

A Search for Identity

Our Worth in God's Eyes

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Last night, I gave a brief overview of what is happening in just one area of this incredibly evil world in which we are living. I am sure that for most of us, these past eight or nine years have been years of increasing concern over the state of the world, wondering how long it can hold out before it just blows itself into smithereens. Even more so, you have felt very deeply about what is going on in the church. You have felt the pressure. You have felt a great deal of concern about it. You have been stressed out, in many cases, because of it.

These events have forced us to go through a process, to reach some conclusions that we thought we would never, ever have to go through again. It was a process very much like coming into the church in the first place. In the wake of the spiritual degeneration of the Worldwide Church of God, we have once again been asked by God to evaluate what we believe and then choose with which group we are going to fellowship.

The process is still far from over. The Worldwide Church of God is still breaking up, and the groups that have formed as a result are still forming. I can guarantee that some of them are even now in the process of breaking up and splitting further. Some of them are trying to identify themselves as the *rightful*, the *only*, the *true successor* of the Worldwide Church of God or Herbert W. Armstrong. They perceive that they are the work of God because of something they are preaching, or because they are in possession of the government of God, or because they have the most leaders who surrounded Herbert Armstrong, or that they stuck with the sinking ship longer than anybody else so they ought to be considered the true church. They establish a criterion that becomes the hallmark of that group. The church is split in several different directions.

As we just heard in the sermonette, what has happened is not all that unusual in the church of God, and I am going to give you more examples as we go along. The question has to be faced, because it is one of immediate concern to us. The question is, "Will the church ever come back into unity again?"

At the beginning of this sermon, we are going to explore some concepts involving unity and what has happened in the recent and maybe not-so-recent history of the Church of God.

Psalm 133:1-3 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

We just observed the Day of Atonement, which commemorates the time when Satan will be put away and all the world can begin to come into oneness with God. It was Jesus' prayer in John 17 that we be one with God. However, when we look at some scriptures and the history of the church, we are going to see that there never has been unity in the church. It has never been achieved in all of the history of the church, except for a brief period of time beginning in Acts 2.

Unity is an ideal that *is* going to be accomplished, because God is able to bring about what *He* sets *Himself* to accomplish. It will not come necessarily because *men* strive to bring it about, however worthy that goal may be.

Amos 3:3-6 Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? Shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?

Amos sets forth this series of concepts that is so obvious it hardly needs explaining. That is his purpose. He used it to set forth ideas that any Israelite should have been able to understand. The basic notion of the verse from which we are going to spring is in verse 6—that God is the sovereign ruler in His creation, and *nothing* happens within it without Him being aware and in a position to say yes or no. I want you to think of this in terms of what has happened within the church.

We see this principle given by Jesus in Matthew 10.

Matthew 10:29-31 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear you not therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.

That is encouraging! How much is a sparrow worth? If we are only worth more than a couple of sparrows, how much are we worth?

Can you see that? Do you understand anything about the incredible mind with which we are dealing? He is *so* aware of His creation that a little sparrow cannot fall of which He does not take notice. Whether it is in Siberia or Alaska or in the United States—way out in the Arizona desert, or in New Mexico somewhere, or up in the mountains of Colorado—He sees it! Do you think there could be a break-up in the church of God and He is not aware of what is going on, or that He is not around to pass judgment? You had better believe He passed judgment! "Yes! Let it happen!" Do you understand the importance of that? He gave His approval for the destruction of the Worldwide Church of God. He gave His approval for the formation of all of these little groups that are springing up out of the Worldwide Church of God. If He did not want it—if He did not pass on it—it never would have happened!

What I am saying is that you are sitting here *on purpose*. It is not just your purpose. I think somewhere in the picture is the mighty hand of God. These verses give us a stunning awareness of His ability to process information, make decisions, and contemplate multiple billions of things that are occurring each and every second. How awesome is that mind? We have trouble keeping track of one child who is all by himself in one room. Can He take care of us? Is He *going* to take care of us? Of course He is! We are His progeny, His kids.

I Corinthians 11:19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

Do you see that word *must* in there? It gives a sense that it is something that is *ordained* to occur. "There *must* be heresies among you." Then he gives the answer why: because God wants to see who really believes Him! He wants to see who loves His truth more than they love fellowship with a nice group of people, people with whom we might have been in fellowship for 20 or 30 or 35 years. There are times when God puts the nut on the anvil and hits it with a hammer, and all the nuts scatter in every direction.

There is nothing new about this concept. Paul had Old Testament patterns to which he could turn and write that in such an imperative way: "There *must* be heresies among you." God wants to see evidence of those who are willing to follow *the message* rather than a man, those who are willing to set themselves free from friends who are going in a wrong direction or deteriorating in attitude or conduct. It is not that we do not love these people. We may ache for them, but to stay with them in that kind of fellowship may not be the best—either for them or for us. Therefore, we have to step aside, even as you did when you stepped aside from your unconverted family to become part of the Church of God. You may have stirred up hornet's nests because you no longer keep Christmas or Easter. You are no longer together with them during the times when families would normally hold reunions and get together. You can no longer enjoy that. It is not because you do not love them. It is simply because the great God has intervened in your life, and He has given you an understanding of things that have caused you to walk on a different path, a different way than they. For right now, it has to be that way.

As we go through this sermon, I am going to show you that this splitting that is occurring is probably in the best interest of everybody. God would not permit it if it were not going to accomplish more than keeping us together would.

Go back to Deuteronomy, because I want us to see one of these patterns that God so clearly shows.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spoke unto you, saying, Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them; *you shall not hearken unto the words of that [preacher]...*"

A prophet is just someone who speaks under inspiration. It does not designate from where the

inspiration comes. There are more spirits out there than God, and those spirits can give inspiration!

Deuteronomy 13:3-5 "...You shall not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proves you, [tests you] to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear Him, and keep His commandments, and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him, and cleave unto Him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death?"

"The Lord your God tests you." I feel certain that is of what Paul was thinking when he wrote I Corinthians 11:19. God allows these things to occur because He wants to see evidence of who it is that believes Him and who loves Him enough to separate himself and follow truth rather than follow a group into error.

Look at what has happened. It has split what was formerly one body into many much smaller groups, some of which have exclusivist and competitive attitudes—even attitudes that are somewhat hostile toward the others that are not with their group. As we regroup, we find ourselves with some variation in some doctrinal areas.

We are going to add another biblical concept to this by turning to the book of Ecclesiastes. This is the section in which he says, "To everything there is a season, and a time, to every purpose under the heavens." Even a time, even a season, for God to scatter His church all over creation, we might say.

Ecclesiastes 3:2-5 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

What we are seeing here actually reinforces the previous scriptures; because when it is seen in the context of the whole book, this section is teaching us that what man wills to do is subject to a higher, greater will which overrides all the desires and works of men. Solomon is not saying that the things that men want to do are necessarily wrong. He *is* saying that events are moving according to a world plan over which man has *no control!* Some things are going to happen, and there is nothing we can do about it. It is beyond our limit. That begins to become clear further down:

Ecclesiastes 3:11-13 He has made every thing beautiful in his time: also he has set the world in their heart [He has given mankind big ideas, vision to be able to accomplish things, to put great organization

into the accomplishment of some magnificent project], so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end. [This is what I mean when I say that there are some things that are beyond man's control.] I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.

Solomon is saying that when one of these times comes along that upsets the apple cart—when a greater, higher, more powerful Will intervenes in the course of events because He has set the time for something to be done—Solomon is saying, "Relax. Where is your faith? God is still in charge. He is still on His throne. He still lives. He is still aware. This is not the end. There is more to come. Roll with the punch! Turn your lemons into lemonade! Do the best you can with the situation in which you find yourself."

What we are seeing here is a prelude to Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good to those who love God, and who are *the called* according to His purpose." Solomon says, "This is not a cause for sorrow, when something like this occurs." Rather, he sees it as a reason to be encouraged, because all things work together for good. There are going to be times in life when things do not go the way we thought that they would. Take comfort in the fact that God's overriding is really best, and we should rejoice at what He does permit us to do that's good.

Inject this into the things that are occurring:

Daniel 12:7 And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by Him that lives for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when He shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished.

What if God never scattered the power of the holy people? There it is, right there. He is going to do it! It fits right into His purpose. All things do not continue as we think they should. There comes a time when God throws us a curve. In His throwing a curve, it is for our good that it occurs. It is an ill wind that blows no good, and God discovers a good deal about us in our reaction to these things.

I think a fairly solid case could be made that since we are in the end-time and, in this case, the church is being scattered that, indeed, what has occurred is God's will. It was His will that this occurred. Even though He did not make anybody sin, those who needed to sin in order to bring this about did so; and it happened—a situation very similar to Pharaoh in Egypt.

We are going to add to this a passage from Isaiah.

Isaiah 45:5-7 I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded you, though you have not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is

none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, *and create evil*: I the LORD do all these things.

What He means by *evil* is better understood in the sense of calamity or trouble. "I the LORD create calamity, create trouble." Notice with what it is contrasted: peace! Peace unifies; but calamities, like war—or in the case of the church, apostasies and heresies—drive people apart. They divide and scatter.

God, in His wisdom and love, is for whatever it takes to bring about His purpose. In the case of scattering, though it separates and divides, it is but for a moment—and God will use it to bring about the unity that is coming! In order to really unify, He first has to drive us apart! He has to drive us apart to see where we stand. He has to drive us apart to see what we need so we can really be unified. He has to drive us apart so we can see what we need and so we can voluntarily and of our own free will do what it takes to be unified. He creates calamity to make us think about these things. That is why I said at the beginning of the sermon that God has required us to do something that we thought we would never have to do before—to re-prove everything in order to get back to the faith once delivered. Of our free moral agency, we can then choose to go in the right direction and cooperate willingly with Him.

Leviticus 26:27-28 And if you will not for all this hearken unto Me, but walk contrary unto Me; then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.

Leviticus 26:33 And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.

This is something that applies directly to the nation of Israel, but I want us to see the principle that God *will* scatter His people. We know from other places that He scatters them, and then He gathers them together. When He gathers them together, they have learned a very great lesson. They are repentant; and they are unified to Him, to themselves, to their fellow Israelites for a good period of time. Here we see scattering as part of a curse, a punishment. We must understand, as we go through this principle, that its overall purpose is to bring about good—to bring about unity with Him and with one another. What occurs is far better than would otherwise occur if God allowed the unity in sin to continue. It is sin that brings about the division and scattering.

Understanding this—that it is sin that brings about the division and scattering—what is your reaction in relation to what has occurred in the Worldwide Church of God? Do we point the finger of scorn only at those at Headquarters or only at the local leadership of the congregation out of which we came? This is very important: We had better not do that, because the church is a body. It is a living, spiritual organism. That is shown very clearly in the Bible. If the church has gotten so sick that sin has scattered the people all over the place, we were part and parcel of a very sick body—which means that we were sick too! It was not just the leadership's sin. It

was all of us. Some may not have been as sick as others; but, brethren, we have got to begin think holistically—the totality of the body—and not just think of ourselves as some independent cell that has no connection to the living body that gives us life!

I think that Daniel very clearly expressed this. I am not going to read it all, but I think we will read enough of it so that we begin to get the feeling. Daniel was in Babylon. Judah was in Babylon. They were not there because they wanted to be; they were there because of sin! They were being punished; they were being cursed. They were no longer in their own land. Daniel, being a man of God, wanted to do what he could about the situation. We find here that he is praying the in the midst of a very long fast.

Daniel 9:1-8 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; in the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years [What he did is he read the book of Jeremiah. He saw there that Judah was going to be in captivity for 70 years.], whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, "O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; *we have sinned* [it was all of Judah] and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and from Your judgments: neither have we hearkened unto Your servants the prophets, which spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs unto You, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither You have driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against You. O Lord, to us belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You."

We have not been cursed to the extent that Israel was, but let us not evade what has happened by thinking it was only they and not we, too.

In I Corinthians 12 is the analogy the apostle Paul makes in comparing the church to a human body.

I Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

The major difference is that Christ—the church—is a spiritual organism as contrasted to the physical organism.

I Corinthians 12:26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it [Do you see what that is saying? As the body weakens, *everybody* weakens.]; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it [As we can find in other places, God places people in the body as it pleases Him].

Understanding that you and I are part of that spiritual body and responsible for it—at least for our own personal spiritual health and well-being—let us add one more principle to this.

Ephesians 4:14-16 ...that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that *whichever joint supplies*, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

This situation is not one of "them and us"; it is all "us." We are all part of this body, and we have to think of the church in those terms. We bear a responsibility to each other. We bear a responsibility to the whole body. When the individual weakens, the body begins to weaken. I am, of course, simplifying this. It is more complex than that. Maybe one person sinning does not have a great impact, but it is the principle that I want to get here. We have a responsibility to the body, and we have to understand that the whole thing works together as a unit. That is why God has given us this kind of analogy.

With that in mind, go back to the Old Testament. I want us to see very clearly that there are times when God acts on behalf of His purpose. He acts on behalf of His people and does things that are very painful to us.

II Chronicles 10:16-19 And when all Israel saw that the king would not hearken unto them [the king here was Rehoboam], the people answered the king, saying, "What portion have we in David? and we have none inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to your tents, O Israel [they were saying, "Let us go home! Let us leave this place."]: and now, David, see to thine own house." So all Israel went to their tents. But as for the children of Israel that dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. Then king Rehoboam sent Hadoram that was over the tribute; and the children of Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. But king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem. And Israel rebelled against the house of

David unto this day.

II Chronicles 11:1-4 And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam. But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, "Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "You shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: *for this thing is done of Me*"'" [God wanted them driven apart!] And they obeyed the words of the LORD, and returned from going against Jeroboam.

You will find in II Kings 17:18-23 that *God* drove Israel into captivity. Jeroboam takes the brunt of the blame, because he was the leader, but all Israel sinned with him. Likewise, we were not guiltless while the leaders were sinning as well.

In Amos 9, there is a very encouraging set of verses in a book that seems to be a downer from the word go.

Amos 9:9-10 "For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve [The principle is following through: God commanded that Israel be scattered all over the earth.], yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, which say, 'The evil shall not overtake nor prevent us.'"

We understand that the scattering was not limited to Israel being within Assyria. It took hundreds of years, but Israel, as a result, ended up in central and north-western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, and South Africa, where they are to this day. We have a warning to those individuals who want to self-righteously separate themselves from any blame by saying that "the calamity will not overtake us"—that takes place in the book of Amos—virtually saying, "We are innocent." God is saying, "Oh, no, you are not!"

Go back to the New Testament to pick up a principle there—the principle of scattering. It begins to get, I think, very exciting.

In Acts 8, we find Saul consenting to Stephen's death, and a great persecution arose.

Acts 8:4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where *preaching the word*.

Is that not interesting? Scattering, from the biblical pattern, always takes place in the presence of sin—because sin divides. Sin creates calamity, and calamity divides. Therefore, scattering

takes place in the presences of sin. In this case, it was Saul making havoc of the church. As we can see, it is not always the church's sins. Sometimes it is the sins of those people in the world, but "the curse causeless shall not come." Even though it may not be the church's sin, the curse still reaches out and affects the church. At first, it may seem evil; but, in the long run, even the *curse* is going to be to the church's benefit. As Mr. Armstrong said, "God knows how to make lemonade out of lemons." It is a simple way of putting it, but it is a truism. As they scattered, the gospel was preached!

We can find in Revelation 12 the church being persecuted, and it says, "She went to her place in the wilderness." The historical reality is that it was not just one place. The church went to many places during that period of time. Do you realize that every time the church was persecuted and scattered and had to flee, even though it was traumatic for those people, it was merely the preparation for the *next stage* of God's purpose?

Between A.D. 68 and 70, Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. The Christians escaped because God provided them a way, and they went to Pella. Pella became the launching pad, and the preaching went even farther out. They scattered into Asia Minor, where Paul had already begun a few churches. They began to grow in Asia Minor, and they began to be persecuted there. When they were persecuted, they scattered into the Balkans. They went into Macedonia, what today is Yugoslavia, Romania, and those areas. After awhile they became too big of a burden for those people there, and they began to persecute them. Then they went into the Alpine regions: Austria, southern Germany, Switzerland, northern Italy, and southern France. They began to be a burden for those people, and were persecuted there. Then they went into northern France, England, and the Scandinavian countries. They began to be persecuted there. Where did they go?

This is what provided the impetus for these people to come to the United States. They went to Jamestown. They went to Plymouth. They established Massachusetts. They went to Pennsylvania. They went into Maryland, and settled into those areas. With them they brought the truth. Do you see what is happening? Every time the church is persecuted, they follow the Israelites who had preceded them there!

Let us update this to the 1980s and 1990s. I think you will all agree that the church is being persecuted—a spiritual persecution that took place from within. Our enemy at this point is not the people of the land or the government, but it is the real rulers of the earth—the princely powers that are now over the nations. They have gotten the people in high places and in low places, and the church has been persecuted. Now it is scattered. If this continues to hold the pattern, where is the next step? If the church always follows Israel, it is going to be the re-gathered Israel in Jerusalem. That is exciting! We have to go through this persecution first, though.

Revelation 2 and 3 contains the letters to the seven churches. We are all familiar with what those chapters have to say, but I want to propose to you a possibility: that they are much more meaningful to us at the end time than we have commonly thought. One aspect of these chapters is very clear: Nobody can disagree that these seven congregations existed at the time of the writing of the book of Revelation, near the end of the first century AD. A second aspect is also fairly clear: Even though there is only one church—one spiritual organism—each of the

congregations was very different in attitude, and some in practice, as well. However, Christ still accepted them as His church.

A third aspect that is not as clear to those who read this message is that each of these churches represents an era—a period of time that would be dominated by the attitude revealed in each message. Mr. Herbert Armstrong believed and preached this, and it was fundamental to our understanding of prophecy as it relates directly to the church. Mr. Armstrong was not alone in this. I have read Protestant commentators who expressed that this indeed is a possibility.

A fourth aspect is that all of the above points are true, but with the addition that the letters apply most directly to the church at the end time. What this means in practical application is that those seven churches are in existence right now—not with those names, of course, but with names that are suitable to the times in which the church is involved.

Revelation 1:1-3 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: Who bore record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Revelation 1:10-11 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last": and, "What you see, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea."

The name *Revelation* means "an unveiling" or "an opening up." What is being opened to our instruction, it directly says, is to *happen shortly*: "for the time is at hand." Taken together, in light of the 1900 years of history, these phrases mean, at the very least, "must shortly begin" or, if the message is intended primarily for the church when the bulk of the prophecies are fulfilled, then that phrase means, "right now!" It means, "in our day and age." It is a fact that with our present understanding, some of these prophecies were already being fulfilled at the end of the first century when this was written.

I think that the best explanation that I read on the phrases *must shortly come to pass* and *the time is at hand* was from *Expositor's Commentary*. They said that it meant "imminent in terms of prophecy, not imminent in terms of time. That is, that it is possible for the events to happen at any time; there is never a time that it is impossible."

I think it is obvious that the fulfillments of the prophecies of this book are the kind that evolves. That is, it takes a long time for them to be fulfilled—especially the ones at the beginning of the book (like the ones that are in Revelation 6). They are not, for the most part, momentary flashes in the pan. There is a reason that God did it this way: It enables Him to write something

that will keep the church vitally interested in watching, in being alert, all through the centuries until Christ does return.

Verse 10 pinpoints the period of time into which John was projected. John was in the first century; but God, using His powers, projected John into the time when the bulk of these prophecies was going to be fulfilled, called in the Bible "the Day of the Lord"—not a day of the week, as the Protestants claim, but a time when the prophecies will be fulfilled because God intervenes in world affairs as He has previously stated. It will be the time when the great bulk of these events occur.

Verse 11 then pinpoints those to whom the message was to be given. Now think about this: was the message of any value to the first century church? Almost none! Do you know why? Because from what we understand, it was not even written until somewhere around A.D. 95-100. The first century was already over! As far as we know, it is a possibility that there did not even exist a congregation any longer in the city of Ephesus or Smyrna or Pergamos. They could have been there, but I just want you to see that the setting of the book of the Revelation is not in the first century. It is in the twenty-first century! Ninety to ninety-five percent of the prophecies that are in this book are being fulfilled in the last fifty years. How then could the message really be intended for a church in Ephesus? You can see why Mr. Armstrong was led to see that these things were probably, at the very least, eras.

Revelation 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things *in the churches*. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."

Revelation 22, chronologically, is about a thousand years or so out in the future from *this* point in time. In reality, He closes the book to make a contact with the very first chapter of the book, to tie the whole thing together so that we will understand that these things are intended for the *end-time churches*. They are churches that may be very different from one another in terms of attitude and different from one another in some cases in terms of doctrine, as well. It is good to note that Revelation 22:16 is not intended just for the Laodicean church but all seven.

We understand that, in reality, there is only one church. Jesus said, "I will build My church." However, we do have seven different congregations, or groups, that are described in Revelation 2 and 3.

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.

Revelation 2:11 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the *churches*; he that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.

This phrase—*He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches*—is repeated in each message. There is an injunction. First, each message is for all seven churches.

It is not intended solely for the group to whom it is written. If God indeed has begun sorting His church, His people, into seven broad groups, we must then understand that the whole spectrum of attitudes is in *each group*, but one attitude will dominate in each group.

A second factor is that each message carries the same admonishment to overcome. This is especially interesting in light of Mr. Armstrong's charge to Mr. Tkach to "get the church ready." There is no praise in these letters for preaching the gospel. There is no condemnation for failing to preach it. This is not to say that the preaching of the gospel is *not* a responsibility; but it is to say that in the press of time, *overcoming* is more urgent.

Do not be misled by Revelation 3:8, where it talks about the open door. While some commentators will acknowledge it means an open door to preach the gospel, they almost universally reject it on the basis of two very strong arguments. They say that it refers to an open door of access to God Himself, and therefore to the Kingdom of God. The first reason is that an open door to preach the gospel does not fit the context of the seven messages. All of the messages involve moral, spiritual, and attitudinal strengths and weaknesses and are tied to overcoming. Second is the immediate context, right within the sentence: an "open door" falls between praise for being steadfast and faithful and reinforces the description of Christ as the one Who has the Key of David. A key is something that opens, locks, or unlocks. David was king. The king carries the key to the most valuable place, and only he carries it. Furthermore, Christ is the door giving access to the Father and access to the Kingdom of God. He is the one to whom our judgment has been given. We do not get into the Kingdom and we do not have access to the Father unless He passes on it. He has the key.

A third consideration of these two chapters that is easily recognized is that some of these groups are *obviously* better than others. They are obviously more spiritually minded than others. *Everybody* wants to be a Philadelphian. *Nobody* wants to be a Laodicean. Nobody wants to be a Sardinian who is dead. Nobody wants to be in Thyatira, where that woman Jezebel dwells, and where they eat things offered to idols. Everybody wants to be either a Smyrnan or Philadelphian, because they can plainly see that those groups are not on the same level spiritually.

I think it should be obvious by this time that even though God is, in an overall sense, very concerned with unity, that there are times when He does drive apart those with whom He has made a covenant. If this analysis of the end-time is correct, why has God done this?

Just prior to Mr. Armstrong's death, he said that the preaching of the gospel is done. He did not mean that it was done for all time; he had not lost his sense. He knew that the Two Witnesses were coming, and he knew that was a responsibility for the church. What he meant was that the preaching of the gospel was done *forthat group* that God had raised up to support him.

Couple that with the charge to "get the church ready," and we begin to see something unfolding. We are not called primarily for what we can do in the here and now. The things that happen in our lives happen for what God is preparing us for in His Kingdom. We heard much of this in John's sermon this morning. God is getting us ready for what is coming. That is why I think it is so obvious that God is following the pattern of scattering His people, and then they follow the children of Israel to where the children of Israel are, because we understand what the

Millennium is about. During the Millennium, God is going to save the people with whom He made the covenant—Israel—and it follows naturally that since God has scattered the church, the church is going to follow Israel back to Jerusalem. That is where they are going to be re-gathered. What is happening now is preparing us *for that*. To me what is taking place is extremely exciting.

Do you understand that this is what Jesus' responsibility is to the Father? He is the High Priest. He is the Mediator of the New Covenant. He is the one Who is primarily responsible for preparing us to work under Him in some responsibility in the Kingdom of God. He said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," in John 14. "I go, but I am going to come again. I'm going to prepare a place for you." That is what He is doing. That is what He has been doing all of these centuries. Did you ever stop and think how many systems it takes to work a government? You have the executive branch. You have the legislative branch and the judicial branch. When you start thinking about the kind of government bureaucracies that have developed in these countries in which we live, we can begin to see hundreds—thousands—of capacities that people are fulfilling in order to operate the government of the United States or Canada or whatever country it happens to be. God's government, of course, is not going to have the huge bureaucracies that have developed in these countries in which we live, but God is going to have service-oriented capacities for us to fulfill in order to serve the people who are going to be coming into His Kingdom.

Think back once again to I Corinthians 12, where Paul used the analogy of the Body. I want you to think just a few minutes about your own body and how many systems you have operating within that body that enable you to have the kind of life, the kind of mind, the kinds of hopes and dreams, the kinds of activities that you are able to enjoy. You have a brain; you have a circulatory system; you have an endocrine system, a digestive system, an eliminative system, a nerve system, and on and on. There are all kinds of systems in your body. Is it possible that God is putting the finishing touches on parts of the organization of His government and that He is slowly allowing people to sort themselves out—and He gives a little nudge here and there—because He wants them to go into a certain area where they can receive the kind of training that is going to be necessary for them to have to help prepare them for the Kingdom of God?

Maybe we are part of the nerve system; I do not know. Maybe we are part of the digestive system; I do not know. Would it not be fun to be part of the brain, where we were *right in the middle* of everything? That would be exciting.

I have a vision that God is doing that very thing and that He has been doing this all through the centuries—working with His people to prepare the government, to prepare all of the systems that it is going to take to operate that government when Israel is re-gathered. When He re-gathers them, that government will be ready to go! It will be all in place, and He will not have to train us right on the spot because we will have received the kind of training necessary in this life. He has overseen it through His Son Jesus Christ. Now is the time of specialization, to put the finishing touches on some system that is a part of the Body, that is part of the church, that is part of the government. Christ is weaving it all together. I think God is sorting us for the specific kind of instruction that His church needs at this time.

I can already begin to see things happening within this group that I think are directly related to this. When you were in the WCG, if you did not get along with somebody, or if somebody offended you, what did you do? You could just bug off—"I do not need you; you do not need me"—and you attached yourself to somebody else. You cannot do that with us—if you want to stick with us—because there is nowhere to run. We can still run, and I know people have left us because of that. They did not want to face up. None of us enjoys confrontation. Well, some people do. Some people are "in your face," and they love it! However, most people do not enjoy that kind of thing. We would rather not get into something that may be disagreeable and discouraging. These kinds of problems are arising. This does not mean that they need to be solved immediately, but they do need to be worked on. They need to be overcome. It seems to be something that God is forcing on us—that we learn not just to live together but to really and truly love one another. That is something that we avoided in the Worldwide Church of God, except with a very small number of people. I do not know for what God is preparing us, but I see these kinds of problem arising so that we are forced to face them.

Revelation 11:1 And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein."

To be measured against something is to be tested against a standard. It is a method used in construction all the time, usually by a plumb-bob, or surveyor's equipment, yardsticks, rulers, tape measures—things of that nature. Judgment for the church, though, is against the character and righteousness of God Himself—against Jesus Christ. We might simply say that it is against the law of God—a concept with which we can deal. Please understand that God does not intend this judgment to be negative. It is a positive, not a negative. We have been privileged to be given the truth. We have been privileged to know what He is doing and working out. We are beginning to see this a little more specifically than we have, even in the immediate past. He is doing it in order for us to have revealed to us where our strengths and weaknesses are, so that when we see the weaknesses we can begin to take correction. We can begin to adjust our life, our conduct, and take action to correct the faults.

He warned people in the book of Amos that, "I am not going to pass by you anymore. Prepare to meet your God." That can be taken positively or negatively. In the book of Amos, it seems to be more on the negative side, but that admonishment was given to give the people the opportunity to get themselves in harmony with God. We should be able to take the positive side of this in its full strength and use this opportunity that has been given to us to do what it admonishes us in the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3: to use the time now to overcome, to get ourselves ready, to take the judgment of God in a positive sense, and to understand that He has scattered us for our own good.

Brethren, I do not feel at this time that we will ever be united again, until Jesus Christ returns. When He comes, we will truly be united, in a sense, because we have learned to live separately. In that time that we have learned to live separately, we have taken the opportunity to overcome and grow, and to grow especially in our love for one another.

I think that our expectations of unity within the church may not be realistic. However, be instructed by the New Testament, that the time in the history of the true church when one might expect the most of unity was right after Christ lived, died, was resurrected, and rose. For a short period of time, the church did have unity. Have you read the epistles of Paul recently, though? They were so disunited that, in some cases, you wonder how they held together at all. Division was everywhere in the first century church. Now we have reached a stage here when there is division within the church of God, but it is not for bad. It is for good. God is still on His throne, and He has allowed a curve to be thrown at us. We have the opportunity to make the best of it. Let us begin, right here at the Feast of Tabernacles, to take positive steps to grow in this love for one another, because that is going to produce a wonderful unity that is going to shine brightly before our Father.