

What Is the Work of God Now? (Part 4)

Solutions to Disunity

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This will be Part 4 in "The Work of God" series. It fits very nicely with the Day of Pentecost. The series began on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread and is going to continue right on through the Day of Pentecost.

Psalm 74:12 For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

We've found, in this series, that the work of God is much more extensive than merely preaching the gospel to the public. We have unfortunately gotten into the habit of using that term "work of God" far too narrowly.

This particular verse indicates

- 1) God is working. He is actively, continuously and personally involved [in our lives].
- 2) His work is more wide spread than first appears to the casual observer.

He will do whatever it takes. He is not an assembly-line worker doing the same things over and over again. He accommodates for the way things are going (within the purpose that He is accomplishing.)

Salvation is a term that the Bible uses quite broadly. It literally means deliverance, but it can be used to include anything that God does in His efforts to bring mankind into His kingdom. The "feeding of the flock" is His work too. As Jesus stated in John 5: 17, "My Father has been working until now, and I work."

"Feeding the flock" is a part of His work, just as getting Israel out of Egypt, under Moses, was a work. The major emphasis, though, was different. Getting Israel into the Promised Land, under Joshua, was also the "work of God." But, again, the emphasis of the work of God changed. Organizing Israel into a nation, under David, was part of His work, but again there was a shifting of gears in "the work of God."

Rebuilding the Temple, under Ezra, was a "work of God" (done through men), but the emphasis changed again. The rebuilding of the wall, under Nehemiah, (a little later) was also the "work of God." We could go on and on with these things. The building of the ark, through Noah, was the "work of God" at that time.

What should we do as a work, considering the state of the church right now? To me, that is the

burning issue. It is really the reason for this series of sermons.

II Timothy 2:15 Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

When I left off in this series, I touched on a couple of Scriptures that I feel strongly apply to this period of splitting in the church that we're now experiencing. For just a few minutes, we're going to focus on the word "study." "Study to show yourself approved unto God."

The King James translates that as "study." However, to the best of my knowledge, no modern translation agrees because the meaning of this English word [study] has changed (in the way that it is used). To us, the word means "*hit the books*," or "*try to learn*," or "*try to analyze, investigate, examine, scrutinize*," or "*earnestly contemplate*." But the [original] Greek word means something quite a bit different. It literally means to "*make speed*." It means "*to hurry*." It means "*to make earnest effort; be prompt to labor*." So you will find - in almost all modern translations - that this word "study" will be rendered "*be diligent*," "*work hard*," or "*do your best*."

The primary question then is, "*What can we do to show ourselves approved unto God?*" Because God's charge is "*Hurry to do it! Be quick about it! Be diligent at it.*" "*Do your best.*"

So, are we doing our best in preaching the gospel to the world while the church is falling apart? Is that really what He wants us to do while the church is falling apart? Or does He want us to do something about repairing the damage that has taken place in the church? In regard to this, I want to touch on those verses that I concluded with in the last sermon - Galatians 6:9-10.

Galatians 6:9-10 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Verse 10 draws us to the word *especially* - "*especially to those who are of the household of faith*." This next verse that I'm going to read is a companion Scripture to that one. I'm going to read I Corinthians 15:58. Notice how this parallels Galatians 6:9-10. I Corinthians 15 is the resurrection chapter, and Paul has just gone through those thrilling things about the resurrection of the dead. So he concludes that chapter by saying:

I Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be you steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

"*Let's not be weary in well doing.*" What kind of "*well-doing*" is going to please God at this time? "Be you steadfast." That's almost the same thing as "*Let's not get weary.*" "*Hang on.*" "*Let's keep going on,*" he says. "*This is not a time to lose faith.*" And so that exhortation comes

at the very end of that wonderful chapter, urging us to continue our dedication to excelling in God's work. He is saying that it is a time to buckle down and remain constant, steadfast in the faith. But Galatians 6: 9-10 points in a very positive direction to direct our energy toward: "*Works of kindness, as we have opportunity, aimed especially toward the brethren.*" That's the church.

I Timothy 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house [That's getting pretty close. But notice the statement right after that.] he has denied the faith, and [to add insult to injury] is worse than an infidel.

To fail to take care of your own (as we have opportunity, because there is need that it be done), is denying Christianity. It is denying the Christian faith and we are then worse off than the unconverted. That's a pretty strong statement. Now apply the principle [in that verse] to the church. A person who meets the qualification of this verse has disavowed Christianity, and is walking away from his responsibility to take care of his own first.

In terms of doing good - put these two Scriptures together. According to God, even in the best of times the brethren have first priority, not the world. I think that's abundantly clear. If there was ever a time for doing good to the brethren, the time is now.

In its broader context, Galatians 6: 1-10 has spiritual matters more directly in mind than anything concerning a physical need. This does not deny that there are times to help out physically, but that chapter begins by stating "If one sees a brother in a fault..." That's the real foundation of this charge in verses 9 and 10 of Galatians 6. It has to do primarily with spiritual matters, and that is exactly where the problem in the church lies. It has to do with spiritual things.

In terms of the ministry, it means that from the top of the administration on down, the emphasis must be on "feeding the flock." If there is a spiritual problem within the church, and we are charged first with taking care of the church, then it means that the administration of the church has to shift gears and take care of that spiritual problem first. *It* has first priority; not the preaching of the gospel to the world.

Unfortunately, during this time of splitting, we've got some men out there who are trying to change the very doctrines around which we were once unified. That, in principle, is the same pattern that the Tkach regime followed which split the church wide open. The only difference is the specific doctrines that these men want to change. I am not saying that these men are heretics, because frankly I do not know. I am saying that I believe that they are misguided in their efforts at this time. This can only lead to more splitting because it creates more uncertainty and confusion.

Others (I'm talking about ministers here) are striving to convince their followers that their group is the only true church, and that everybody else (except those who are in their group) are Laodiceans and headed into the Tribulation. They've set themselves up as the judges of everybody's spiritual condition (without even knowing them). That is another divisive position.

Others, despite all the evidence to the contrary, still claim that we are in the Philadelphia era.

Again that kind of talk only drives wedges between the groups even deeper.

Brethren, the reality is that we were scattered. People of every spiritual level are scattered throughout all of the groups. No *one* group has cornered the market on those who are best off spiritually. The whole church is sick. "*Sin sick*." We didn't get into this condition by doing well. It is a time which - of necessity - must be given over to healing, to repairing the breaches that are becoming ever wider.

Now the greatest and most important breach - the one that lies at the foundation of the problems - is the one between us and God. Individually, a very large number of us have drifted from God. It is a loss of faith instigated by a loss of devotion. Neglect of duty is another way of putting it. We've drifted from the doctrines given through Herbert Armstrong which, for this period of time, is "the faith once delivered." The fruits are confusion and uncertainty and sometimes, brethren, outright antagonism.

Turn to Amos 4: 2. This chapter is addressed to the socially high-ranking women of Samaria. I am not really deeply interested in that [their social status], but in what God says about what they are doing.

Amos 4:2 The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness.

How many times, brethren, does God swear in the Bible? Not very often. If it is something that He swears about, you can be sure that there is a great deal of feeling, in Him, regarding what is occurring. He says:

Amos 4:2-3 The days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. And you shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her: and you shall cast them into the palace, says the LORD.

He's pretty disgusted with the way that they are living and the kind of attitudes that they have. But I want to pick up on that word "*breaches*." Turn to Amos 6:11. This is addressed to those who are "at ease in Zion, which trust in the mountain of Samaria." Those who, "*trust in our military strength, in our economic ability, and our position in the world*."

Amos 6:11 For behold, the LORD commands, and he will smite the great house with breaches, and the little house with clefts.

If you look in the margin, He says He's going to blow it into bits. Turn to Lamentations 2:13. This is addressed to "the daughter of Jerusalem."

Lamentations 2:13 What thing shall I take to witness for you? What thing shall I liken to you, O daughter of Jerusalem? [Is that the church?] What shall I equal to you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your breach is great like the sea: who can heal

you?

Did you ever stand on the seashore and look out over the ocean — out to the horizon? That's the picture here. The split is so wide - between the church and Himself - it's "*as wide as the ocean*." It's so wide that He says, "Who can heal you?" "*Who can pull that breach together and sew it up and heal it?*" Are we in bad shape, or what?

From my position, it seems an awful lot of people either have no idea what's going on, or maybe they don't care. (I don't know what it is.) But, the split between us and God - *that* breach - is awfully great.

We're going to introduce another word into this. It is the word "*wall*."

Amos 2:7 The Lord has cast off his altar, he has abhorred his sanctuary, he has given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast.

The enemy streamed in and made a great noise - yelling and cheering about what they had accomplished. We'll go to one more Scripture on this line as we tie this all together. Go to Isaiah 58:12. This is in regard to the Day of Atonement and the keeping of the Sabbath - things of that nature.

Isaiah 58:12 And they that shall be of you shall build the old waste places: you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called, the repairer of the breach. The restorer of paths to dwell in.

That adds an element of hope that the "*breach*" is going to be repaired.

Think of some of those Scriptures and notice that when we sinned and didn't turn to God, He broke down the walls, and breaches appeared. Put those four or five verses together, and that will give you the picture.

The word "*breach*" has a very interesting usage in the English language - as it pertains to our relationship with God and the church's present state. Very interesting. Here is a list of synonyms for the word "*breach*" taken from "The Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Word Finder." They are: "*break, gap, opening, rupture, split, alienation, schism*." I could have written down about another fifteen synonyms for this word, depending upon the context in which the word might appear.

Now here is the first definition for the word "*breach*." I think that as far as the situation in the church is concerned, it is really unusually appropriate. It states: "*Breach means the breaking of, or failure to observe a law or contract or standard*."

"*Breach means the breaking of or failure to observe a law or contract* (Shall we say

covenant?) *or standard* (Shall we say The Ten Commandments?)." Doesn't that almost sound just like I John 3: 4? "*Sin* (which separates, creates a breach) *is the breaking of the law - the transgression of the law.*" The second definition of breach is really rich. "*A breaking of relations; an estrangement; a quarrel, a broken state.*"

These two together describe almost exactly what has happened to the church as a result of breaking the covenant (as a result of breaking laws, as a result of sin). There has been a breaking of relations with God because of the church's failure, as a body, to live up to the contract that we made with Him.

In Amos 7, it says that God has out the measuring stick - the "plumb line." A "plumb line" judges and evaluates things in a vertical position. A level does the same thing for those things that are horizontal. So God has the "plumb line" out and He wants to see whether or not we are upright. When He measured us against the "plumb line," He found us leaning at a variety of angles - a variety of degrees off the center.

Now back to the word "wall." A wall in the Bible is a symbol of a protective barrier that provides a measure of protection, peace, and security. When a breach is made in it, the protection, the peace, and the security begin to dissolve. Vulnerability increases. The enemy can stream in, and people can be taken out as captives. That is why He said that the cows of Samaria are going to go out through the breaches, tied together like so many fish on a fishing line.

Spiritually "a repairer of breaches" is one who restores the right way — beginning with himself. He may have no influence or control over what others do, but he does have control over what *he* does, and when he repairs his own personal breach with God, the breach in the wall closes a bit. It's just like a stone or a brick is added to the wall, and somebody is again in a good relationship with God.

I mentioned again, toward the end of that last sermon, that I wanted to show you a couple of interesting things in Revelation 2 and 3. These things are interesting in relation to what is happening to the churches, and of course are contained in the messages to the churches there in Revelation 2 and 3.

Maybe these are some things you have already noticed. I never paid much attention to them [in this regard] because our focus, in these two chapters, was on [the concept] that they pictured eras that the church would go through. We're going to begin in Revelation 1 verses 1 and 4 - where the foundation for the book is established.

Revelation 1:1, 4 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven spirits which are before his throne.

Now the "*eras*" instruction may still be correct, but that is not all that is there. The primary focus of the book is on what happens after it is written. "To show unto his servants things which

must shortly come to pass."

That word "*shortly*" may be mistranslated. It can also mean "*quickly*." In other words, once it starts, it can happen very quickly. The book concerns itself with things that "shall be." That ought to be very obvious (from the contents of the book) to all who read it.

We are frequently looking at it, wondering what's going to happen. "*What does this symbol mean?*" "*What does this paragraph mean?*" "*How does it apply to right now?*" "*Can we fit any of the news events into what is written there in the book of Revelation?*"

So time keeps going on, and we keep looking ahead in time - wondering if this, that, or the other thing is going to apply. We all understand that the book of Revelation is an "end-time" book, and its primary focus is on things that "shall be." Revelation is a book intended for the end time, and I believe that the primary instruction in Revelation 2 and 3 concerns the end-time church.

Here is the line of my thinking: When Revelation was written toward the end of the first century, all seven churches existed at the same time; therefore the seven conditions - the messages described - also existed at the same time. Local and personal conditions to be sure, but all of them were within the greater church at the same time, and God considered all of them to be part of His church. Some of those churches had some pretty wide divergences from Him, yet He still considered them to be part of His church. They all existed at the same time.

So, why can't they all exist at the same time at the end (since Revelation is an end-time book)? Even as they formerly existed all at once, they will again exist all at once. In fact brethren, it is my opinion that we are living them right now.

Revelation 2:7 carries a thought [within it] that is in *all* seven of the messages. We'll just use this as an example.

To Ephesus, He says:

Revelation 2:7 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches: To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

The sense is that these messages for each church - are for all Christians. This means that the attitudes and conduct [described] dominate the group accused or complimented by Christ, but they also exist in the other groups as well; otherwise, the advice to whoever hears wouldn't apply.

In other words, the Ephesian attitude might also be in Smyrna; it might also be in Pergamos; it might also be in Laodicea. It might also be in Philadelphia, etc., etc. But, it dominated the church that was in Ephesus. The attitude that was in Smyrna dominated it, but there are some (in the other groups) that it would also fit. The same with Pergamos. The same with Thyatira. The same with Sardis. The same with Philadelphia. The same with Laodicea.

All the messages apply to all of the churches. All the messages apply to each of us as individuals, and it is a matter of, "*If the shoes fits, wear it.*" That's God's approach. We're to live

by every word of God. It is only with *that* approach that we can meet that principle.

Let's look at something here. To Smyrna:

Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which you shall suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days: be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.

The sense there is that tribulation is right over the horizon, isn't it? Fit that into the end time. Is tribulation very likely right over the horizon? I think so.

Look now at the message to Pergamos.

Revelation 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto you quickly.

It has the sense of "*I will come soon.*" Do we think that the return of Christ is shortly ahead? Boy! I sure hope so. That's the feeling we have - based upon what we see happening in the world.

Look now at the message to Thyatira.

Revelation 2:25 But that which you have already hold fast till I come.

There is no sense that they are going to die before He comes. His return is so imminent, He says, "Hold fast till I come." It's like He's saying, "*You only have a little while to hang on.*"

How about the message to Sardis?

Revelation 3:3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore you shall not watch, I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you.

If they were all going to die before He came, that last sentence wouldn't make any sense. They're going to be alive when He comes, because otherwise the threat carries no weight.

Let's look at Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:11 Behold, I come quickly.

This is very similar to one of the others. His time is not far off.

Let's look at the message to Laodicea.

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door.

Boy! I tell you, *that* is close! Very urgent!

What I have just read to you, indicates pretty clearly that at least six eras will be in existence at Christ's return - which lends further weight that all of these groups exist at the same time.

We're going to go back to Revelation 2 to look at some of those messages again, because there is yet more here. There is something there that is very interesting (considering the cause of the church's scattered condition at this time) as well as a solution, given by Christ if one considers all of these groups existing at the end (even as they did in the first century).

What we're going to find here is a common thread of advice running through them which follows the same pattern (easily seen) in God's relationship with Israel in the Old Testament. Perhaps the only difference is that, when combined with what is in the Old Testament, it is exceedingly more urgent in its admonishments.

Regarding Ephesus:

Revelation 2:4-5 Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have left your first love. Remember therefore from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent.

I'm going to interject something here. I missed that phrase - "Or else I will come to you quickly." That indicates that *all* seven of them are going to be in existence when He returns. Now go back to the thought here of Revelation 2:4-5. "You have left your first love." "Repent." Now here comes the advice - the common thread: "Go back to what you were doing before."

Now remember (in one of the sermons in this series that I gave), how Israel was happy to make the covenant with God. But when the cost — the sacrifices required to keep it — became more evident, they drifted. They wanted out. They started blaming Moses and Aaron, and indirectly God, for their problems. Later, when they were in the land, God sent prophets from time to time basically with the same message over and over again. "Turn you. Turn you from your way. Why will you die, O Israel?"

Now with Ephesus, we are looking at a people who had not so much drifted from the doctrines, but had changed in the way that they respected and applied those doctrines. Go to Hebrews 2:1-3. Hebrews was written to the Hebrew people in the first century who were drifting. The Ephesus letter applies directly to them.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip away.

The letter to Ephesus showed that they had let them slip. They were in the process of letting

them slip.

Hebrews 2:2-3 For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.

The Ephesians had become neglectful through the loss of devotion to this way. This is a very stern warning: "I will remove your candlestick." "Repent." "Go back."

You can't go back to something that you did not previously have. That's the key here. That's the key to our separation from God. It's going to be a major key in re-unifying us—going back to something that we had before. Repenting, turning, going back. We must never forget that we are involved in a relationship with a real live Being, and it's not just any being, but the One that we are to marry.

Would you want to marry somebody who could take you or leave you? That's what happened to these people. They had lost their devotion to the relationship. They still had the doctrines, but the devotion was gone. They didn't cherish Him anymore. They didn't cherish the relationship, even though they hadn't walked away from the doctrines. So He says, "Turn." "Go back."

It's good to recognize a hopeful sign — to recognize that it does not say that they had "lost" their first love. It says that they had "left" it. What God is saying is that the power to love was still residing in them, but they were going to have to stir themselves up and use it. Love is what one does out of consideration for making the relationship good, making it better than it had ever been before. They needed to stir up the spirit within them and go back to the same zeal and devotion that they had shown at the beginning of their conversion.

Now back to Smyrna. This is the only group that He has nothing even slightly negative to say. But, in Revelation 2:10, it does say the following regarding Smyrna:

Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which you shall suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried: and you shall have tribulation ten days: be you faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.

Even though He has nothing negative to say, He still exhorts them to do what? To be faithful, as in a relationship. Now get this. When one is faithful, one is remaining loyal to something one had previously been given. There's that common thread again - be it a contract or a standard, it was something that they had been given before and had agreed to. And so they were remaining loyal to it. There was no negative thing [said], but He does say, *"Hang on to what you have been given before. Be loyal"*

Pergamos is kind of interesting. Regarding Pergamos:

Revelation 2:13-16 I know your works, and where you dwell, even where Satan's seat is: and you hold fast my name, and have not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells. but I have a few things against you, because you have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So have you also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolatanes, which thing I hate. Repent: or else I will come unto you quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Sometimes we look at the meanings of the names of these cities, and this one is interesting. My Study Bible says that Pergamos means "*thoroughly married, like in a binding relationship.*" However, the context of those verses shows that they are in a relationship with a system - the wrong one! They've got the doctrines of Balaam in their congregation. They have got the doctrines of the Nicolatanes there as well. And so He tells them to repent, because some there (unlike Smyrna), had drifted from what they had previously been given. They had not been faithful in the relationship to Him, even though they gave lip service to the doctrines. There were some people who were holding fast.

Now Thyatira. We know this church is guilty of fornication. Spiritually fornication is another one of God's terms for being "mixed up with the world." Fornication is something that one should never do - let alone when one is supposed to be in a relationship with another. Fornication represents idolatry. Do you know what idolatry is? It is "*faithlessness to a relationship.*" Regarding Thyatira:

Revelation 2:25 But that which you have already hold fast till I come.

One can only hold fast to what one has previously been given. You can't hold fast to something that has not yet been given. They had been given something in the past. They had drifted away into a relationship with the world. Idolatry was present in their character. But Christ says, "Hold fast to that which remains" (something that had previously been given) so that you don't drift any further.

Regarding Sardis:

Revelation 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain.

Isn't that interesting. "Strengthen the things which remain." You can only have a remainder when you have been given something previously, and some portion of it is gone.

Revelation 3:2-3 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,

and hold fast, and repent. If therefore you shall not watch, I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you.

For many of these people, the relationship is dead. But, He still makes reference to what I am getting at in this message. "Remember therefore what you have received and heard in the past." It's like He's speaking - in the present - of something that they had shared together - in the past —something that He had given them. They received it and grasped it, but it was slipping away — to the extent that some of them were dead. The relationship was broken. And so to those who remain, He exhorts them to hold on to what they have been given. "Strengthen the things that remain."

Now Philadelphia. Everybody wants to be a Philadelphian it seems, because they mistakenly believe that He says nothing negative to them. Well, what He does have to say is minor compared to what He says to some of the others.

Regarding Philadelphia:

Revelation 3:8 I know your works: behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength.

There is the criticism, or maybe simply the statement of a fact. They are weak. They do have good characteristics, but they are weak. They have little strength.

Revelation 3:8, 11 And have kept my word, and have not denied my name. Behold, I come quickly: [Here it comes again!] Hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown.

So "*Hold fast, and don't let things slip away.*" Again I remind you that we can only hold fast to what we have previously been given.

Now Laodicea. Laodicea is so bad, so spiritually blind, so filled with self-righteousness. These things are revealed primarily in their attitudes and actions. "*They have need of nothing.*" The relationship, for all intent and purposes, seems to be forgotten. If they have need of nothing... Boy! If anybody doesn't have need of God, need of Christ, need of anything... Boy! They really think highly of themselves.

You understand they are not saying this verbally. Christ is reading their actions. Did you notice He doesn't even tell them to "hold fast?" Maybe there's nothing left to hold fast to. He simply exhorts them to repent, because they have so little remaining of what they received and heard in the past. There is apparently virtually nothing to hold on to - almost nothing to be faithful to.

Now here is another very interesting city name. It means (again according to my Study Bible) "*people ruling.*" Just think of what I just said about the Laodicean, and think about that name — "*people ruling.*" If we take this name to be indicative of their condition, then the name clearly indicates that God is no longer running their lives. They are simply doing their own thing —

while still professing to believe.

Can you see, brethren, from this resume (if this analysis of Revelation 2 and 3 is correct), that it is intended that, at the end time, all seven of these conditions will exist in the church. They will dominate this group, or that group — but all groups can have all the attitudes [at once].

Can you see also, why I've been saying over and over again that the church is going through a crisis of faith. It takes faith to be faithful. If we are not faithful (which is just another word for loyal), it means the things that we had previously received - that we were to be faithful to, loyal to (in keeping and doing) - are slipping away. We are no longer submitting to them. We're having a crisis of faith.

This was the major damage done by what the Tkachs did. They introduced doctrines that altered people's faith and left them confused. Left them wondering. Left them doubtful. Left them skeptical. Left them angry. Left them so frustrated they give up and just wander off. The messages in Revelation 2 and 3 make that abundantly clear when He repeats over and over again " *Hold on. Be faithful to what you have been given.*"

It takes faith to maintain and to build a relationship with God. Our faith brethren, has been very severely damaged. Our faith in God is not merely in His existence - but also in His purpose, His plan, and His way (as revealed through the doctrines that were given through Herbert Armstrong). It is the message that came through Herbert Armstrong which formed the foundation for the faith that Christ is telling us to hold onto.

Does it not say in the book of Jude, "Go back to the faith once delivered"? I'll tell you, brethren, Jude was not the only one to say it. John said. Peter said it. Paul said it many times. When we lose faith, it is because we are turning away from those things [once delivered]. They are slipping away from us, and very frequently, the culprit is worldliness.

There was a time, brethren, when we were zealously devoted to them. But we have neglected them (slipped from them in practice) and have grown faithless in tiny increments through the years. And so the solution that Christ gives us here is "*Hold on. Don't let it slip anymore.*" But He is of course hoping that we will do something about rebuilding it, and that is why He told the Ephesian church "*Go back and do what you did before.*" That is why Jude says, "*Go back to the faith once delivered.*" Recapture those doctrines, and recapture the zeal for practicing them.

The church has been in various states of disarray for over ten years now. It's been splitting seemingly endlessly. But there was a time (signified by this day of Pentecost), when the church was unified — perhaps as unified as it ever was in its entire history. As Richard mentioned in his sermon this morning, some say from that point on - it was all downhill for the church. Turn now to Acts 2: 41-47. I want you to see two things that are written here when the unity of the church was at its very peak.

Acts 2:41-42 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And [here is what they did] they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

There are two things that I want to emphasize here. There are actually four things listed here, but three of them actually fit within one category, and one stands out by itself.

1) They were devoted to the apostles' doctrine. In the first century that was "the faith once delivered." It means they were constant. They were resolute. They were single-minded. They were determined in learning and following it. They didn't drift. They didn't swerve from it, and it produced what it's supposed to: faith in God; faith in His way; faith in His church; confidence and trust in putting these things into practice. They were deeply convicted.

2) They took care of each other. They were very much concerned for their brother's welfare. This was not communism - where they voluntarily sold all their goods and turned them over to the administration of the church to distribute equally to all. But, rather, it indicates they voluntarily looked out for each other personally (individually), striving to meet the needs of each other.

Do you know what this is? This is "feeding the flock." And ALL of the body is participating - not just the ministry. Everybody is nurturing everybody else. The whole body participating in two major things — pursuing the faith once delivered, and taking care of each other.

The New Testament epistles make it very clear that later (whenever the first century church was splitting), the people were counseled to get back to the faith once delivered (which means that they had drifted from it). They were no longer doing the things they were doing here in Acts 2. Again, why? Why counsel them to get back to the apostles' doctrines?

If you begin to put this together - asking where faith arises from - there are two major components. The one is God, and what He does. That's covered in I Corinthians 2. He opens up our mind. He predisposes it for us to receive something. The second is expounded upon by Paul in Romans 10. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes by the word of God." Those two work together. What God does - by a miraculous act of His mind, of His will, of His spirit (working in our minds) - is combined with the message *He gives* to the person *He SENDS*. It is to be the basis and foundation of our conversion and our faith. From that point on, it becomes a matter of learning (more specifically) the things that are contained within the message that were delivered to us.

It's not real hard to see what happened to the church. We can see the causes. But the solutions are not so easy. Once things (like this) begin to get a hold on a person's mind, it's not all that easy to get the person turned back. That's something that God is going to have to do, working with each person.

What I have just described, is a major part of the process that has put the end-time church in its present condition. What remains to be seen is whether each of us will follow God's clear instruction by doing what He said.

This is a personal insight, but I think that it's at least part of the solution. I think that the real beginning of turning (to follow God's instructions given both to Israel and to the first century church) starts when a person sees this chaos for what it is — a very positive action of God's providence that stirs us from to becoming less passive, taking more control of our lives to prepare for His kingdom.

Apparently not very many, in the first century church, did - and the church practically passed from existence. Those of you who are older (in the church), might recall Mr. Armstrong quoting every so often from a book by Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, "History of the True Church." Hurlbut said, "*When the curtain rose on the church at the beginning of the second century, it was far different from the one immediately after Christ's resurrection.*" The change was not good. It had lost its doctrinal purity, devotion, and the enthusiasm it had at the beginning.

It remains to be seen what we will do individually and as a group. But remember this, that Christ did not form a corporate body - a church - as an act of vanity. It WILL BE UNIFIED AGAIN!

When God has those who are faithfully yielding ready, He will work to preserve it. Christ has promised that the gates of the grave will not prevail against the church. It will not die out, because God is faithful to His word. But we must be on the same track as He is, and He allows us to exercise our free moral agency to do that.

He is using this time to purify (to refine) the church and to change individual personalities. He must do this because the church is [going] to provide some important functions for the preparation of His people. It will provide common teaching of God's truth - to perfect the saints, to provide fellowship for those with a common spirit, to provide a base for preaching to the world.

The church's focus is the "family relationship" with the Father, through Jesus Christ, in preparation for the eternal relationship in the Kingdom of God. Now considering the church's scattered state, and the undeniable fact that God scattered it because of our sins, now is the time for personal, deep, and heartfelt repentance. Repentance is a change of mind. It is a change of attitude. A change of heart. A change of direction - in our thinking. That's where conduct-change begins.

II Chronicles 7:13-16 If I shut up heaven that there be no rain [Yes, the former and latter rain. How about showers of blessing? How about raining out His holy spirit? How about producing fruit in us?], or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name [the church of God] shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now my eyes shall be open, and my ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there forever: and my eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually.

What has happened to us *is* a positive thing - provided by a loving God. He has provided this so

that we will turn — if we care at all for Him, for the church, for the salvation He's offered, for Jesus Christ. He says that He will hear. We can look at other prophecies - most of which pertain directly to Israel, and to the church - He IS going to save it. The gates of the grave will not prevail against the church. Repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart.

I have a quote from Herbert Armstrong's sermon of June 24, 1978. This is the sermon when he said "Wake up!" fifteen times. Do you think he wasn't inspired to know that something was going wrong in the church? He may not have understood the specifics of it, but he certainly had enough guidance from God to recognize the church was off the track even that far back. As I said before, it never did get fully back on the track. Some changes were made, and things improved for a while. As long as he was alive, there was enough of a relationship with him, and enough of a sense of loyalty to him (and with God) that things held together reasonably well. He left the church in fairly good condition. But boy! As soon as he died, "that's all she wrote!" So he knew. Now listen to this. This is the last paragraph from that sermon:

"God knows our weaknesses. He is a forgiving God. If we will only turn back to Him, He will still put out His arms and receive us and love us. You can imagine how much the love of God can come into your minds and your hearts, and how much He can love you. God loves His church. Now the time has come for us to have a revival with our own hearts. It ought to strike home to us and condemn us. It's our fault, and I'm not just talking to you that I see here today. I am also talking to the other churches that will hear this on tape all over the world. Unitedly brethren, let's get on our knees, and let's get back to Christ [Herbert W. Armstrong, 1978 Sermon]

Well, he's still talking to us.