting of men, the authority of Christ flows from the top down through the top leadership down to the pastors. But even in a Church governed by balloting, Christ's authority flows from the top down through the pastors in the sense that every minister has been ordained by the laying on of hands of another ordained minister going back in a chain of authority to Mr. Armstrong and to Christ. Those pastors have authority over the members of their congregations in matters of church administration such as making binding decisions. That authority flows from the top down. The members of a congregation do not elect their pastors. They do not make someone an ordained minister by popular vote. In every case, a minister is ordained by the laying on of hands of another ordained minister, not by the counting of ballots.

That authority, the authority a pastor or minister has that comes directly from Christ through ordination, authority to feed the portion of Christ's flock he has charge of, the authority to resolve disputes between brethren, the authority to determine times of Sabbath services, sermonette speaking schedules, and similar matters, does not end because he chooses to submit to other men who are voted into office because they are popular with the majority. Each pastor is still responsible to Christ in how he takes care of the members in his flock, and the members still must respect the office their pastor holds and the authority of that office.

And in that sense, yes, Christ is the head of a Church of God fellowship and the congregations in it even if the pastors choose to govern themselves administratively by the ballot box.

But it is still wrong for those pastors to ignore the Bible teaching regarding the basic top-down structure of godly government and choose to submit themselves to rule by the majority rather than submitting to Christ's leadership from the top down. And Christ's authority over the pastors does not imply that Christ is pleased with their decision to set up ballot-box governance in the Church, or is pleased with the actual selection of leaders they make, or is pleased with the decisions those leaders make.

Christ gave binding and loosening authority to the leaders of the Church, especially in but not limited to the context of resolving disputes between members (Matthew 18:15-18). Does that binding and loosening authority exist in Church of God fellowships governed through balloting? Should members respect binding decisions given to them through their pastors? I think the answer is yes. Even though ministers err in setting up governance by balloting, there must be some kind of authority or the Church of God could not function. God is not the author of confusion, but of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33). God can rebuke and chasten us for our mistakes to teach us lessons and yet not totally reject us.

Bible history shows that God often backs up authority even when that authority is not completely faithful or makes serious mistakes. Moses sinned when he disobeyed God by striking the rock instead of speaking to it as he was commanded, and his sin was so great God punished him severely. Yet God backed up Moses' authority by causing water to come out of the rock anyway (Numbers 20:7-12). Israel sinned by asking for a king because they were really rejecting God as their king, but God gave them Saul and backed up Saul's authority, for example by answering Saul's inquiry concerning the curse he placed on those who ate before sundown on a certain occasion (1 Samuel 8:4-22, 12:16-22, 14:24-45), and David also respected that authority by not killing Saul to defend himself on two occasions (1 Samuel 24:1-22, 26:1-25), even after Saul himself had proved himself unfaithful (1 Samuel 13:1-14, 15:1-31). God backed up Judas with power to heal and cast out demons along with the other eleven apostles, even though Judas was not a faithful man (Mark 3:13-19, 6:7-13). God even backs up civil authorities in this world, commanding us through scripture to obey them (Romans 13:1-7) even though Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31, John 14:30, John 16:11, Matthew 4:8-10, Luke 4:5-8).

But in emphasizing their authority that comes to them from Christ in Christ's role as head of the Church, ministers in Church of God organizations governed by balloting may imply that Christ endorses and approves of their structure of governance, and that is false reasoning. Ministers have authority, but ministers can also misuse that authority.

Argument: There are cases in Acts in which a church or a group is said to have "sent" apostles to this or that mission, indicating that the group collectively had authority over the apostles, not the other way around, because someone doing the "sending" has authority over the person being "sent" - See Acts 8:14-15, 11:22, and 13:1-4.

Answer: "Sending" someone in the Bible does not necessarily imply authority as the English word would generally mean in our culture today. If you study the use of that term in the Bible, it can sometimes mean authority, but it can also mean support, encouragement, provisioning with supplies, or simply accompanying a person part way on his journey, not necessarily authority. Look at Genesis 18:16 where it says that Abraham "sent" the three men on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah. We understand that these "men" appeared as men but were Christ and two angels. It is obvious that Abraham did not have authority over them, yet he is said to have "sent" them on their way. So if you see an account in the Bible that says that someone sent someone else on their way, that does not necessarily indicate that the sender has authority over the one sent.

Other Problems with Using Balloting to Govern the Church of God

I will briefly mention a number of other problems with using balloting to govern the Church of God. I cover some of these in more detail in the Preaching the Gospel blog.

The name of this book is *Preaching the Gospel*, and the subject is what the true gospel is, why it needs to be preached to the world, and how to do it effectively. One of the points I make in chapter 6 is that to be successful, we have to practice what we preach. We preach a message of good news about the return of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God over all nations and to abolish all man-made governments in this world. But how can we say that it is "good news" that the various forms of man's government on the earth will be abolished, including the democracies of this world, if we hold to one of those forms of government in the Church? If we do that, we are not being consistent. If we think that it is good news that the rule of Christ will replace democracy, then we will not be practicing democracy in the Church of God. We will accept Christ's rule over us if we are sincere in believing that His rule is really good news.

Setting up governance by balloting creates an immediate conflict of interest in a Church of God and encourages politics and division. Consider: In the Church of God we are correctly taught to respect authority and not undermine leaders in the Church by openly

criticizing them in front of others who are under the authority of those leaders (Numbers 12:1-15). Yet, we should also seek counsel before making decisions. Now, if those under the authority of a leader in the Church must make a decision on whether or not to vote him out of office, they have to be able to give and receive counsel among themselves about that decision, but that automatically opens the door for criticism that undermines the leader's authority and ability to govern. Moreover, democracy in a Church of God organization can encourage division because those in power can retain their power by forcing those who disagree with them out of the Church so they cannot vote against them in the next election.

You cannot mix the world's way and God's way and expect good results.

The very concept of an organization governed through balloting is a concept learned from the world. It is not in the Bible.

God is teaching us the way of life that we will be living for eternity in His kingdom. He is not teaching us how to make Satan's way in this world work more effectively.

Recent history in the Church of God seems to show that ballot-box governance produces bad fruit. We have an example of good fruit borne by top-down government, and that is the fruit borne by Mr. Armstrong, but I am aware of no example of a Church of God organization governed by balloting bearing good fruit in the long term. Rather, recent history demonstrates how ballot-box governance can encourage division.

God inspired Paul to write that we should keep the traditions Paul delivered to the first century congregations he supervised (1 Corinthians 11:1-2, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:6). Any objective study of the New Testament Church of God will show that selection of leaders in the Church by the balloting of the elders was NOT part of the tradition of the Church.

Setting up a Church of God fellowship governed by balloting creates division in the whole Church of God because that fellowship automatically becomes separated from brethren who cannot accept that type of system with a clear conscience because they know that it is contrary to the teaching of the Bible.

Democracy in a Church of God also tends to encourage or create a conflict of interest between a leader's obligation to obey Christ and his desire to retain the voting support of those who may vote for him in the next election.

Ballot-box governance is taking to oneself the prerogative of joining with others to make a decision that will be binding on those who may disagree. In other words, it is the use of legal force by the majority of ministers to impose its will on the other ministers.

Clarify Your Thinking!

The whole issue of top-down vs. ballot-box governance in the Church of God boils down to only two questions.

Should God choose who the top leaders in His Church will be, or should the ministers choose the leaders?

Now if you say the ministers should choose the leaders, then we don't need to look at the second question.

But if you say God should choose who the top leaders should be, the next question is, does God make His choice known through the voting of the ministers?

If you say yes to that question, then I say that we must let God show us in the Bible how he makes His will known to us.

You can't just make up some criteria to know God's will and say, "If such-and-such happens, that means God wants me to do such-and-such". Or, "If I win a million dollars in this sweepstakes, then that means God wants me to attend this church, but if I don't win the million dollars, then that means God wants me to attend this other church." What if God doesn't want you to attend either of those two particular churches? What if He doesn't want to answer your inquiry? Or what if He wants you to attend the first church but doesn't want you to have the million dollars? What if he didn't want you to enter the sweepstakes in the first place because you have a bad attitude about it and are making an idol out of money? What if you are using a lack of money as an excuse for bad choices in your life?

How about, "If that traffic light up ahead stays red for 10 more seconds, that means God doesn't want me to go to Bible study tonight."

God doesn't have to answer you on your terms.

You say, "If all the ministers vote, whoever receives the most votes must be God's choice, and that is how we will know." Really? Did God agree to that? Did God tell you to vote to know His will? Did God say that whoever is most popular is His choice?

How do you know God will guide the vote? Does God even want you to vote? Where is the authorization in the Bible? Where does God say, "By this you will know My will, whoever receives the most votes is My choice"?

How do you know God will guide the balloting? Do you suppose that everything that happens, even the wrong choices we make, is God's will? Suppose that God wants to teach the Church the lesson that balloting to select leaders is not His way and that He

wants to teach the Church to trust and rely on His word more to use the criteria He has given in the examples of the Bible to discern whom He has chosen. If that is the case, is it possible God will NOT guide the balloting but allow events to take their natural course and allow men to come into office who will divide the Church even further?

Jesus Christ did not say, "by the votes they receive you will know them" (Matthew 7:20, Luke 6:43-45). We are to judge by fruits, and one of the primary fruits is what a man teaches and says (verse 45). Not by popularity in the eyes of others. Not by counting how many men want him in office. But by what the man himself says, teaches, and does and by whether God blesses the man with power and effectiveness in doing good works and in doing God's work of preaching the gospel to the world and feeding the flock.

When the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask if he was the Messiah, Jesus told them to tell John the fruits they had seen in Jesus: the sick were healed and the poor had the gospel preached to them (Matthew 11:2-6). Fruits, not votes. That is how John was to know. Not by how popular Jesus was.

Most people who believe in balloting in the Church do not make clear if they think God wants them to choose or if God chooses but makes His choice known by the votes cast. Which is it? If you believe in balloting, do you think the ministers, not Christ, should choose the leader? Or do you think that Christ chooses the leader and makes His choice known by inspiring the voting? At least be clear about WHY you believe in balloting.

If you are a minister, and you do not want to be independent of other ministers but want a man over you, if you see a fellow minister bearing good fruits, teaching right doctrines, and blessed by God with power and gifts for doing His work, you can join that man if you want and work for him and follow him as he follows Christ. But you don't have to look at the voting of other men to see if he is popular before you support him.

Because at the bottom line, ballot-box governance is really a popularity contest. Voting is not how God makes His choices known to his people for leaders in Israel or the Church of God, according to the pattern God shows us in the Bible.

Some may think that God puts men into office in the Church by arranging events and circumstances to put those men into office and to make His choice known by the circumstances of voting.

Have men in the Bible ever asked God to make His will known through circumstances, and has God ever answered their requests? Abraham's servant asked God to let him know whom God had chosen as a bride for Isaac based on what she said and did (Genesis 24:10-27). Jonathan based a decision to attack the Philistines on what they said as a sign from God (1 Samuel 14:6-14). Saul and David inquired of God through the priest, whom I understand cast lots (1 Samuel 14:24-30, 36-44, 1 Samuel 23:1-6, 9-13). The disciples cast lots to know whom God had chosen to replace Judas (Acts 1:15-17, 21-26).

In the matter of lots, this was an accepted practice in God's sight from earliest times in Israel (Exodus 28:30, Leviticus 8:8, Deuteronomy 33:8, Ezra 2:63, Nehemiah 7:65). God even gave instructions concerning this - see Numbers 27:21. Although there is no record of this practice continuing in the Church of God after Pentecost, it was not wrong for the apostles to inquire of God this way at that time - there was plenty of biblical precedent.

What about Abraham's servant asking God to show him who was to be Isaac's bride based on the woman offering to draw water for him and his camels? What about Jonathan deciding that if the Philistines called out for them to "come to us" that meant God had delivered them into their hand and they should attack them?

I am sure many Church of God members from time to time have done similar things. Is this wrong?

In the case of Abraham's servant and Jonathan, it seems to have had a good result. God may from time to time let us know things through circumstances. But mostly God gave us this physical life so we can learn to make decisions using wisdom (James 1:5). And in any case, there is no promise from God that He will answer us according to the signs and indications we ask for. Even Abraham's servant, who must have learned about God from Abraham, wasn't sure God had answered him even after Rebekah spoke according to the sign He had prayed for (Genesis 24:21). God wants us to learn to make decisions using His word the Bible as a guide and using the wisdom God gives us through Bible study and the Holy Spirit.

And setting up permanent institutions governed by popularity voting, with ministers committing themselves in advance to support the preferences of the majority, is a long way from the examples of what Abraham's servant and Jonathan had done to know God's will. Moreover, it is unnecessary. God has given us a pattern to show us how to know whom He has chosen as leader, and it is not voting. It is fruits. In some cases God inspires a leader to name his successor. And in some cases it is both fruits and an announcement from one who has the authority to name someone. But not balloting. It is wrong to substitute our own man-made systems for the process God has already given us.

The very nature of the election process and structure set up in most of these man-made ballot-box governed organizations shows that they are not designed to show God's will. Men are not only elected by popular vote, they must be reelected every so many years or they lose their offices. They must not only be popular, they must remain popular. In most cases "safeguards" are put into place to prevent any one man from being very powerful, for example not allowing him to serve as president and also be on the ruling board or council. This is not about discerning God's will but ministers trying to control their own employer.

God is preparing us for His kingdom and we should be practicing the way of life we will be living in the Kingdom of God at every opportunity so we can learn that way of life. That is God's purpose for us and that should be our purpose too. We can choose our own leaders out of self-will and distrust of God's will or we can discern God's will

according to the pattern He has shown us in the Bible for knowing His will. It does not prepare us for the Kingdom very well to blur the distinction between those two paths by setting up organizations that use majority opinion to make binding decisions about leaders.

I have more about the issue of Church of God governance in the Preaching the Gospel blog in posts starting with the post dated December 19, 2009 and later. The December 19 post is titled "Church of God Governance". See link at the top of this website (<http://www.ptgbook.org>) or go directly to <http://ptgbook.blogspot.com>
Go to the archives listed in the left column of the blog for all archived posts.

Also, see the following sections about governance in other chapters in this book:
Chapter 5 - Government in the Church
Chapter 6 - Following the Bible - Pattern of Government
Chapter 6 - Why Voting in the Church of God ALWAYS Leads to Division
Chapter 7 - Church Government
Chapter 7 - How Is the Church Organized?

Root of the Church's Problem - Lack of Faith

I am convinced and I believe the evidence is overwhelming that the doctrine of the eras of the Church of God is correct and that the whole Church of God is in the period of time and the condition known as the Laodicean era of the Church. The problem with governance in the Church is just one symptom of the spiritual state described in Revelation 3:14-22.

What is needed is Church-wide repentance.

It is not just those Church of God organizations that govern themselves through balloting that have problems. I think many of the major groups are in need of repentance. Most of those who are governed from the top-down according to the biblical pattern have other problems not relating to the structure of governance, but potentially just as serious.

We should all take seriously what Christ says to the Laodiceans. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with

me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:15-22, KJV). We need to be zealous and repent.

I think the need for repentance in the Church will become more obvious to the ministry and membership as we draw closer to the end of this age.

But it helps to know exactly what we are to repent of.

We are to repent of lukewarmness and complacency (Revelation 3:15-16). We are to repent of a sense of self-satisfaction, the sense that we are "ok" in God's sight (Revelation 3:17, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Matthew 5:48). Often times this sense of self-satisfaction comes from consciously or unconsciously falling into the habit of looking at the faults of others and comparing ourselves with our brethren and neighbors (Luke 18:9-14, 2 Corinthians 10:12). When we do that we give Satan an opening to use our human nature against us. Instead, we should compare ourselves with Christ and say, "No, I am NOT ok. I need to change, and I need to change NOW, or I am in big trouble." God wants a humble contrite attitude, not an attitude that dwells on the faults of others (Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 57:15, 66:2, Matthew 7:1-5, James 4:6-12). We ALL need that attitude, because that is an attitude Christ can work with. We each have a full time job working on our own faults not the faults we perceive in individuals we see around us.

The whole Church of God has serious spiritual problems, and we need to repent.

The longer I am in the Church of God the more I am convinced that the root of our spiritual problems is a lack of godly faith. We need to see and acknowledge to ourselves that we have that problem, that our trust and faith in God and in Christ and in God's word is weak and needs strengthening. Disbelief in God's word and distrust of God is a sin (1 John 3:4, Matthew 23:23) - it is a violation of the law. We need to confess that sin before God, to turn from it, and to claim God's promise to cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9). We turn from that sin by resolving to believe and trust God more deeply and more consistently in our lives. We must study God's word more diligently, put Satan and his influences out of our lives in whatever way we can (maybe by not spending a lot of time with TV for example), and act more diligently on God's word and rely on His promises. God is faithful and true. His promises are not in vain - He will keep them, every one of them. All of His word is true, and if we really believe that we will diligently look to His word for answers to all of our problems and we will live by His word because we know we can trust it. We will exercise courage to "stick our necks out" to obey Him, trusting God's word, that He will do what He says He will do.

If any of us does that, and the majority probably will not, whoever does this will make progress in becoming zealous and escaping the punishment coming upon the Laodiceans. "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole

earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:34-36, KJV).

CHAPTER 9 - REPENTANCE

We Need to Repent

Does the Church of God, as a whole, *need* to repent?

If we are in the Laodicean era, yes.

Christ *commands* Laodicea to repent. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Revelation 3:19).

This chapter is a call to repentance for the whole Church of God.

It is not hard to see visible sins and the fruits of sin in the Church. The general disunity of the ministry and members is an example. There are others I could mention, such as various heresies, abuses of power, etc. I am sure many members can see problems even when they are not looking for them. As a Church, we lack the power to do a great work of preaching the gospel to the world as Mr. Armstrong did. God promises an open door to Philadelphia, but the door is only open a little bit for us today (Revelation 3:8).

But focusing only on particular, visible problems is a mistake. These sins and fruits of sin are visible, outward results of a deeper spiritual problem.

That problem is a weakness of faith.

Repentance and Faith

The longer I am in the Church, the more I am convinced that lack of faith and trust in God is a major root of all other sins.

When I say, "lack of faith", I should say, "weakness of faith". We have some faith. But it is weak. We need strong faith to overcome sin.

Faith is a starting point for spiritual growth. "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand" (2 Corinthians 1:24). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift

of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8). "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge..." (2 Peter 1:5).

Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. Both are requirements for conversion and salvation (Acts 2:38, Acts 8:36-39, Hebrews 11:6, Romans 10:8-11, Galatians 2:15-16, John 11:25-26).

You really can't have one without the other. Each comes from the other and leads to the other. Each is part of the other.

Faith is a part of repentance, and therefore repentance must lead to faith. Why? Repentance means turning away from sin towards obedience to God's law (1 John 3:4, Hebrews 6:1). But that also requires living by faith because faith is **required** BY THE LAW! Jesus said that faith is one of the three weightier matters of the law (Matthew 23:23). The law requires that we love God with all our hearts and minds (Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:36-38, Mark 12:28-30). That means we must do God's will to please him in all things - that is how love is expressed. "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). Yet the Bible is clear that it is God's will that we believe and trust what He says. Many scriptures *command* us to believe and trust God (Proverbs 3:5, Mark 11:22). To doubt God's word is to break God's law, and is sin. When we repent, we must repent of distrusting God and doubting His word. We must repent of our lack of faith. Thus, true repentance leads to faith. Someone who tries to repent of visible, outward sins, but makes excuses for his distrust of God's word and lack of faith that leads to sin and doesn't strive to believe what God says may not have fully repented.

Similarly, repentance is part of faith, and true faith leads to repentance of sin and our sinful nature. Why? Faith includes believing what God says, and if we believe and trust His word, we will know we have sinned and need to change. We will know that God's law and way of life are right. We will know we are sinners and have an evil nature (Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 7:11, Romans 7:14, 18). If we truly believe and trust God, we will see our need to change, and we will make the effort to turn from our wrong ways and wrong nature and live according to God's law and word.

If we believe and trust God about His commandments, we will strive to obey them because we will know that if we do what God says, things will work out better for us (and for others) in the long run. We will believe God's promises and know that our sacrifices and obedience and suffering for righteousness sake will not be in vain (Romans 2:6-10, 8:18, 1 Peter 2:19-21, 3:14, Hebrews 6:10).

Repentance and faith are two aspects of the same thing. That is why "faith" without works is a dead kind of faith, not real godly faith at all (James 2:14-26). Real faith, the kind of living faith that God requires, will motivate us to strive to obey God. A call to repentance is therefore also a call to faith.

Faith is a key to everything.

The Church of God therefore needs a renewal and strengthening of faith. A stronger faith will lead to stronger zeal and effort to obey. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Revelation 3:19).

How do we build faith?

It is not just a matter of building an atmosphere of faith by calling Church-wide fasts. It is not built by praying for healings and hearing how others have been healed. Faith is not primarily about healing or fasting. Faith is about obedience and it is about doctrine.

Think back to when you were baptized. Was it by hearing about and fasting about healings that you came into the Church? Or was it by studying and believing and obeying the Bible?

Members of false churches and religions can fast. They can pray for healings. But they do not have faith in God's word. They do not believe what God says in the Bible. They do not believe God about doctrine. They do not obey God's commandments and all of God's instructions in the Bible.

"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble" (James 2:19). I might also add, the demons know maybe better than we how many times God has healed people - they were there, they have been around for the last 6,000 years since man has been put on this earth. They know God heals.

But do they believe what God says? Do they trust His word? Do they believe Christ when He says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)? I don't think they do. I think they believe the way of competition is better than the way of giving.

Did Lucifer believe God's word and instruction when he first sinned? I doubt it. Why would he choose misery for himself? But if he doubted God's instruction that the way of love and obedience is the best way of life, if he didn't trust God and His word, then the way was open for him to experiment with vanity and self-exaltation. If he doubted and distrusted God, he could believe that vanity and hostile competition would be better for him. Faith and trust in God and His word would have kept Lucifer from sin. Lucifer made the choice, not to believe and trust God, but to sin. Once he made that choice and sinned by choosing the way of vanity and self-exaltation, he began to pay one of the penalties of sin - his mind became perverted. "You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor" (Ezekiel 28:17). Now he can never go back because his thinking is so warped he can never see the need to go back and repent. He cannot think clearly and righteously to be able to straighten out his own mind.

When we are tempted to sin, Satan often pumps doubts into our minds about God's faithfulness and trustworthiness. When Satan tries to lead us to doubt God, he is trying to infuse his own nature and way of thinking into our minds, because Satan is the original doubter and distruster of God.

When ancient Israel grumbled and complained in the wilderness, they were expressing their carnal human nature, which is Satan's nature. God promised to bless them (Exodus 3:7-8, Exodus 23:20-31). They knew it was God speaking through Moses because they saw the miracles (Exodus 19:3-6). But they doubted God's word and motives. "And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt' " (Numbers 14:2-4). "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:19). But you won't find that attitude in Jesus Christ, who is our example.

Look at any sin, and you will see where faith is missing or weak.

A key to faith is the simple choice to believe what God says in the Bible, then act on that belief. "So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). It is the choice to trust God and believe the Bible that is vital to building an atmosphere of faith, the right kind of living faith that leads to zeal to obey, the kind of faith Laodiceans need but do not have.

The principle that we need to believe what God says is something that is easy to agree with but sometimes hard to do.

Too many try to build faith, but not in God and His word. They try to have faith in their traditions. They try to have faith in their ministers. They try to have faith in their church. They may equate the teaching of their church and their ministers with the "word of God". They are not equal. The word of a minister is never equal to the Bible. A minister's explanation of a scripture is never equal to the scripture.

Many members recognize that they need more faith. They may ask God to increase their faith, as if faith is all a gift. Certainly, that aspect of faith that is Christ's faith given to us through the working of the Holy Spirit is a gift, and it is right to ask for that.

But we must not neglect our direct part in faith. Like repentance and obedience, faith is a **choice**. We must **choose** to believe God. It is up to us. It is not all a gift only, something that God does for us and we do not have to do anything.

Imagine someone who prays for repentance, but refuses to repent. Imagine someone who prays for help to overcome, but refuses to make the effort to resist temptation. Imagine someone who prays for wisdom, but refuses to make right choices, choosing to sin rather than obey. So is anyone who prays for faith, but refuses to believe God.

Building Faith One Verse at a Time

Faith is built by reading the Bible, by choosing with the mind to believe what the Bible says, and by obeying it, one verse at a time. In other words, faith is built by believing and obeying God's word. It takes faith to do that, and doing that exercises and strengthens our faith. "So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). When that verse was written, Church members received the word of God spoken by the apostles - the printed Bible was not yet complete or available. They knew the word the apostles spoke was from God because of the signs and miracles the apostles worked. They built and strengthened their faith by hearing the apostles speak, then believing and obeying their word as the word of God. Today we have the Bible as God's word, and we know it is from God because fulfilled prophecy proves the inspiration of the Bible. The verse that refers to building faith by "hearing the word of God" applies to Bible study today.

You read the Bible. You come to something that challenges you. It might be one verse or a collection of verses on one subject. Those verses are teaching you something you didn't know before. They correct you. Maybe they tell you that you are doing something wrong and need to change your behavior. Or maybe they tell you that you believe a wrong doctrine and need to believe differently. Whatever the point is, you have to change, and change can be hard. So you have a choice to make. That choice is the key to faith. That is why I say, we build faith one Bible verse at a time.

The choice is this - do you believe God or not? The Bible is God speaking. God is telling you something in that one verse or in that small collection of verses on a subject. Sometimes you have to study for a while and put all the verses on the subject together, and that can take time, but while you are studying you better have a willingness to believe what God is telling you even if it is unpleasant.

So God tells you something, maybe in a single verse. You don't like it, necessarily. But do you believe God?

Here is the key. Will you ACT on that belief? If it is a matter of doctrine, will believe God on that point of doctrine? Will you change your doctrine, even if it means believing differently than the Church of God, or whatever church you attend? Will you believe God more than man (Psalm 146:3, Jeremiah 17:5-8)? Will you believe God more than your own opinions, reasoning, and judgment, even views you have held all your life (Proverbs 3:5, 14:12, 16:25)? Will you admit to yourself that you have been wrong?

Mr. Armstrong had to do that. Thousands of people who came into the Church of God because of his preaching had to do that.

That is a test of faith, which Peter says is more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:6-7).

Yes, we should pray for faith. But I am pointing out that we have our part to play in making the *choice* to believe God, as Mr. Armstrong did, as Abraham did. And that is part of repentance.

Believing God is not always easy. It takes effort. It is not easy to give up our long-held, cherished, precious, familiar opinions and traditions. Try it sometime.

Mr. Armstrong had to do it. It was hard for him. Read his autobiography again, especially the chapters about how he came into the Church.

Likewise, many members who came into the Church of God in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s through the preaching of Mr. Armstrong had to do what he did. They had to give up what they believed and let the Bible correct their beliefs. If they weren't willing to do that, we would not know what we know today, because it was through their sacrifices that we have been taught.

Maybe it wasn't hard for all of them. It apparently wasn't hard for Loma Armstrong. But for some, believing God is hard.

It wasn't easy for Mr. Armstrong to believe the Sabbath doctrine, to admit to himself and his wife that he had been wrong all his life about his Sunday belief. It might not have been easy for Abraham to believe God when God promised him descendents as numerous as the stars at a time when Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children (Genesis 15:2-6, Romans 4:16-22). I do not think it was easy for Abraham to obey God's command to sacrifice his son, which James connects with faith and the writer of Hebrews connects with believing God would keep His promise somehow, if necessary even by raising Isaac from the dead (Genesis 22:1-18, James 2:20-24, Hebrews 11:17-19).

It must be hard today for several hundred Church of God ministers and several thousand members to believe God concerning governance. It must be hard for many others to believe God concerning preaching the gospel to the world as a witness. It must be hard for those who think Mr. Armstrong's teachings should never be. It must be hard for COG leaders and ministers who teach their members to trust the ministry to interpret the Bible for them because trusting the ministers is "trusting Christ".

If you have grown up in the Church of God, faith is more than just a matter of studying the Church's literature, looking up the quoted scriptures, and then just "going along". You have to read the entire Bible in order to live by every word of God (Matthew 4:4). You have to seek to understand all of God's word. You have to read with an attitude that is willing to believe God more than your ministers. And God will probably test you at some time. It might be a single verse. But He can test your attitude - is your faith in God or in the Church?

If you find something in the Bible that seems contrary to your church's teaching, if it is something important, by all means seek counsel. Let your ministers explain the Church's teaching - that is part of getting all the facts, and it can be a good step in doing

research (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Proverbs 18:17, 18:13, Acts 8:30-35). Take as much time as you need to get things right. But make sure that you believe the Bible more than the Church. Then, when you believe the Church's doctrines, you will believe them for the right reason, because you have proved them in the Bible, and not because you are just going along with the traditions of your Church like millions of Catholics and Protestants. Your faith will be in God as it should be (Mark 11:22, 2 Corinthians 1:24).

And if you are a minister counseling a member, you better be honest with the scriptures. Woe to you if you deliberately twist things to support the doctrines you are paid to teach. Woe to you if you lie to members of the Church of God about doctrine. Read the example of a man lying to Peter in Acts (Acts 5:1-5). As I point out in my blog, God struck the man dead, not because he lied to an apostle or a minister, but because, in lying to one who had God's Holy Spirit, he was lying to God, not man. It is a dangerous thing for anyone (even a minister) to lie to anyone (even a lay member) who is converted and has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him (Colossians 3:9). We are learning a way of life to practice in God's Kingdom for eternity. Will we be lying to each other in the Kingdom of God? I think not.

So God can give us the gift of faith (Romans 12:3, 1 Corinthians 12:7-8), and we can ask for more faith as the apostles did (Luke 17:5). But just like repentance, we have our part to do. Repentance is a gift (Acts 11:18, 2 Timothy 2:25), but also, we must choose to obey God's command to repent (Jeremiah 25:4-5, Ezekiel 18:30, Matthew 4:17, Mark 6:12, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38, 17:30). Repentance is a gift, but we must choose to repent - God doesn't force us to repent. Likewise, faith is a gift, but we must choose to believe - God doesn't force us to believe.

We build faith one Bible verse at a time. We read and study the whole Bible - cover to cover - to live by EVERY word of God. When we come to a verse that corrects us, we must make the hard choice to believe it or not believe it, and if we believe God, we will act on that belief. Action is the real test of faith. Thus, one verse at a time, day by day we build faith in God and in His word. Every time we believe and obey, our faith increases.

We may not understand everything in the Bible right away. God knows that. It was God who inspired Peter to say that some things Paul wrote are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16), and I am sure that Paul's writings are not the only ones hard to understand. Some things take time. So we may have to research, to seek counsel, to find all the Bible verses on that subject, and to pray to God to open our understanding of His word.

But even with our limited understanding, God knows our hearts and attitudes, and he can use the Bible to test our faith and to give us opportunities to strengthen our faith through obedient action.

Dealing with Doubts

Some people wonder how they can get rid of doubts.

It may seem that we cannot stop doubts, that we cannot just force ourselves to believe something.

But we can control our actions. We can "step out" in faith and trust God with our behavior and actions. And that will strengthen our belief and help to remove doubts. In other words, we choose what we want to believe, then we choose to act on that belief, then we act. In that way, we can act on our choice to believe what God says.

For example, God says, "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:31-33).

Now, let's say you understand that in the Bible God commands you to tithe. If you don't understand what God teaches about that, that might be a good topic of research. Now, let's say when you look at your budget it looks like you do not have enough to tithe. Can you believe and trust God that if you seek His kingdom and righteousness first, He will provide? Maybe you have doubts. But you can write a check. You can put a stamp on the envelope and walk to the mailbox. You can pay your tithe first, and trust God for the rest. In other words, as far as physical actions are concerned, you can make the decision of will to pay your tithe and rely on God's promise.

Or use the Sabbath as an example. If you don't work on the Sabbath, your boss will fire you. Do you trust God to provide? Maybe you feel you have doubts. But you can still obey the Sabbath, showing God by your actions that you are putting your trust in Him and relying on Him to provide. That is a way you can do your part to exercise faith.

What about lying on the job? Some bosses require their employees to lie to customers, vendors, or other employees. If you don't tell the lie your boss wants you to tell, he may fire you. Do you trust God's promise enough to put your livelihood on the line to obey his law? You can make the choice to obey God. That is faith in action. It is action that counts. Action overrides doubt.

In one scripture, God actually told Israel to TEST HIM, not by disobedience, but by obedience. " 'Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,' Says the LORD of hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you *such* blessing That *there will not be room enough to receive it*' " (Malachi 3:10).

Why Is Faith Important to God?

Why is faith important?

We know that faith is important to God. He requires faith (Hebrews 11:6, Romans 11:19-20, 2 Corinthians 1:24, Ephesians 2:8). But why? Why does God require faith? Why does God count faith as one of the three weightier matters of the law along with justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23)? Why is faith so important to God? Isn't love and obedience enough? Why does God require that we believe what He says?

Traditional Christianity does not know. First of all, it barely understands what faith is, and many traditional Christians totally misunderstand what faith is. They think faith is believing that God exists and believing their church traditions. They may think it means assuming that God will do this thing or that thing, and then believing strongly in their assumption.

Real faith, the kind of saving faith the Bible talks about, is always towards God personally, and not towards the ministry or any set of traditions. It is belief in God's word. It is a trust in God and His word that God will not lie, that every word in the Bible is true, that He will keep all of His promises to us without fail (Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18, Proverbs 30:5, John 10:35).

But even if some ministers and members in traditional churches understand what faith is, at least in principle even if they do not exercise it, they do not seem to know why it is important to God. Some think that God saves us through faith because we are unable to keep the commandments. That kind of thinking goes like this: God's law requires that we obey His commandments, but we have all broken the commandments, thus incurring the death penalty. To save us, God sent Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins so we can be forgiven. So far, this is true (though traditional Christians do not understand really what the death penalty is - most think it is being tortured forever). But here is where some of them go into error. Obedience was required under the Old Covenant, but since we cannot obey the law, God made the terms easier under the New Covenant. Instead of requiring obedience for salvation, He only requires faith. Just believe in Christ, and you will be saved. Faith in Christ becomes a substitute for obedience to the law. In effect, God says, "I cannot require that people keep the law, because they are not able to keep it, so I will only require that they have faith in Christ who kept it for them."

This thinking is wrong because faith and obedience go together. It is true that God uses faith as a means for us to be forgiven our past sins. But we have to learn to obey. Faith without works, or in other words, faith without obedient action, is dead (James 2:14-26). Disobedience is often spoken of as equivalent to unbelief (Hebrews 3:18-19).

God does not require faith under the New Covenant as an easier substitute for obedience to His spiritual law. That is NOT the reason faith is important to God.

God is building in us a kind of character that can be trusted for eternity never to sin. Faith is an important element in that character. Obedience without faith is not enough.

Someone, perhaps motivated by pride, or motivated by their own concept of love, might be very obedient to the law without really believing and trusting God. The Pharisees might have been that way. They might have obeyed the letter of the law (some of them) out of selfish or self-centered motives, wanting to feel good about themselves, wanting others to think well of them, building their pride and vanity in themselves, or just desiring a reward from God for their good deeds. They could be motivated only by fear of punishment if they disobeyed.

God wants us to believe and trust Him completely, to believe and do whatever He says without doubting His word. He wants that to be part of the motivation for obeying Him one hundred percent forever, not just in the letter of the law, but in the spirit of the law.

God does not want us to have faith as a substitute for obedience to His spiritual law. He wants us to have faith to motivate and help us to obey His law. And the law actually requires faith, because faith is one of the weightier matters of the law. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (Matthew 23:23). Therefore, faith is part of the law, and the spiritual law of God **REQUIRES** that we believe God. It is a violation of God's law to doubt God's word.

God is building in His children the kind of character that will make it impossible for us to ever rebel and sin against Him for all eternity.

To see why faith is important to God, let's go back to the origin of sin.

As far as the Bible reveals, Lucifer was the originator of sin. He was the first being of God's creation to turn against God's way of life by committing the first sin. God's way is the way of humility before God, the way of outgoing love towards God and neighbor. "He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). But Lucifer turned to pride and vanity. He exalted himself in his own mind. He must have sinned inwardly in his thoughts, violating the spirit of the law, before he sinned outwardly. After he sinned his mind became perverted and he sinned more and more (Ezekiel 28:17). He also enticed, or tempted, many angels under his authority into sinning, and when they sinned their minds also became perverted and they became demons (Revelation 12:3-4). Satan also tempted Adam and Eve, and he led them and the whole human race into sin, and sin has become part of our human nature as a result of Satan's influence.

Sin started with Lucifer, who then became Satan the Devil.

Why did Lucifer sin?

God created Lucifer as a mighty angel, a cherub (Ezekiel 28:14-15). After God created him, He must have instructed him and the other angels in the right way of life. This is evidenced by the fact that God testifies that Lucifer was perfect in his ways in the beginning (Ezekiel 28:15). That cannot be by accident. God made Lucifer with a free will, the ability to choose to do right or wrong, and God must have instructed him in His perfect way of life for Lucifer to know how to be perfect in his ways. Also, it is likely that God warned Lucifer and the angels of the consequences of violating God's law of love, just as he warned Adam of the consequences of taking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So Lucifer knew God's spiritual law and he was warned of the consequences of violating that law. What were the consequences? As we have seen, his mind became perverted, as God told him, "you corrupted your wisdom" (Ezekiel 28:17). It is also evident, from seeing Satan's way of life in action on this earth, that one of the consequences of sin is suffering, not just for those around the one who sins, but also for the sinner himself. Then there is the loss of position and future responsibility in God's government, which has yet to completely occur, when Satan will be removed from his throne forever (Ezekiel 28:16-19, Isaiah 14:12-15, Revelation 12:7-9, 20:1-3, 7-10). There is punishment awaiting Satan and the demons for what they have done (Matthew 8:28-29).

God must have warned Lucifer about all these things before Lucifer sinned so he could avoid sinning. That seems to be God's way, as taught in the Bible (Genesis 2:16-17, Ezekiel 3:17, Proverbs 24:11-12).

So why did Lucifer sin?

It could not be that Lucifer was tempted by God, because God tempts no one (James 1:13). God does not entice or encourage anyone to do wrong. No other being would have tempted Lucifer if he was the first being to sin. Lucifer did not have any evil nature in him if God created him to be perfect in his ways. So it does not seem that Lucifer was tempted in the way we experience temptation, as a pull of some kind that causes us to sin. There was no one to pull him towards sin, and there was no evil nature in him to cause him to tempt himself.

I do not think that God tempted Lucifer into vanity, or that Lucifer was tempted by some other angel, or that Lucifer was tempted by his own evil nature. At this point, he had no evil nature.

I do not think that vanity somehow "snuck up" on Satan and overcame him before he realized what was happening. Sin can do that to us because Satan broadcasts his evil nature and temptation to sin into the whole human race, but that could not have been the case at a time before sin was first introduced into the universe.

So why did he sin?

During the time that Lucifer was perfect in his ways, he must have known nothing but happiness and joy. Yet God must have warned him that if he turned to sin and to vanity, his mind would become twisted, warped, perverted, and he would experience unhappiness and torment. So why did Lucifer do it?

Would Lucifer deliberately choose a way of life that he knew would bring suffering and misery upon himself?

But did he really know?

You see, to know something, it is not enough to be told. You have to believe what you are told. You have to believe the person who tells you. Otherwise, you do not know. The person who tells you something must be telling you the truth and you must believe what he tells you. Then you know. But if not, then you are still in doubt. In your mind, you do not know the answer even if it has been given to you.

What would be the consequences for Lucifer if he turned to self-centered vanity? This is a question he must have had to deal with.

If he believed God, he would know that the consequences of choosing the thoughts of vanity and sin would be catastrophic for him. But if he did not believe God, then he must have doubted God's warning. Then he might figure, the only way he could know for sure was to experiment.

But to experiment was a risk. If God was telling Lucifer the truth, then Lucifer would be buying an eternity of misery for himself. He had to consider that, even without knowing from experience what misery would be like. Yet, he must have thought, if God was not telling him the truth, he might find greater happiness by choosing the way of self-centered vanity, of exalting the self instead of serving God and others.

Lucifer had to make a decision. And in choosing to sin, he may have performed the first scientific experiment, based on a "scientific method", the method of speculation, reasoning, experiment, and examination of results to form conclusions, rather than simply trusting and believing his Creator. He gambled.

The Bible teaches us that faith is important to God. It is not enough that we have a feeling of "love" towards God, but mixed with doubt about what He says. It is important to God that we believe what He tells us (Isaiah 51:1-2, Genesis 15:3-6, Romans 4:3, James 2:23). The Bible does not spell out in so many words WHY faith is so important to God, but I am suggesting that a reason why faith is important to God is that He is building in us a character that will never disbelieve Him and turn to rebellion and sin as Lucifer did. God wants children who will believe and trust all that He says, for all eternity. I am basing this on the scriptures I have quoted or referenced, plus many other scriptures that show that it is God's nature to warn those He loves and therefore He must have given Lucifer a warning about the tragic consequences that would be the result of sin, a warning that Lucifer chose to ignore.

So God has written faith into His plan for the salvation of mankind. And we must base our obedience to God's law on faith in God and His word. That is why, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8), and "*Abraham believed God, and it was* accounted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3).

Faith can help us overcome sin. We can make a commitment to believe what God says, and then we can read the Bible cover-to-cover in an attitude of faith so we can live by every word of God. Then when temptation comes, we can remind ourselves of our commitment to believe God and recall the scriptures that teach us to avoid the wrong behavior we are being tempted to do. We can believe God's word about the unhappy consequences of giving in to the temptation and the rewards for resisting it. We can make the choice to believe and obey God that Lucifer should have made, but didn't. By doing this repeatedly, with God's and Christ's help through the Holy Spirit, we can build the character God wants us to have and we can show God that we can be trusted to believe and obey Him in His family forever.

Laodicea and Philadelphia

Laodiceans are warned that they think they are ok, but they are not.

"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'-and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-" (Revelation 3:17). They don't see their own Laodicean condition. They may see it in others but not in themselves. That is a scary warning. It means that any one of us can be Laodicean and not realize it, especially during the Laodicean era.

Laodiceans are told to repent. Philadelphians are told to "hold fast". "Repent" means change, but "hold fast" may seem like the opposite of change. A Laodicean who thinks he is Philadelphian may try to "hold fast" without realizing what Philadelphians are to "hold fast" to. He may think it means, in his case, "don't change". But the Laodicean NEEDS to change. He is NOT ok.

It right to hold fast to the things God and the Bible teaches are right and good. We should hold fast to our trust in God, those of us who trust God. If we really believe the Bible (and how few, even in the Church of God, really do!), we should hold fast to our belief, our faith, in God's Word. But we should not hold fast to our spiritual condition where we fall short. As long as we are human, in the flesh, there will be need for improvement. It will help us to see that if we compare ourselves with Christ instead of each other (1 Peter 2:21-24, Hebrews 12:1-4, 2 Corinthians 10:12). We need to fight our human nature. We must never assume we are "ok" in our character. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). We also should not hold fast to any doctrinal errors we believe in.

There is no contradiction between repentance and holding fast. We are to hold fast to those things God has given us that are good, and we need to repent of our character attributes and errors in thinking where we fall short. We need to do both. In fact, Sardis is told in the same sentence "hold fast and repent" (Revelation 3:3).

Personally, I think the main thing that Philadelphians have that they need to hold fast to is a willingness to believe the Bible more than their traditions, their ministry, and their opinions, and to be corrected by the Bible and to learn new knowledge from the Bible. That was Mr. Armstrong's outstanding characteristic.

I think it is better for us to regard ourselves as possibly Laodicean, and work to repent and draw closer to God, than to assume we are Philadelphian.

I, myself, do not want to regard myself as Philadelphian. I will figure I am Laodicean or some other condition in the messages to the seven churches that requires correction. I regard myself that way, not only because I am painfully aware of my shortcomings, but because I know the danger of the Laodicean era, the danger of assuming we are ok when we are not. But I am determined to repent and continue to repent more and more and overcome and strive to become a Philadelphian, hoping that God, in His mercy, will look at the glass that is me and count it as half full and not half empty. Perhaps if I strive to overcome, and if I ever learn the lessons God is teaching me, God will also judge me with mercy.

I would rather make the mistake of thinking I am Laodicean while God actually counts me as Philadelphian, than the other way around (Luke 14:7-11, 17:7-10, 18:9-14, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5-6, Isaiah 57:15, Proverbs 3:34).

The Ministry's Responsibility

The ministry, first and foremost, has a responsibility to repent. The ministers set the example. Much of the responsibility for the scattered condition of the Church falls on the ministry. Mr. Tkach did not scatter the Church. He and other Worldwide ministers made doctrinal changes that forced ministers and members of Worldwide to leave if they could not accept the changes. But he did not scatter the Church. Those of us who left could have left in unity. But we scattered as we left. The members were not the direct cause of that scattering. God no doubt allowed the scattering because of the lukewarm spiritual condition of the members, and He gave us the leaders we deserve, but it was the ministry that scattered the Church.

What exactly did the ministers do wrong? How did they go astray? God knows the hearts of all men, and I can only speculate. I am sure it varies from man to man. But a good tree cannot bear bad fruit. The scattered condition of the whole Church of God is a bad fruit. This did not come from a faithful ministry.

In any church organization, there is a potential for conflict between the church's teaching and the Bible. This is obvious in the large, traditional churches, but it is true even in the Church of God. Why? Both a church and the Bible teach doctrine. One is infallible, perfect, the other is not. The Bible is not wrong about anything, but churches and ministers can make mistakes. This is true for *any* church, *any* minister, even a true minister, even Mr. Armstrong, because we are all human.

The true Church of God is not perfect. The messages to the seven churches of Revelation prove this (Revelation chapters 2 and 3). The history of the New Testament Church of God proves this. There was sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas over the issue of taking Mark with them (Acts 15:36-40). Paul withstood and rebuked Peter in front of others (Galatians 2:11-14). There were serious problems in several Church of God congregations as shown in Paul's epistles such as 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:11-13, 3:1-3, 4:18-21, 5:1-13, 6:1-10, 11:17-22, 27-30, 15:12, 33-34), 2 Corinthians (2 Corinthians 13:1-6), and Galatians (Galatians 1:6-10, 3:1-6, 4:19-21, 5:4-15).

A wise and faithful minister will realize his limitations and the limitations of all ministers, and he will teach his flock to put the Bible first. He will teach the members the proper way to handle disagreements, but he will not teach them to let the ministry interpret the Bible for them. He should know that he can make mistakes with the Bible and with doctrine and that other ministers in the Church of God can also make mistakes. He won't teach members, directly or indirectly, to put their faith in the Church or in the ministry.

Mr. Armstrong was well aware of the importance of putting the Bible first when he first came into the Church of God. He loved and respected the Church, but he always put the Bible first. He believed the Bible more than the Church. When he began a work on radio, he knew he was preaching to people schooled in false doctrine by their traditional churches, and he put an emphasis on believing the Bible first in his messages. "Don't believe me, don't believe any minister, believe your Bible," he said.

Then, something began to happen. Mr. Armstrong began to face rebellion of various sorts against his authority in the Church. Often, doctrine was an issue in these rebellions. Ministers in the Church of God, claiming to follow the Bible, taught doctrine contrary to the teachings of Mr. Armstrong. They did not handle doctrinal disagreement the right way. They did not follow Bible teaching about respect and obedience to authority in the Church. They rebelled. They caused division in the Church and Mr. Armstrong had to deal with that.

Mr. Armstrong had to emphasize the authority of his leadership and the ministry for a time. There needs to be a balance, and teaching faith in the Bible without respect for the Church, the leadership, and the ministry is just as one-sided as teaching the authority of the ministry without teaching faith in God's word.

Toward the end of Mr. Armstrong's life, he was still teaching the general public, "don't believe me, believe the Bible", but his emphasis to the membership in the Church was on government and the authority of the Church, the apostle, and the ministry.

Thus, he said of Mr. Tkach (not naming him at that time, but referring to the man who would replace Mr. Armstrong as pastor general), you will follow him if you want to get into God's kingdom.

Mr. Armstrong did not prepare the members for the apostasy to come. It was God's will to allow this to happen because we had become Laodicean, but we can learn lessons from this.

I think that if Mr. Armstrong could see what has happened in the Church after he died, his biggest regret might be that he didn't teach the ministry and membership what to do if the top leadership goes astray.

What happened underlines the importance of teaching and practicing faith in God's word, the Bible, more than faith in the Church and the ministry. Faith means believing what God says, as Abraham did (Isaiah 51:1-2, Genesis 15:3-6, Romans 4:3, James 2:23), and the Bible is God speaking. This principle is not just something that Catholics and Protestants need to learn, but we in the Church of God need to practice this also.

When the ministry teaches members to believe and trust them to correctly interpret the Bible for them more than they teach them to believe the Bible itself, they are competing with God for the faith of the members.

What did ministers do wrong that scattered the Church?

Too many, in an effort to protect their authority and uphold or magnify "their office" (Romans 11:14-14) placed undue emphasis on loyalty to the Church and the organization rather than to God. They taught the brethren to seek peace and unity with each other, with the ministry, and with the organization, but not first with God. That is not the kind of unity God will bless.

Unity in the Church of God comes from seeking first unity with God. If we all have unity with God, we will have unity with each other.

Why Many Ministers Are Afraid to Teach Faith in the Bible

Probably every minister has to deal with this problem sooner or later. A member confronts him with a "different understanding" of a passage of scripture leading to a difference in doctrine. The Church and the minister believe one thing, but the member believes something else, and the member claims to base his belief on the Bible.

So there is discussion. The minister patiently explains why the Church believes what it believes, and he may bring in other scriptures to back up the doctrine. He tries to show

the member why his understanding of the scriptures he is using is wrong. But the member doesn't "get it". At the end of the discussion, the member is not convinced and neither is the minister.

Then the member talks about his "new understanding" to other members. It becomes his "pet doctrine". He promotes it. And in so doing, he creates division and confusion. He disobeys God's instruction that we should all try to speak the same thing (1 Corinthians 1:10). He contradicts the Church and the minister. He becomes what the minister might call, a "self-appointed teacher". Now the minister has a bigger problem than just one member with a question.

This is a typical pattern that repeats often in the Church. Long-time pastors and evangelists in the Church have probably had to deal with exactly this kind of scenario more times than they can remember.

In most cases, it is the member who is doctrinally wrong. He doesn't understand the scripture, but he thinks he does. In many cases, the member may be promoting heresy in the Church of God.

This type of thing also occurred in Paul's day, so it is nothing new (1 Corinthians 15:12-34, 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 12-15, Galatians 1:6-9, 3:1, 5:7-12, 1 Timothy 1:3-7, 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 2:14-26, Titus 1:10-14, 3:9-11).

To many ministers, to teach the members that they should believe the Bible more than the Church and more than the ministry may seem like a recipe for doctrinal confusion, heresy, and division. It may encourage members to come up with their own pet theories that they then promote in the Church, causing division. It may seem that the easiest and most effective way to discourage such behavior is to teach that God appointed ministers to interpret the Bible for the members, that Jesus Christ as head of the Church guides the ministers in their interpretation of the Bible, and that members should trust Christ to lead the ministers to the correct understanding of scripture. Members therefore should feel free to ask questions, but when the explanation is given, they should believe what the minister is teaching about the scriptures, assuming that the leadership and ministry of the Church is right.

I think that is absolutely the wrong way to handle it.

A better way, a way that preserves a member's faith in God's word, is to teach the members that if they have a disagreement about doctrine, for the sake of unity and peace and respect for the authority of the ministry, they should not talk about it with other members. Their faith should be in God and in God's word, the Bible, and if they do not understand or agree with a minister's explanation of a scripture, they should believe the Bible, but keep the matter between themselves and God until such time as God opens the understanding of either the member or the minister to see his error.

In other words, members should be taught to avoid openly contradicting the leadership and ministry with members of the Church of God they attend. If a member has a problem, let him bring it to his pastor, but not others. If that does not resolve it, let him

leave it in God's hands, but still not try to teach his views to others in contradiction to established Church doctrine. When it is God's time, He will reveal the truth to whoever is wrong.

That is the right way to implement the principle of unity of doctrine and all speaking the same thing without directing the faith of the members towards the ministry rather than God.

Since I first published this book, I have engaged in discussions about Bible doctrine with members of traditional, mainstream churches on the Internet in blogs and forums. Some of those churches teach their members to let their church interpret the Bible for them. Some of them will be glad to talk about the Bible, but it is a useless discussion. They will affirm that the Bible is God's word and is true. But, no matter how illogical their doctrines, no matter how clearly the Bible contradicts those doctrines, those members can't see it. They will always find a way to let their ministry and church interpret the Bible to agree with their traditional doctrines.

They do this because they think they can have faith in God by believing their church traditions and ministry equally with the Bible. If you ask them, what do you believe, your church or the Bible, they will answer, both. If you ask them, what if the Bible contradicts your church or vice-versa, they will say, impossible. God will not allow that. They will agree that the Bible is inspired by God and is infallibly true. But they will say that God also inspires their church, and their church's ministry and traditions are equally right and true.

In other words, their view is, God inspired the Bible and now He inspires the church (their church) to interpret the Bible correctly. Both are needed, the Bible and a church to interpret the Bible. God inspires both, so both are infallibly correct in teaching.

These people ignore the plain Bible teaching that even the Church and ministers can make mistakes.

But you can't convince them. It is their faith. They are committed to believing that God guides their church, and for them, it would be an act of unfaithfulness and disloyalty to God if they ever doubted their church. So they will not allow themselves to doubt their church.

Are Church of God ministers teaching their members to think the same way?

Some ministers in God's Church think that members should not form their own opinions about what scriptures mean. They may quote 2 Peter 1:20: "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation".

But the Bible says, "Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand" (2 Corinthians 1:24). And a careful reading of "...no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20) shows that it is speaking of the WRITING of the Bible, not the reading of it, as shown by the verse that follows: "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke

as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). In other words, when the prophets wrote their prophecies in the Bible, they were not writing from their private understanding of events. This has nothing to do with our reading and understanding of the Bible.

Mr. Armstrong taught that the Bible interprets itself. We let clear scriptures interpret difficult ones. I think he was right.

We have to practice what we preach. If we tell the world, don't believe your church, believe your Bible, don't rely on your church to interpret the Bible for you, but read it yourself and let the Bible interpret the Bible, then we must say the same thing to our members. It is not wrong for those other churches but right for us to believe ministers and traditions more than the Bible. It is wrong for both them and us. God has one standard.

Whatever standard we teach for understanding the Bible, we have to teach the same standard to our own members as we teach to the public. It is not right to have two standards, one for ourselves and one for outsiders (Proverbs 20:10, Deuteronomy 25:13-16, Matthew 23:1-4, Romans 2:17-21).

The Pharisees believed their own traditions more than scripture, and we must avoid making the same mistake (Matthew 15:1-9).

Some ministers, in teaching or pressuring members to believe the minister's explanation of a scripture, may be encouraging the member to break faith with God, though that probably is not the minister's intention.

When a member and ministry have opposing viewpoints about what a scripture or collection of scriptures means, from the member's point of view, he faces a choice. He has to choose to believe the Bible or the ministry. Which will he choose? A minister might say, "but the Bible doesn't say that, and the member is mistaken", but that misses the point. Even if the member is wrong, he doesn't know he is wrong. The choice for him is the same whether he in fact is right or wrong: believe God or believe man.

If he is sincere but mistaken, and is still not convinced after a minister tries to correct him, then he doesn't understand the Bible correctly. But he still has to make the same choice as if the minister was wrong and the member right. He has to believe God or man. Because, if he can't understand where he is wrong **FROM THE BIBLE**, the only way he can **ASSUME** he is wrong is to place belief in the word of the ministry over that of God Himself! And if he makes that choice, he has broken faith with God!

When we see what God says in the Bible and begin to believe and trust him, but then **ASSUME** our belief is wrong because it disagrees with the Church, that **ASSUMPTION** is the same as doubting what God says. How can it be otherwise? It would in fact be choosing to believe our traditions and the ministers of our Church more than the Bible just as we teach the world **NOT** to do. It is that kind of thinking that has opened the door for all kinds of false teaching in traditional mainstream Christianity. Members of those churches, most of them, will not believe what we show them in the

Bible because they ASSUME that their traditions and their ministers are right, that their church has the right interpretation and understanding of the Bible.

Do some ministers even realize that they could be injuring the faith of some of their members in God and in the truth of God's word by teaching them to accept the Church's teaching even when they see something different in the Bible?

Our relationship with God has to be a personal relationship, where God talks to us through the Bible and we talk to God in prayer. In that relationship we believe what God says in the Bible. The Bible is personal to us. It is our Father and Christ talking to us. We *have* to believe what God says. The job of the ministry is to help that relationship, not *compete* with it.

Members of traditional, mainstream churches sometimes use physical idols such as pictures and statues they think represent Christ to "aid" them in their worship. We teach them that no image can represent the infinite God. We recognize that the carnal human mind craves something physical to help God seem more real.

But without our realizing it, that same process can work in the Church of God when members, having human nature as we all do, crave something or someone physical to represent God to them. That can be a minister or an organized body. They would rather put their belief and trust in a physical church or a physical minister than in the invisible God and His word, the Bible. Wise ministers will be aware of that tendency and try to direct members to put their faith in God directly. Ministers should teach members to prove what they believe from the Bible and to believe what they believe because God teaches it in the Bible, not because the Church and the ministry teach it.

When ministers teach and prove doctrine in sermons, they should prove it from the Bible, not from Church of God literature or the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong.

The leadership and ministry of a Church of God organization should never dig in its heels and refuse to consider doctrinal changes, saying, "No doctrinal change."

Ministers like to say they want their members to be teachable, and teachability is a sign of conversion. But the ministry must be teachable too. The ministry, if it is to imitate the positive example of Mr. Armstrong, must always be teachable in the sense that it is willing to learn new things from and be corrected by the Bible.

Christ is the head of the Church, and He leads us by the Bible first, and by the ministry second. Christ can lead us by opening our minds to understand things in the Bible we never fully understood before, and we must follow where Christ leads us. "These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4).

Learning, practicing, and teaching doctrine is a living, active system. We should always be learning new things and accepting correction from God. When change becomes impossible, it is a broken system. Those who teach must continue to be willing to learn and teach what they learn. Those who learn must be willing to prove

what they learn, and that means question, and those who teach must be willing to respond to their questions, or change themselves. We all know in part and are limited, and God is an active teacher, always teaching and correcting us, and our response to Him must be active.

Fasting, Faith, and Doctrine

Long-time members can remember the atmosphere of faith that existed in the Church under Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's leadership in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, and most of us who were not in the Church at that time have heard of the healings that took place. There seemed to be more healings in the Church at that time than now.

Mr. Armstrong had faith in God. He believed God's Word. He proved his faith in the Bible by giving up his own Sunday traditions and letting the Bible correct his beliefs. That attitude of willingness to believe the Bible more than his opinions, traditions, and the Church was at the heart and core of Mr. Armstrong's faith. That is the way of thinking that Mr. Armstrong practiced, and it is the way he taught when he said, "Don't believe me, believe your Bible."

Mr. Armstrong always had a willingness to learn new knowledge from the Bible and to accept correction from the Bible, and it was because of that willingness that God was able to use him to restore lost doctrine.

I believe there is a direct connection between Mr. Armstrong's faith and trust in God's word, including his willingness to change doctrine when necessary, and the healings that took place in those years.

Mr. Armstrong was willing to go, doctrinally, wherever Christ through the Bible would lead him (Revelation 14:4). He was more concerned with being faithful to teach the Bible accurately than he was about the reactions of human beings to the doctrines he taught. He was more concerned about what God thought than what man thought. He was not a people-pleaser. He was not trying to teach what the Church wanted to hear in order to build up and retain the largest possible number of members.

Today, some in the Church of God emphasize that Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah to come (Malachi 4:5-6, Matthew 17:11), and then they use that idea to say that Mr. Armstrong's doctrines can never be changed, but in saying this they overturn the most important doctrine Mr. Armstrong ever taught, his teaching that we must be willing to grow in knowledge and be corrected by the Bible. But our body of knowledge as a Church is never complete and free of error. The Bible teaches that we know only in part (1 Corinthians 13:9) and that we are to grow in both grace and in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18). There is always more we can learn from the Bible.

When we preach the gospel, we ask our listeners and readers to be willing to learn new things from the Bible. We have to be willing to do the same if we are to practice what we preach and not be hypocrites.

Fasting is a tool we can use to draw closer to God, and as we draw closer to God we can ask for more faith, and God will supply our need. But we have to do our part to be willing to believe His word. We increase our faith as we exercise it, making right choices to believe and obey God when occasions arise.

And when we seek God with fasting, I think we would be wise to consider the teaching and positive example of Mr. Armstrong. He relates in his autobiography how he first began to fast when his wife Loma Armstrong was sick and when God was not answering his prayers for her healing. When he was fasting, he did not ask God for healing. Instead, he asked God to show him what was wrong with HIM. He used fasting to humble himself so that he could more readily be corrected by the Bible, and he looked to the Bible, studying it while he was fasting, for the answer to WHY God was not answering his prayers for his wife's healing.

And after God corrected Mr. Armstrong and he received the correction, THEN God answered Mr. Armstrong's prayer for his wife's healing.

We Need to Be More Zealous for the Things of God

This will probably be the last chapter I will add to this book. This chapter is a call to repentance to the Church of God, but in a sense, that is what this whole book is.

This book started with a study on the Holocaust and the effect it had on the religious faith of the Jews, intending to use it to show that we still need to get a warning message out, before I even knew it would eventually lead to an entire book. From there this has grown.

I was provoked, in a sense, into doing the Holocaust study because some in the Church of God were saying that this is not the time to preach the gospel to the world (and the Ezekiel warning), that the Church should only get itself ready. The history of the Holocaust, along with the Bible, shows the falseness of this view. But I didn't think it would become a book. What I intended as an article became a chapter in a book.

The Holocaust study became chapter four. I noticed Church of the Great God was emphasizing feeding the flock at the expense of warning the world, and I wrote up what became chapter five as a response to that view.

I saw other problems in the Church. There were those who were saying that it is wrong for the Church to change any of Mr. Armstrong's teachings, and they taught his

teachings as if he was infallible. I wrote chapter six in response to that view. When I knew I would publish the book, I wrote chapters one, two, and three, not for the Church of God, but for the members of the public who might discover the book, because without background information, what I say in the later chapters would make no sense to an outsider. Yet, in a sense, chapters one, two, and three are also for the Church of God, because by putting my book in the public domain, I made that background information available for other Church of God writers to use in their efforts to preach the gospel to the world. In other words, the first half of the book provides sample content free for any group to use (probably with editing necessary to improve my writing) to follow through and put into action the principles I teach in chapters four and five, to get a warning message out to the nations of Israel before the tribulation begins. The sections and paragraphs in the first half can, with some rewriting and editing, can become books, booklets, and articles to help warn the public. Church of God, a Worldwide Association (COGWA) is looking for content as they gear up to do a work of preaching the gospel to the world. Their writers are certainly free to use this material to help them get started.

I know that, except for certain parts, this book is not well written. It is too long for one thing. It needs editing, more than I am qualified to give it. I am not a professional writer. I do not even have a college degree. What I write, I write from my passion, but often I am too wordy.

I first published this book early in 2006, and I revised and expanded it several times since then.

In late 2010 and early 2011, United Church of God (UCG) split down the middle. The causes are still not fully known to outsiders, but politics born out of ballot-box governance seems to me to be a major cause of the split. Whether or not voting was the primary cause for the division, it was certainly a contributing cause, in my opinion. In the fall of 2011 I added chapter eight on governance, showing that Churches of God should not submit to a system of governance by voting.

I have been surprised since I first published this book that it has not had more impact, especially the material in chapter four. Even though I am not a professional writer, I think the lessons of the Holocaust show the importance of getting a warning message out to our nations BEFORE the tribulation begins, and I think I make the point clearly enough for those who read it. Yet there still seem to be those in the Church who do not give high priority to getting the warning message out, and I know of no group or writer that has picked up on what the history of the Holocaust can teach us and talked about it in articles or sermons.

But I could say the same thing about the other chapters. Chapter eight for example. I think it clearly shows the Bible teaching on governance. No one has corrected me about it from the Bible. Yet at least two major Church of God groups seem not to care. How can I help but conclude that those groups do not care what the Bible says?

Most members probably do not really care what the Bible says. They read it to reinforce what they already believe and to feel superior to the world. They don't really

want its correction. Correction to help them do what they already want to do, yes. They will read it to feel motivated to lose weight, stop being angry, overcome addictions, forgive their neighbor, be thankful to God, etc. But correction in their BELIEFS? No.

Most of the other chapters in this book, chapters four, five, six, and eight, all deal with major problems in the whole Church of God, problems of thinking, doctrine, and approach as an organized body. These are problems we need to repent of. We need to repent of a lack of zeal for preaching a warning message to the public, and chapters four and five deal with that. We need to repent of making an idol of our own traditions, the ministry, or the doctrines of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, and we need to let the Bible correct us and teach us new knowledge, and chapter six deals with that. We need to repent of practicing governance in the Church by balloting, a practice contrary to the Bible teaching that God's system of governance is from the top down, and chapter eight deals with that.

But these are surface problems. Most are problems in the ministry, for it is the responsibility of the ministry to preach the gospel, to teach the right doctrines, and to practice the right governance. But it is not just the ministry that needs to repent. God gives us the leaders we deserve. We members need to repent. If the ministers are Laodicean, it is a pretty good bet we members are too.

The problems are one. The problems of lack of zeal for the gospel, making an idol out of our traditions or ministry, and practicing the world's form of governance by voting are only outward expressions of an underlying problem. There is really just one problem that these other problems spring from. That problem is spiritual. And it is a problem with ministers and members alike.

Christ gives a name to it. He call us "lukewarm". He also says we are self-satisfied.

I think it is this lukewarmness combined with self-satisfaction that is the root cause of most of our other spiritual problems in the membership and the ministry.

Look at the way we spend our money. Look at our homes, our cars, our clothes, the food we eat, the recreation and entertainment we enjoy, the restaurant meals we eat, and the junk food we consume. Look at the average amount of money we spend on things we do not really need. Then look at the average contribution to the work of God from each member in tithes and offerings. Does our spending reflect our priorities or not?

Each of us is one out of about 100,000 people on the face of the earth privileged to know the truth, not because of our righteousness, but because of God's mercy towards us and because God has a job for us to do. If we make it, we will be part of the first fruits of God for all eternity. Our reward will be greater. The world, and the nations of Israel in particular, are about to go through the intense suffering of the tribulation, and 90% or more of our people will die in it. God has given the Church the job to warn them before it happens, and He has given the members the job of backing their ministers who give that warning with money to finance it (because it all takes money). So we members spend more money on restaurants, movies, games, entertainment,

recreation, nice furniture, junk food, etc. per year than we contribute in offerings. Nice, huh?

How about our time? How do we spend that?

Here is a simple test. Ask yourself this question. Which do I spend more time on, watching TV and movies, playing games, and enjoying other recreation and entertainment, or praying and reading or studying the Bible?

Here is a form to make it easier:

A. Average amount of time spent with recreation and entertainment per day: _____

B. Average amount of time spent praying and reading or studying the Bible per day:

Which is greater, A or B?

There are no clearer tests of where our hearts are than how we spend our time and our money.

Most of this world's entertainment is bad. Did I say "most"? I should say, "almost all". Almost all movies contain one or more of the following: illicit sex, violence, the occult, wrong religious concepts, vulgar language, taking God's name in vain, and teaching of wrong values. In the early history of TV and movies, censors would not allow God's name to be used except in a reverent way. Now, even cartoons use God's name in a frivolous manner. And we willingly listen to it. We don't say God's name out loud ourselves. But we turn on the DVD player and listen to others use His name carelessly. I do not think Christ would do that.

If most of us members are lukewarm in our priorities, we don't need to wonder about the ministry. God will give us ministers who are lukewarm like us. It is a way of teaching us the principle, what we sow we will reap. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). If we are lukewarm about teaching the world the truth it needs, God can give us the ministers who will be lukewarm about teaching us members the truth we need. If we are lukewarm in the way we obey God and love each other, God can give us ministers who are lukewarm in the way they obey God and get along with each other. If we are lukewarm about proving and believing the truth from the Bible, God can give us ministers who are also lukewarm about what the Bible actually says. God will give us the ministers we deserve. We will wake up in the tribulation, we and our ministers together, if we don't repent. Then we will be cured of our lukewarmness and self-satisfaction the hard way.

God commands us to repent. If we do, God can empower us to finish His end-time work and may protect us during the tribulation, which is on its way.

There is still time for us to change. And time is running out.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) At the Mind's Limits
page 12
- (2) At the Mind's Limits
page 20
- (3) Facing the Extreme
page 35, quoting
Prisoners of Fear by Ella Lingens-Reiner (118)
- (4) The Death Camps
page 49
- (5) The Death Camps
page 55, quoting
Five Chimneys by Lengyel, p. 100
- (6) The Death Camps
page 56
- (7) The Death Camps
page 57
- (8) The Death Camps
page 61, quoting
Night, by Wiesel, p. 80
- (9) The Death Camps
page 61, quoting
Five Chimneys by Lengyel, p. 110
- (10) The Death Camps
page 61
- (11) The Death Camps
page 63
- (12) The Death Camps
page 63
- (13) The Death Camps
page 63

- (14) The Death Camps
page 64, quoting
Five Chimneys by Lengyel, p. 45
- (15) The Death Camps
page 65
- (16) Elie Wiesel - God, the Holocaust, and the Children of
Israel
page 13, quoting
Elie Wiesel, My Teachers, a radio address 4/8/73
- (17) The Theory and Practice of Hell
pages xiv-xv
- (18) The Theory and Practice of Hell
page 34
- (19) The Theory and Practice of Hell
pages 312-313
- (20) Faith After the Holocaust
pages 4-5
- (21) Faith After the Holocaust
page 67
- (22) Faith After the Holocaust
page 89
- (23) Faith After the Holocaust
page 135
- (24) Facing the Abusing God
footnote on page 267
- (25) Shattered Faith
page x
- (26) Shattered Faith
page 123
- (27) Jesus and the Holocaust
page 54
- (28) Jesus and the Holocaust
page 60

- (29) Rethinking Jewish Faith
page 107-108, article reprinted from
JUDAISM: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Thought,
37, no. 3 (Summer 1988), 323-326
- (30) Inside the Concentration Camps
page 5
- (31) Inside the Concentration Camps
page 18
- (32) The Aftermath
page 13
- (33) The Aftermath
page 38
- (34) The Aftermath
page 46
- (35) The Aftermath
page 88
- (36) The Aftermath
page 93
- (37) The Aftermath
page 94
- (38) The Aftermath
page 143
- (39) The Aftermath
page 144
- (40) The Aftermath
page 144
- (41) The Aftermath
page 145-146
- (42) The Aftermath
page 151
- (43) The Aftermath
pages 152-153, quoting
The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors, Brenner

- (44) The Aftermath
page 155
- (45) The Aftermath
page 156
- (46) The Aftermath
page 156, quoting
The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors, Brenner
- (47) The Aftermath
page 156, quoting
The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors, Brenner
- (48) The Aftermath
page 160
- (49) Holocaust - Religious & Philosophical Implications
page 261
- (50) Holocaust - Religious & Philosophical Implications
page 266
- (51) God and the Holocaust
page 12
- (52) God and the Holocaust
page 26
- (53) Lucien's Story
page 24
- (54) Lucien's Story
page 26
- (55) Lucien's Story
page 28
- (56) The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors
pages 57-58
- (57) The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors
page 71

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Holocaust Testimonies
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Survival in Auschwitz
by Primo Levi

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<http://ptgbook.blogspot.com>: *Preaching the Gospel* blog discusses many of the same topics as this book and also discusses some current events in the Churches of God. Comments are accepted after moderation. This is a good place to ask questions, give feedback, and see what others say.

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