

Church History (Part 5) AD 1934 - Present

Philadelphia and Laodicean Eras

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If you'll recall, last week I was on the fourth part of the CHURCH HISTORY series. This week will be part five, and it will be the last part. Some how, this week I managed to cram what I wanted to say in here. I had to leave an amazing amount out, and I probably read a hundred times more than I have in my notes here. But I think that what we have here will give you the message that I want to portray of the church in the last eighty years or so.

In John 15, Jesus spoke with His disciples about the necessity of bearing fruit.

John 15:16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

This is something we saw that the Sardis Era did NOT do. They produced very little fruit, and that fruit [which they did produce] did not remain. If you'll turn with me to Revelation 3, the apostle John recorded a similar exhortation to the church in Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:10-11 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.

An important lesson can be drawn from these two verses. If our bearing fruit is to continue, we have to keep up the effort; and the effort has to be diligent. The fruits—or qualities of character—that God is building into our lives must be maintained and improved upon. We must produce fruit, which means that we can't stand still.

In Hebrews 3:1, Christ commands: "Let brotherly love continue." And like some trees that bear fruit continually (among them lemon, orange, and grapefruit), the fruit produced by God's Spirit should be never ending. Even though hundreds may eat of your fruit, the supply should never run out. In other words, we are to produce a perpetual harvest of rich spiritual fruit. This is an area many who were called failed to achieve, because they didn't faithfully persevere in producing fruit.

Sometimes we get discouraged because we don't grow as quickly as we think we should. We become frustrated because we don't see tangible fruit being produced. This frustration is especially noticeable during trials. One reason might be that we start to respond in a right

direction, but stop too soon—just short of completion. Or, we may become bored with the routine that is required to correct the problem. Or, we may become just plain weary of well doing. (And this appears to be what Sardis had done. So Christ warns Philadelphia not to do the same. In the positive things that He said about Philadelphia, obviously they listened and reacted.)

We can't allow ourselves to give up, or get discouraged. We have to accept the time God needs to work out His purpose in our lives. The more we zealously practice the way of God and accomplish good works, the more fruit of righteousness God will be able to produce in us. This is why God's testing seems so often and consistent, and there seems to be no break from trials. But, God promises *a way of escape* to those who love His law. In I Corinthians 10:1-13, the apostle Paul gave the Corinthian congregation encouragement in this area.

I Corinthians 10:1-12 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

In that statement we see a common problem throughout the history of God's church. All the eras—at least somewhat, and at some times—would allow themselves to reach this point.

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation [trial or test] 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.

The same principle holds true for the Church of God in the Sardis Era. There seemed to be no escape from the worldly temptations and Protestant enticements that Satan threw at the church. But at the critical moment, when the church in the Sardis Era was breaking up as a result of these problems (especially its problem of being spiritually dead), Jesus Christ separated A FEW people in Oregon to begin what we think of in church tradition as *the Philadelphia Era* of

His church.

I'm going to give you some dates for the Philadelphia Era, but they are not "concrete." These are our best guess estimate type of dates for the Philadelphia Era. Some people may have other dates, but these are the dates that I am going to use. In my investigation into CHURCH HISTORY, this is what seems to be the most accurate. So I am going to say that the Philadelphia Era was from A.D. 1934 to 1972. That's two nineteen-year time cycles.

Prior to the 1930s, Herbert Armstrong had been very successful in business as a younger man. But more than once God had swept his business away, in order to humble him. Then God called and converted him, and Herbert Armstrong began to search for the one true church he knew must exist. Somewhere there had to be the church Jesus Christ said He would build and that nothing could destroy.

The Church of God people in Oregon seemed to have the truth; but something was wrong, and he couldn't put his finger on it. They seemed "spiritually dead;" and, consequently, Herbert Armstrong never joined their organization. But he began to fellowship with the people. He was asked to speak to them, and was finally ordained by the Oregon Conference of the Church of God in June of 1931.

God revealed the true identity of the modern "House of Israel" to Herbert Armstrong. He also came to see that God's annual festivals were commanded to be kept today—along with the weekly Sabbath. He began to understand their meaning, but it was seven years before any others in Oregon kept God's annual Sabbaths with Herbert and Loma Armstrong.

The world didn't notice the Sardis Era of God's church because it didn't proclaim the Gospel with power, and they didn't exploit the possibilities opened to it by the development of printing.

But at the critical moment when the Church of God Seventh Day was breaking up, Jesus Christ separated nineteen people in Oregon to begin the Philadelphia Era of His church. (No doubt there are people left who are part of that era, but primarily today we are in the Laodicean Era of God's church.)

Revelation 3:7-13 "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. 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. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

You'll notice there that God has nothing negative to say to the Philadelphia church. So, in one sense, they were unusual; and the things that God did with the Philadelphia Era were unusual in the great things that He was able to do in witnessing to the world. He began to use Herbert Armstrong—and the small group that He had called to assist as co-workers—to reach the world with the *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God, unlike any era before or after.

In verse 8, Christ promised *an open door* before the church. The "door" here is an opportunity to broadcast and publicize Christ's gospel. This verse implies that some people actually wanted to shut the door that Christ opened to the church. So we see there that there was resistance to it, and we know that Satan was the one leading that resistance.

Christ opened the door of radio to His church. Since the first Sunday in January of 1934 THE WORLD TOMORROW broadcast did not miss a week on the air until 1972. It began on television on a regular basis in 1967, and this proved to be an even greater "door" than radio. The Philadelphia Era had only *little strength* of itself (as verse 8 states); but it magnified greatly through the modern "doors" of radio, television, the printing press, and the public appearances of Herbert Armstrong before world leaders—and, most important of all, through the power of the Holy Spirit! It [the church] was very active during that era.

Problems of a personal nature still plagued the church on a regular basis. About the 1950s, Herbert Armstrong wrote: *"In those early days I used Raymond Cole, a pioneer student, as a 'trouble-shooter,' to restore peace where frictions had developed."* So even though God has nothing negative to say about Philadelphia in Revelation 3, there were problems of the normal types that human nature ends up getting involved in; and they had to be taken care of. But generally speaking, things were quite smooth in the church (comparing it to all the other eras).

In 1953 (one nineteen-year time cycle after the beginning of the Philadelphia Era) the gospel of the Kingdom of God had gone coast to coast in the United States. Also this year, the work of God expanded to Europe.

Herbert Armstrong wrote in the June 24, 1985 issue of The Worldwide News (which was the issue that gave the history of the recent era of God's church):

Up through the 1960s, with new lost truths being continually restored to this era of God's Church, there had been little contention or opposition within the Church. But the wily Satan was not to allow this growth in harmony and peace and unity to continue without opposition.

We were to learn the truth of Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed. (Luke 8)

The seed sown was the Word of God—the Bible. The Word was being proclaimed over the United States, Canada, Britain, Europe, and other

parts of the world. It fell on four types or classifications of people. The first and largest number were those by the wayside. They heard, but "then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." These were the millions who heard, but the truth of God's Word never sank in. There was no response from this largest number, though they did hear, at least in part.

The second group were those on the rocks, who, when they heard, were interested and received the message with joy. Many of these were baptized. But they had no root, and temporarily believed, but because they lacked depth of purpose or capacity to grow spiritually, soon dropped out.

The third group were among thorns. When they heard the message they were baptized. But the cares and interests of the world choked them. They still wanted to be like the world. They were liberals. They brought forth "no fruit to perfection."

The fourth group, smallest of all, were those on "good ground," which kept the word and came out of the world, growing spiritually in character and biblical knowledge. They brought forth "fruit with patience," in various degrees.

So it has been, especially since 1969 in God's church.

The world looks on such events occurring in any church as evidence of corruption or wrongdoing or something wrong and reprehensible in the church. Worldly clubs, societies, or churches do not generally seem to have such troubles or controversies. Satan does not bother them. They are already on his side. But Satan seeks to destroy God's one and only true Church.

So we see that Herbert Armstrong realized, starting in about 1969, that the Laodicean attitude of God's church was beginning to creep in, in a noticeable way.

The Philadelphia Era received most of its persecution from the world on individual members for Sabbath keeping. I remember back and I know that during that time my father lost several jobs because he was keeping the Sabbath in the Radio Church of God. Back then, an employer could fire someone for any reason he wanted. The laws weren't as strict as they are today, and lawsuits were very rare in that type of thing. I know many—even many of you—have lost jobs because of the Sabbath (and some of you during this time period, especially so).

Even the children were persecuted for keeping the Sabbath and holy days. In the times that I remember in the '60s, I remember two examples in my own case. In the seventh grade, after coming back from the Feast of Tabernacles my homeroom teacher stood me up and she said, "*Now Martin Collins is going to tell the class about his weird religion.*" That's how she

worded it. Today you'd think "lawsuit." But that's the way they were.

I was raised in the Baltimore, Maryland area, which is a Catholic colony, so to speak. And in eighth grade, my homeroom teacher (who was another Catholic) used to call me "*Preacher*." He would never use my real name. He would just call me "*Preacher*" or "*Jew*" when he called out my name. So the persecution back then was different than it is now, because the laws allowed it. That's just a couple of examples. But what impact that had on me today, I can guess one thing; and that is I am terrified to stand in front of people and speak to this day. But that's just a personal example that I saw back then. And I'm sure many, many, many people had to go through serious trials during that era.

But that Philadelphia Era, as I said, Christ doesn't say very much bad about. And there's so much information about it that I can go into, but I am actually going to stop there on the Philadelphia Era of God's church. I'll cover more about it towards the end, as I summarize the sermon; but I'd like to get into the *Laodicean Era* because there's so many (in one sense) more lessons to learn—though of a negative nature—than in the Philadelphia Era. Also we've heard many sermons and examples of the good things that Philadelphians have done.

So I am going to say that the Laodicean Era goes from A.D. 1972 to the present. At the end of this sermon I will explain to you how they are not only *eras* but also *attitudes* and *historical aspects* as well. But in contrast to the Philadelphia Era, the Laodicean Era received most of its persecution on faithful individual members from within the church, as we will see later.

Having attended the Church of God since 1963 (when Worldwide was called the Radio Church of God), I saw firsthand many of the events that transpired during the 1960s, '70s, '80s, and '90s. And I can attest to the fact that there *was a definite transition* in the church's attitude around 1970 to 1974.

The humility, teachability, and brotherly love of the brethren prior to 1970 (just throwing out a general year) was replaced by the less moral, rebellious, and anti-authority attitude of the people who surged into the church through the evangelistic campaigns of the early 1970s. This attitude deteriorated into the "ME" attitude that so typified the world in the 1980s, which further degenerated into the "NOW" attitude of the 1990s. This trend went from "*I want it.*" to "*I want it now!*" This and other self-centered traits typified the Laodicean attitude we see very obviously throughout the church today.

In 1972, THE WORLD TOMORROW radio program was taken off the air for a time; and the Worldwide Church of God, as a corporate body, ceased to preach the gospel publicly to the world. The only verbal preaching of the gospel was by ministers to the members in the local congregations.

The Protestant attitude began its infusion into the church in the early 1970s—and maybe as soon as 1969, as Mr. Armstrong noticed. It coincides very closely with *the Laodicean attitude* seen in the church at that time. Beginning in the Worldwide Church of God in the 1970s (especially with the influx of the large numbers of what we might call "converts" as a result of the evangelistic campaigns of Garner Ted Armstrong and other evangelists) Protestant and Laodicean approaches and doctrines were flowing into the church. The Laodiceans have the trait of constantly striving over doctrines, with a never-ending pursuit to liberalize and water

down doctrine. And this is a trend that we saw constantly from the early 1970s, and even to the present.

In 1974, a large number of ministers conspired against Herbert Armstrong because of their differences of opinion on various doctrines—especially Pentecost, divorce and remarriage, healing, and tithing. They were impatient and wanted their "pet doctrines" changed quickly. Let's see what James has to say about being impatient.

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

What these rebellious ministers didn't do is that they didn't remain patient and wait for some of the doctrines to be changed in the way that they needed to be changed. But they took it upon themselves to take it into their own hands. So they missed out on developing this patience that James talks about here.

Had these ministers had patience, real errors in doctrine would have been corrected by Herbert Armstrong in due time. Thirty-five ministers rebelled against him, formed their own church and incorporated as the Associated Churches of God. They took about 2-3,000 people with them. Some Worldwide Church of God congregations were devastated. For example: Richmond, Virginia (if I remember correctly) lost 80-90% of its members; and then Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (where some of you on line with us today were there at the time) lost about 60%. I am not sure of that percentage, but I know that it was quite high—the number that these ministers had pulled away in their rebellious attempt to change doctrine.

According to an article in March 10, 1974 issue of the Dallas Times Herald:

Kenneth Westby, former regional director of the Worldwide Church of God and chairman of the board of trustees of the new church, said there will be several differences in the operation of the new church compared to the Worldwide Church. They include no requirement for tithing...[and] local autonomy in the operation of the church with no central authority.

So these are some of the changes that they couldn't wait for Mr. Armstrong to change (and obviously he never would have).

While the rebellion and conspiracy festered in Worldwide and just prior to the forming of the Associated Churches of God—Garner Ted Armstrong (Vice President of Worldwide at the time) issued a letter to the brethren, dated February 25, 1974, in which he said:

I am writing this letter with a heavy heart, in the midst of a vital emergency which is striking at the very heart and core of this great work of God!

Heresy, collusion, every form of chicanery, backbiting, disloyalty, and rebellion have reared their ugly heads among many of those even within the ministry!

I have had to declare a state of emergency throughout the entire church—canceling all Bible studies, deacons' and/or elder' meetings, special meetings, Spokesman's Clubs or meetings by any minister, elder, or deacon in the entire Worldwide Church of God for the time being!

So you can see there how serious this whole thing had become—with the rebelliousness of those ministers. This rebellion was about forty years after the beginning of the Philadelphia Era of the church in 1934. *Forty* is the number of *trial* and *testing*. But keep in mind that the "eras" overlap. That is why I suggest that the beginning of the Laodicean Era was 1972, but it looks like this was a significant event in the Philadelphia part of the church as well (in the overlap).

According to the August 6, 1979 Worldwide Church of God Member's Hotline newsletter, Herbert Armstrong wrote:

During these years from 1970 on, I was oversees a great deal of the time—even up to 300 out of 365 days of the year. Garner Ted had threatened ministers, and those who knew what was going on, with being fired if they communicated to me what was being done.

There came to be a total lack of response from ministers when I repeated requests during 1975 and thereafter. I was being shut out of all authority in the Church Christ had used me in starting and building.

Ministers were crying for more and more watering down of truths Christ had put into His Church through His Apostle. For example, a number of ministers either had not been really converted, or had slipped so far from Christ by lack of prayer, that it was too embarrassing for them to anoint and pray for healing. They were demanding that healing be eliminated.

Meanwhile, in these same years, a small group of self-professed "intellectuals" were busy preparing the STP (Systematic Theology Project).

The Systematic Theology Project was the number one official symbol of this *Protestantizing* of the church. It also brought out the rebellious attitudes in the Worldwide Church of God in the early to mid-1970s. The STP (which the evangelist Dean Blackwell referred to as "Slowly Turning Protestant") was pushed on the ministry as a new doctrinal approach to the truth of God. In the May 21, 1990 issue of The Worldwide News, Joseph Tkach's Personal admitted this:

I have instructed that we undertake a long-term plan of setting down

the basic, clear foundational truths of God's Word in a doctrinal manual.

Some work along these lines had already been done in the Systematic Theology Project. Let's remember what Mr. Armstrong wrote regarding the STP:

[Quoting Mr. Armstrong...] "*While it MAY be that some or even most of this STP is in conformity to those original teachings through God's apostle, some are not.* [And I, Martin, emphasized "not" there.]

Therefore I [Mr. Armstrong continues] declare the ENTIRE STP null and void until updates or authorized corrections, approved by me, can be produced."

Joseph Tkach went on to say:

Of course, Mr. Armstrong never had time to do that. But now, so that you are aware, some of the STP material may be corrected and updated for use in helping produce a new doctrinal manual.

During the final eight years of Herbert Armstrong's life, he intensely denounced the STP—calling it *Satan inspired!* This Laodicean rebellion against God's truth so disturbed Herbert Armstrong that he was still condemning it just a few months before his death. Here is what he said in the June 24, 1985 issue of the Worldwide Church of God newspaper, *The Worldwide News*: On the Pasadena campus more and more friction developed between the Liberals and those loyal ministers and members who held to the biblical truths God had placed in His Church. It was a sort of cold war of nerves.

On the Pasadena campus more and more friction developed between the Liberals and those loyal ministers and members who held to the biblical truths God had placed in His Church. It was a sort of cold war of nerves.

It had become custom to hold an annual ministerial conference of ministers at Pasadena headquarters. In the 1974 to 1977 conferences, these meetings had been marred by controversies over doctrinal issues.

Just before the January 1978 conference, I was determined to prevent doctrinal controversy. I was also due to leave on another round-the-world trip. I had decided to postpone the trip until after the conference in order to keep controversy out of the conference. But the one to be left in charge in my absence urged me to remain for the opening morning session, so that I could open the conference, and keep my departure at 12 noon; and he gave me his word no doctrines would be discussed in the conference, only administrative matters.

I agreed to this. I opened the conference, left immediately for the

airport and had lunch on the plane. I was going first to Japan, then across the North Pole to Europe, and into western Africa before returning to Pasadena.

I had not gotten very far out over the Pacific Ocean that afternoon, until in the afternoon session of the conference a voluminous printed work called "Systematic Theology Project," or "STP" for short, was distributed to the ministry with special instructions that this was a definite outline of basic Church doctrines, and no minister was to preach anything contrary to this treatise.

I knew absolutely nothing of this STP, or that it had been in preparation. It had been carefully concealed from me. It was a flagrant violation of the promise made to induce me to leave so this doctrinal change in Church teaching could be given to all ministers without my knowledge. I knew nothing of this STP, in spite of claims made by others, until a copy was brought to me by some loyal ministers in late April or early May of 1978 when I then notified every minister in the world to return his copy immediately and ignore all its liberal doctrines and teachings.

It has come to my attention that some of the liberals, no longer members of God's Church, have claimed that I did know of this infamous STP project. That is positively not true. A few papers on one or two subjects, which were not liberal, had been brought to me in Tucson, Arizona, but no clear mention was made of the preparation under way for producing this STP project. None of the liberalizing teachings in the STP were shown to me or approved by me at this time.

There's no doubt where Mr. Armstrong stood on this. Herbert Armstrong, once finding out about this project, put a stop to it and commanded ministers to return their copies of the STP to headquarters. Many ministers did not! It was at about this time that Herbert Armstrong began his campaign to get the church back on the right spiritual track.

By the early 1980s, he stated that the church was back on the right track. But little did he know of the extent to which many of the ministers had allowed themselves to be *indoctrinated* with this Protestant approach to God's truth. Remember the old saying, "A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still." Well, many ministers and brethren were *of the Protestant opinion still*—just waiting for Herbert Armstrong to die. So you see that up until 1980 the Laodicean Era of God's church was marked by rebellion, after rebellion, after rebellion.

In this series on CHURCH HISTORY, we have seen *unconverted man's* characteristics of rebelliousness towards, and hatred and disdain for, God's way of life. The world's treatment and pursuit of anyone associated with the true doctrine of Jesus Christ and the example He set for us to emulate is always a threat to the world. God has allowed the members of His church to be tracked down, persecuted, attacked, and in many cases martyred. We see no difference

today in this end time as far as the attitudes are concerned. It's just that the laws of today prevent people from actually murdering God's people.

Immediately on the heels of the conspiratorial STP that attached Christ's doctrine from *within*, the church and its government were attacked from the *outside* with the help of disgruntled ex-members. (This was a mild precursor to the coming persecution of the church in the near future.)

In 1979, the State of California sought to destroy the religious freedom that was guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States of America.

Here is part of a report dated March 31, 1979 and entitled "An Aide Memoir re: State of California vs. Worldwide Church of God." It was prepared under the auspices of the Emergency Committee for the Defense of Religious Freedom, an ad hoc voluntary association of lay members of the Worldwide Church of God in good standing. It was published as an official record of the events surrounding the church's confrontation with the State of California. (As I read through this, the hair just stood up on the back of my neck, because here we claim so much religious freedom in this nation; but this was allowed to happen without anyone batting an eye.)

On January 3, 1979, without prior notice or warning of any kind, an armed task force descended on the headquarters complex of the Worldwide Church of God in Pasadena, California. It forcibly assaulted, seized possession, and took over control of the Church and its affiliated organizations, Ambassador College and Ambassador International Cultural Foundation. The task force consisted of a Court-appointed Receiver, retired Judge Steven S. Weisman, representatives of the Attorney General of California and private attorneys "deputized" by the Receiver, together with State investigators and law enforcement officers. The property and assets of the church and its related organizations were summarily taken over; the offices and records were seized and their contents rifled; cartons and files of records were taken and carried off without receipt, inventory or accounting by private attorneys as well as public officials.

The Church's administration was displaced. The Receiver and his deputies were heard by the Church employees to observe that the Church's founder and its temporal and pastoral head, Herbert W, Armstrong, "was out" along with his personal advisor and chief deputy, Stanley R. Rader. Mr. Rader's executive secretary was summarily fired and other personnel were insulted, intimidated and formally advised that any resistance or disobedience would result in instant dismissal, if not contempt proceedings or even jail.

Acting pursuant of the supervisory powers contained in the ex parte court order issued in secret, without notice or hearing, the Receiver took control of the entire administration of the Church and its affiliated

organizations. One of his first acts was to instruct United California Bank, with which the Church had a \$4 million line of credit, on which some \$1.3 million was owed, to stop payment on all outstanding checks.

As a consequence checks totaling approximately \$1 million, issued in payment for items ranging from salaries and welfare benefits to television and advertising media, were refused payment by the bank and returned. The bank also withdrew the Church's line of credit, declared a default on the loan, called it, and paid itself by offsetting Church assets on deposit. The Receiver by this single stroke completely destroyed a hitherto impeccable credit rating, which the Church had labored years to build.

Locks were changed on the executive offices of the Church, and Church officials were excluded from their offices. The Church publishing facilities were seized; contact between the chief pastor and Church membership was choked off. Communications were screened and impounded to the extent that they contained language of which the Receiver disapproved. Using a confidential list, taken from confiscated records, the Receiver distributed a Mailgram to the ministry around the world, instructing Church ministers to advise their congregations that they were forbidden to send their tithes or voluntary offerings to anyone other than the Church's Court-appointed Receiver in Pasadena!

Isn't that interesting? And that's in these here United States. Continuing on with the quote:

The forgoing events occurred neither in Hitler's Germany, nor yet in Stalin's Russia, nor even in Europe during the religious wars of the Middle Ages. They occurred in 1979, in the United States of America.

That's a very sobering report, but it gives you an idea that things aren't always as they seem on the surface. At any moment, the government can move in and take over a church, or keep people from meeting together.

It's interesting that the original charges were filed by ex-members of the Worldwide Church of God, who had either real or imagined grievances against the church and sought vengeance on their ex-fellow brethren. How many times throughout the church's history has the persecution of the brethren of the true Church of God been instigated or aided by false brethren and ex-members (wolves in sheep's clothing)? I hate to say it, but often—as you already know. And the civil and religious leaders are always anxious to take part in the attacks if given a chance, and they themselves don't feel threatened.

Once Herbert Armstrong died (on January 16, 1986), the "wolves" inside and outside the Worldwide Church of God were able to have their way with the "sheep." They began to "*clarify doctrine*," as they phrased it—when in reality they were subtly changing essential teachings of Christ to conform to mainstream Christianity, which is dominated by Catholicism and

Protestantism. They were actually bringing back the Systematic Theology Project under a new cover—once again slowly turning the ministers and the brethren "Protestant." (I say "*slowly turning*," but many were already that way; and so what they did was that they used it to continue to completely turn individuals "Protestant.")

Since I lived in Pasadena, California—working for Ambassador College and the Worldwide Church of God from 1986 to 1990—I saw this first hand, and recognized similarities to the STP within one and a half years of Herbert Armstrong's death. The "wolves" used the same scenario as they had in the 1970s. The same doctrines were changed, in the same general order, and in the same way. So they hadn't been successful in the 1970s, but they were in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Satan doesn't give up!

Many of those Worldwide Church of God leaders, who themselves taught these heresies, are now in some of the major splinter groups. It seems it wasn't until the Worldwide Church of God started changing the doctrine of the Sabbath that they left the Worldwide Church of God. The other major changes in doctrine didn't really faze them. So they took many of those Protestant beliefs with them into the various large groups. *With God's allowance*, Satan saw to it that his lies would continue within the fellowship of God's church.

Many of those ministers who went from Worldwide Church of God to other splinter groups continued in their agreement with the changes in doctrines of the Worldwide Church of God up until the point that they left. By that time, they have been *deeply indoctrinated* with Protestantism.

The "fallen woman" of Revelation 17 is clearly identified as the great false church, which ruled over the kings of the Roman Empire from A.D. 554 until 1814. Her doctrines and practice (falsely called by Christian names) are actually the same identical "Chaldean mysteries" of ancient *Babylonian Baal worship*—denounced in the Bible as the most idolatrous of all false worship! And isn't it interesting that Baal means "Lord." What is it that you hear people proclaiming in the Protestant churches? "*The Lord this and the Lord that.*" And what they are not realizing that they are saying is "*Baal this and Baal that.*"

Revelation 17:5 says that she is called "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS." She is a *mother church*. She has daughter churches. She calls the Protestant denominations her wayward *daughters*. They came out of her in protest, calling themselves "Protestant." They—like the mother church—participate in the governments, politics, and affairs of this world. By this, they reject the government of God! All Protestant denominations contain a certain mixture of false Roman doctrine that have been handed down from the ancient Babylonian idolatry. It is an organized system, even though divided into hundreds of sectarian organizations.

Malachi 3:1 states that Jesus is to come to His temple. He came to a physical temple of stone, wood, gold, and materials in 27-31 A.D. This temple—or church—that Jesus comes to is NOT divided like the Babylonian mystery religion and mainstream Christianity.

Ephesians 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles

and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The church, of course, is spiritual today (not like the physical temple that Jesus Christ went to in 27 A.D.) The church at Ephesus was composed of former Gentiles. They were no longer foreign Gentiles, but fellow-citizens with the saints—a spiritual nation. They are also a Family—a "household" of God—*the Family of God*. As a "building," they are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. As a "building," they are fitly framed together—growing into a holy temple, a spiritual temple. That is totally unlike the Protestant and Catholic descendants from the Babylonian Mystery Religion.

When I worked for the Worldwide Church of God in Pasadena in 1988, I remember hearing that 50% of the members of the church had started attending within the previous ten years. So, from that statistic, you can see what a turnover there was. Not only a turnover, but there were also new members coming in. And it was so substantial that the impact of the liberal mentality coming from the world was overwhelming to the church. With this huge influx of new members, and the turnover of existing members, the whole *character of the church* had long before become Laodicean.

Most of you know only too well what has transpired in the last 12-15 years. The same problems that sporadically hit the Church of God down through its history have now accumulated into the *Laodicean Era*. Conspiracies, liberal discontented brethren, splinter groups, doctrinal difficulties, false teachers, opinions galore, self-righteousness, faithlessness, and disloyalty—to name just a few.

Now an old satanic deception has been repackaged and is rearing its ugly head to try to grab those who are scattered. Today there is a movement developing, and gaining popularity, that encourages "brethren" to invite outside preachers to speak to them on the Sabbath. Recently I received this e-mail encouraging just that. The e-mail, which tells a clever story that is designed to impress the emotions, is entitled BUILD BRIDGES, NOT FENCES. I'll just read this story quickly.

Once upon a time two brothers, who lived on adjoining farms, fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in forty years of farming side by side, sharing machinery, and trading labor and goods as needed without a hitch.

Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding, and it grew into a major difference; and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words, followed by weeks of silence.

One morning, there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days work," he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there I could

help with? Could I help you?"

"Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor. In fact, it's my younger brother. Last week there was a meadow between us; and he took his bulldozer to the river levee, and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll go him one better. See that pile of lumber by the barn? I want you to build me a fence—an eight foot fence—so I won't need to see his place, or his face, anymore."

The carpenter said, "I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post-hole digger; and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you."

The older brother had to go to town. So he helped the carpenter get the materials ready, and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day—measuring, sawing, and nailing.

About sunset, when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job.

The farmer's eyes opened wide. His jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all! It was a bridge—a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other! A fine piece of work, handrails and all; and his neighbor (his younger brother) was coming across, his hand outstretched.

"You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I've said and done."

The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge; and then they met in the middle, taking each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder.

"No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother.

"I'd love to stay on," the carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build."

That story, in itself, is a nice story—one that warms our heart. We feel good about it, and we want these bridges to be built. But notice the application—how missed it is, and deceitful. The e-mail went on to say:

In Arizona, brethren who feel they do not belong in a formal Church of God have organized "Building Bridges"—a once a month gathering of brethren who invite other speakers of various background to attend their service.

So you can see the danger of that—after having gone through the eras of God's church throughout its history; and seeing that every time this type of thing was done, it led people astray. But you see how they've tied in such a nice story, but not compared it directly with what's being done. That is, calling in other speakers of *various backgrounds*. That means they don't know what they are teaching, but they are asking them to come and speak to them.

Here we see people—claiming to be "brethren" of Christians—looking through a smorgasbord of ministers who titillate their senses and agree with their form of religion. These religious hobbyists have rejected the government of God, and have set themselves up as "the standard of righteousness"—replacing Jesus Christ and God the Father, who give clear instruction through the apostle Paul NOT to do this.

II Timothy 4:1-4 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

For more scriptures supporting this, I give you I Timothy 6: 3-5, also verses 20-21; II Timothy 2: 16, and verse 23; II Timothy 3: 1-5; Titus 3: 9-11; and Jude 4. All of these warn that we are to avoid these types of situations and these types of attitudes. In one of those scriptures it said that these are proud people, who come around preaching these things in this way.

In the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, we discover that all seven letters to the seven churches have three distinct approaches:

Historical and chronological references indicating that the seven churches followed consecutively down through history, while also overlapping one another.

(This has been the foundation of how I organized these sermons on CHURCH HISTORY, just to give organization to it in the way of eras.)

Character references indicating negative and positive attitudes, characteristics, and works. Jesus said, "I know your works."

Remember in John Ritenbaugh's May 4th sermon, he listed these scriptures and mentioned this about "I know your works." Those locations in scripture are Revelation 2: 2, 9, 13, 19 and Revelation 3: 1, 8, and 15—where it states "I know your works."

What He is saying there, partly, is that He knows their character, He knows their traits, He knows their works and what they do. And so Jesus Christ gives them His assessment of the attitude.

Prophetic references to Christ's Second Coming, indicating that the churches and

their attitudes exist just before Jesus Christ's return.

Now, here's a quote from John Ritenbaugh, from the sermon he gave on May 4, 2000 entitled SOVEREIGNTY, ELECTION, AND GRACE:

I think what is given here in Revelation 2 and 3 is an end time prophecy. Here we have a description of seven congregations—perhaps seven groups—into which all of the people of God in some way fit in the period of time that we are living in right now, just before the return of Jesus Christ.

So we see there that there are different approaches that we can study the letters of the seven churches; and I've tried to combine all three throughout these five sermons.

Five out of the seven references to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 indicate they are in existence when Christ returns:

Ephesus. (In Revelation 2: 5-6 it says, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.")

Pergamos. (In Revelation 2: 16, "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight

against them with the sword of My mouth.")

Thyatira. (In Revelation 2: 25, "But hold fast what you have till I come.")

Sardis. (Revelation 3: 3-4, "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.")

Philadelphia. (Revelation 3: 10-11, "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.")

And, of course, the Laodicean Era talks about them having to be tried by fire, which is an indication that they have to go through the tribulation. So, if you take those five or six, then you can also assume that the other one (with no mention of His return) is also included with those as being in existence at Christ's return. And you can take your pick—whether it's the attitude, or the characteristics, or the era that is in existence at that time. To me, if it is all or one of them isn't really all that important, but just the fact that we learn from it. I personally apply all three of those approaches here at the end time.

Here is a summary of the negative characteristics of "the called" of the Church of God, down through its history and at the end time:

Ephesus lacked diligence and love for the doctrine of Christ, thereby losing its first love. It ceased to actively carry God's truth to the world; and, in the process, they went to sleep spiritually.

Smyrna has nothing negative said about it by Christ. They were warned about infiltrators.

Pergamos compromised the doctrine of Christ. This was the church of evil surroundings, and it was infected with heresy.

Thyatira was guilty of harboring a false prophetess. They committed spiritual adultery with the Roman Catholic Church. They undervalued the holiness of the doctrine of Christ. Many just sympathized with the church, with little or no commitment to the teachings of Christ. Very few were willing to give up their lives for it. When the going got rough, they dropped away from what truth they had received—often neglecting the Sabbath.

Sardis is called the "dead" church because it forgot much of the doctrine of Christ and became spiritually dead as the result of a lack of real faithfulness and spirituality. It is accused of imperfect works, and they had misdirected efforts that were fruitless.

Philadelphia had nothing negative said about it by Christ.

Laodicea is called the "lukewarm" church because it is faithless, self-satisfied, and tolerant of sin. This self-righteous group constantly strives over doctrine because of their never-ending pursuit to liberalize and water down doctrine.

An example of this liberalization is that one professing Church of God minister recently stated that the story of Adam and Eve was a myth. Some of the split-off groups have officially changed the church's standard Bible version to the very Protestant slanted New International Version, which among publishers is considered half literal and half paraphrase in its translation.

Today many Church of God groups differ on the application of doctrine—for example, on Sabbath keeping and tithing. Tithing is taught that it is a matter of the heart, and not a command; but it is both. With some congregations in other groups being organizationally *autonomous*, the members determine what the minister preaches—hand tying him from preaching the truth of God. As a result of this wrong type of church government, the minister doesn't "cry aloud and spare not" as God commands in Isaiah 58: 1.

Isaiah 58:1 "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet.
Tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

Since the minister under this type of government fears the loss of his job (because of having to please the members), he is unable to admonish the people of their transgressions. Also, in this bottom-up government, some Church of God congregations are very liberal and others are very conservative. The brethren determine what the minister preaches—according to human reasoning, not godly guidance. This is *afaitless* form of government, which promotes disunity.

In many of the Church of God groups the view of the Sabbath is similar to the Protestant attitude that it is good to seek your own pleasure—even when it contradicts Isaiah 58:13. The Sabbath is NOT kept as holy time. Many seek entertainment during this *holy time*, while many neglect Bible study and prayer. Some spend hours in restaurants, feeding the lust of the eyes and the flesh. Others play sports, or work out; and some go as far as to do secular work on it.

There has been a similarly Protestant de-emphasis of keeping the law of God. In many congregations, the Ten Commandments have become *suggestions* rather than commandments! When appearing before the great God of the universe, many people wear casual clothes. Casual Sabbath wear reflects casual attitudes, and a *casual attitude* is a Laodicean attitude. Remember the prophetic description of the Laodicean attitude in Revelation 3.

Revelation 3:17 "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..."

We have to yield to being molded into the image of God—growing in character, in grace, and in knowledge. This *choosing* is a joint effort: We work, and the Father works. Our part is to show Him our faithfulness, loyalty, commitment, and obedience. It is those who overcome with the help of the Holy Spirit that God places with Him on His throne. *Sanctification* signifies that we are impregnated with the Holy Spirit and stamps us with a seal that says we have God's Holy Spirit.

II Thessalonians 2:13-17 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

God calls many, but He selects only A FEW. He makes His truth available generally; but, by comparison, only A FEW succeed in passing the test for inclusion with the firstfruits. So, tens of thousands of people throughout the almost 2000 years of the history of the true church have been introduced to God's truth, and then gone back to the religions of this world.

I just want to take a moment to look at the positive characteristics of the seven churches. I don't want it to be all "negative;" but as you realize in reading through them, it is mostly negative things that are said about the churches—but there are some good things. So here is the summary of the positive characteristics of the churches.

The common link in the praise that Jesus Christ gives the churches and the difference between *the called who fall away* and *the chosen* is that "the called who fall away" are the faithless, proud, and opinionated; but "the elect of God" are truly faithful, humble, and teachable. From all that I've read about CHURCH HISTORY, these are some of the key factors that I've noticed:

Ephesus is persistent in service to God, and their patience is mentioned twice. They are strong in discipline, including self-control.

Smyrna is poor in material possessions (in contrast to the Laodiceans), but rich in faith. Because of their faithfulness, they were strong enough to be sorely tested in their appreciation for the doctrine of Christ. Many remained faithful, even though persecuted to death.

Pergamos is steadfast in their identity with Christ. They actively evangelized much of Europe, witnessing of the coming Kingdom of God. Many remained faithful, even though persecuted to death.

Thyatira is the church of good works at their latter end. They had the fine character traits of love, service, faith, and patience.

Sardis is credited with keeping God's name. Only a few faithful saints stayed pure, by overcoming and adhering to the true doctrine of Christ.

Philadelphia is called the faithful church. It is known as "those who have their fellowmen as brothers." (That's part of what the word 'Philadelphia' means.) The Philadelphians show love towards human being by obedience to the law of God and by carrying out God's commission—that of warning the world of the impending destruction that hangs over it, and of the coming Kingdom of God. This era did not deny Christ's name—including His nature, character, personality, and power. And they kept (that is, both believed and practiced) His Word.

Laodicea has nothing good said about it by Christ. Although it is a Sabbath keeping church, there is still nothing [positive] said about it. Of all the doctrines of Christ, the most visible and the one God uses as *the test commandment* is that of the Sabbath to narrow down where His church exists. It is only the first test of many tests in search of the true Church of God. Christ's advice to this church focuses on being zealous for God's way of life, and repenting of hidden sin. And, obviously, some in the Laodicean Era do that.

It is essential to God's plan to preserve, train, and perfect His church. We find all that the seven churches persevere through is for the purpose of refinement (in using a general category).

Psalms 66:8-12 Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard, who keeps our soul among the living, and does not allow our feet to be moved. For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through the fire [or, trials] and through water [purification and baptism]; but You brought us out to rich fulfillment.

That's what God's goal is for the seven churches—to bring His people through all of these trials, and into "*rich fulfillment*." Though the experience of metalworking is unfamiliar to most people, we still talk about God's *melting* our hearts, and purifying or *refining* us. We tend to see this individualistically, rather than corporately; but God does both—because by refining us individually, He refines His church corporately. Our actions individually affect the church corporately as a whole—as a Body.

The Bible often stresses refinement's positive benefits, rather than the element of judgment—although both may be involved. This is why the refining process requires the judgment that sin be removed from the Body, beginning on an individual level.

In this CHURCH HISTORY series, we have seen that (throughout the last almost 2000 years) God's people have experienced the same types of trials, tests, and persecutions. Some time periods have had more severe trials than others. But, regardless of the time period, God have *tried* and *tested every individual He has called*—for the purpose of separating out and completing His "Elect," in preparation as first fruits for the Kingdom of God. "Many are called but few are chosen."

The true Church of God is spiritual (not physical). It is NOT some politically organized denomination that one joins. We are NOT baptized into any humanly devised organization, but into the Body of Christ. Jesus did NOT die for one organization called a church. We can't join the true church. Only God puts us into it! The church is called "the Body of Christ" because it is a *spiritual organism* whose Head is Jesus Christ (just as a husband is head of his wife, as we read in Ephesians 5: 22-24). Sadly, even this is not a popular concept among the Laodiceans.

From the beginning, the church was subject to the rule of God. It was NOT a government set up by human beings. Jesus is the Head of the church. The true Church of God is one spiritual church, composed of scattered members and united in spirit. The church that Jesus is building is composed of those scattered individuals who have God's Holy Spirit.

But God has often used organizations to further His preaching of the gospel. And Worldwide Church of God is a prime example of an incorporated body that—by its worldly incorporation—was able to further preach the gospel to the world than it would have otherwise. So there are times when incorporation will help the church more easily promote God's way of life.

If we have submitted to God in faith and obedience, and are genuinely repentant of our sins,

have accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, were baptized with full submersion in water, and had ministerial hands laid on us so that we may receive the Holy Spirit; and if we have done all the required things and produced good fruit—it is still by *the grace of God*, through faith, that we receive salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of God.

The major principle regarding *God's part* in working with His church is reflected in the number of sermons in this series. There have been five, and "5" represents the number of *grace*. What we see throughout the history of God's church is that it is by God's grace that His people will be saved. But, of course, there is work to be done. And faith without works is a dead faith. So we do have to produce faith and works; but we don't earn salvation with that.

What we see consistently through the church's history is the *unmerited pardon* of the *weaknesses* of the elect of God! It is NOT the blind grace of the tolerance of sin (that Protestantism falsely calls "love"). Rather, it is a deep commitment by God the Father and Jesus Christ to see Their plan for the salvation of mankind through to the successful development and completion unto perfection of the first fruits of the Kingdom of God—followed, at another time, by the salvation of the rest of humanity.

These are great rewards promised to the called who overcome: *spiritual food* (Revelation 2: 7), *a new name* (Revelation 2: 17), *authority* (Revelation 2: 26), *robes of righteousness* (Revelation 3: 5), *a permanent position or responsibility* (Revelation 3: 12), *enthronement* (Revelation 3: 21), and *an eternal inheritance* (Revelation 21: 7).

In God's dedication to work individually *with each of us*, He generously forgives our sins—as we repent and overcome them! It is by *the grace of God* that we are given the opportunity to be among the first fruits of the Kingdom of God. I'm going to read Romans 8: 27-39 and end with that, because it couldn't be stated any better by anyone else.

Romans 8: 27-39 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 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. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation [or distress, or persecution], or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in

all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Who could say that better?