

Avoiding Superficiality

Repentance

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This sermon is, in a way, kind of a potpourri. I have had a very great deal of difficulty organizing it because, in one sense, there is so much I want to say. And yet, in another sense, I seem unable to confine my thoughts in a single direction. I want to briefly go through Daniel 9 with you just to make sure that the words there are a witness *to you*—or *against you*—of what Daniel did whenever he found himself in virtually the same circumstance that we in the church of God are in at this time.

When we think of the context in which this was uttered, Judah had been scattered for about 70 years; and they were just about ready to go back to the Promised Land at the time that he prayed this. God was just about ready to release them. Daniel was very concerned regarding his observations of what he saw in Babylon; because what he saw discomfited him. I think that he saw some of the same conditions existing in Babylon that had caused the Jews to go into captivity in the first place almost 70 years before. His fears were justified, because (when we find that Ezra and Nehemiah went back with the group from Babylon to rebuild the temple and then to rebuild the wall around the city) we find that very few Jews went back. In fact, it was such a small number by Ezra's count (the count as actually given), that he called a fast. He wanted to make sure that the people would 'hide' on the way so that nobody would see them making the trip back there and think they were "easy pickin's".

When the church was finally begun in 31 AD, Peter went to Babylon because there was still such a large colony of Jew there. Indeed, they stayed *in the world*—in Babylon—and they continued to multiply.

Daniel 9:1-4 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, 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 supplications, 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.

I think that we can read between the lines of Daniel's prayer as we go through here and understand that he was in anxiety over their return. I think (in the research that I did in regards to this) quite a number of commentaries said that they feel that this was certainly not all that Daniel prayed. Really, all that we have here is *an outline* of what he said; and these were the high points. After praying it, Daniel went back to his office (or to his home, or whatever) and jotted these things down so that they would be remembered. God undoubtedly did that.

And so we are actually only seeing the essence of what he said. I am sure that he went into a great deal more detail.

When we pray for repentance, we go into detail about things that we personally know about—especially those things that happen in our lives (and maybe things that happen within "the work", of which we were cognizant). We did nothing about them then; but we certainly can ask God to forgive them.

You will see that Daniel begins here by establishing (between him and God) that he, Daniel, understood that *God is faithful*. He keeps His covenant. He keeps Leviticus 26. He keeps Deuteronomy 28. And when something goes out of God's mouth, it does not come back to Him empty. *There are no "hollow threats" with God!* I hope that we understand that. It is one of the things that makes Him God. He can *always* be depended upon. He is Jesus Christ—the same yesterday, today, and forever. "I am God. I change not."

Daniel 9:5 We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from your precepts and from your judgments.

It is kind of interesting that he does not even say "the Ten Commandments". He starts out with what we might consider to be 'the little things'. Of course, we understand that "the commandments" are included within these things. So he establishes, secondarily, that he understands (before God) the reasons why they went into captivity, why they were scattered. Please apply this to the church. This did not *just happen* because there was no cause. "The curse *causeless* shall not come," as Proverbs 26:2 says. We are under a curse; and we have sinned.

Daniel 9:6 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.

The next thing he establishes is *we were warned* and we did not listen!

Daniel 9:7 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.

He establishes next that *God was righteous in what He did*. We got what we deserved.

Daniel 9:8a O Lord, to us belongs confusion of face.

The next thing he establishes is why we are in such disorder. We are confused.

Daniel 9:8 O Lord, to us belongs confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you.

There it is! Why are we so confused? Because of *sin*. "Great understanding have they that do thy commandments." If we are doing God's commandments, then we are not confused.

Daniel 9:9 To the Lord our God belongs mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him.

Now begins to be given the groundwork of 'an appeal'. "*God, you are merciful.*" And He is merciful. God will forgive. Even though we have rebelled, God's ear is still open to our cry.

Daniel 9:10-11 Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yes, all Israel have transgressed your law...

Yes, "the body of Christ" (the church) was sick—from the top to the bottom. It wasn't just the leadership. It was all of us.

Daniel 9:11-12 ...even by departing, that they might not obey your voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses [Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28] the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he has confirmed his words...

Daniel says, "We were scattered." That confirms that God follows through with what He says.

Daniel 9:12 And he has confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven has not been done as has been done upon Jerusalem.

I will tell you (when you get home) you need *desperately* (almost) to make a very detailed study of the book of Lamentations and apply that to the church.

Daniel 9:13 As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand your truth.

Is Daniel still worried? You had better believe he is still worried! John Ritenbaugh is still worried too. Sometimes I get almost "overwrought" at what is happening to the church. And so I yell at you. And you must feel (sometimes) like I am blaming you. But I am just 'upset'—not at you, so much as at just what's happening. We have all been so foolish.

Daniel 9:14 Therefore has the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he does: for we obeyed not his voice.

Did this thing happen without God knowing what was going on? No. He was watching. Brethren, He engineered it!

Daniel 9:15-19 And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought your people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have gotten you renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly, O lord, according to all your righteousness, I beseech you, let your anger and your fury be turned away from

your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of your servant, and his supplications, and cause your face to shine upon your sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord" sake. O my God, incline your ear, and hear; open your eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by your name: for we do not present our supplications before you for our righteousnesses, but for your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do: defer not, for your own sake, O my God: for your city and your people are called by your name.

And this is *the church of God*.

Daniel, at the end, asked God for compassion on them (and on the city and on the temple). That God would forgive them and rescue them *for His own name's sake*. So that God Himself could be glorified by His people—because, as we are, we are not in a state to glorify Him. We need to be *turned around* (personally and individually).

Let us go to Jeremiah 23. We are still concerned about the state of the church and what the work of the church needs to be at this period of time. Here we can at least get a feeling of the *essence* of the chapter and what it is about.

Jeremiah 23:1-3 Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! Says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; You have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, says the LORD, And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.

We have a very wonderful promise from God—that He has not forgotten about us and that He will punish those who are most responsible. Even though there was sin (from the top to the bottom), the ministry bears the major portion of the responsibility (because we should have done something). He undoubtedly expects *more* of us than we gave to Him—and than we gave to you. He says:

Jeremiah 23:4 And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, says the LORD.

Jeremiah 23:20 The anger of the LORD shall not return [that is, back to Him] until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days you shall consider it perfectly.

Are we living in "the latter days"? Well, this applies not only to the nations of Israel and Judah; but it applies to the church as well. The church is going through this *as a forerunner* to what the nation is going to go through (in much more horrible terminology, much more horrible conditions). What has come upon us is very tiny and insignificant compared to what is going to

come upon the nation. These prophecies will be carried out against them. God is going to really chasten the leadership of the nations of Israel far worse than He has chastened us.

Jeremiah 23:21-22 I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

Brethren, it is a very great honor to represent God in the preaching of the gospel (whether it is to *the world*, or whether it is to *the church*). But there is an important principle here: if they are going to do that, they had better *be appointed* to do it.

Is God organized in what He does? Did He create a human body that is organized? That body is a *type* of His church; and all direction comes from the Head. Does the hand take over and do the job of the eyes? Does the nose take over and do the job of the ear? No. It only does the job that it is *appointed by God* to do. And so it is in the church of God! God expects those that He has appointed to do the job, to perform a certain responsibility—He expects them to do it. We bear that 'burden'. How many times have you read in the Old Testament "the burden of the Lord"? "The burden of the Lord" is that responsibility that God gave to the prophets. The word *burden* is very interesting. It *is* a burden (in a number of ways). If a person is going to be running out and preaching the gospel (wherever it might be—in the church, or to the world), he had better be appointed to do it; and he had better be *worthy* to represent the One who appointed him—God the Father.

Jeremiah 15:1-4 Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth. And it shall come to pass, if they say unto you, Whither shall we go forth? Then you shall tell them, Thus says the LORD; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity. And I will appoint over them four kinds, says the LORD: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy. And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because [in this case] of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.

I wanted to only pick up that right there—to express my opinion to you (once again) that we are purposely scattered by God. Nothing of this magnitude occurs without His permission! Now, if He has given His permission to Satan to be the actual "instrument of scatter" (to do His will), it still would never have happened if God did not agree that it needed to be done. If we stop to think, "Well, maybe Satan came up with this idea, and Satan got into the flock, and Satan scattered it." Do you think that Satan could do anything like that *unless* God gave His permission? Impossible! And, if God gave His permission, it was then His Will that it occur. Satan only became "the instrument."

Now, I did not leave the Worldwide Church of God with the idea of starting yet another splinter group. It was literally *thrust upon me* by people appealing to me to pastor them. How could I

say "No" to them when this is *the very reason why God ordained me* in the first place? The reason that I was ordained *was to 'pastor' people converted under Herbert W. Armstrong* (under the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong); and that I was part of that "chain" that God Himself had established within His church to be responsible to God for the feeding of His people. And so when there are hurt *sheep* out there who are confused, who are concerned about what is going on in the church, not knowing what to do, and they turn to *a shepherd* that they know and trust, and say "Will you *pastor* me?"—I *have to* do that! If I did not do that, I would be running from my responsibility to God. And so, I did. (That is how the Church of the Great God got started; because that is what I am doing.)

God did not ordain me as an apostle. I think that the New Testament makes it very clear that God *set some* (in the church) *as apostles*; and it is apostles who represent God before the world. They are His chief ambassadors. John Ritenbaugh is 'down the line' from them. We might call John Ritenbaugh "an assistant" of an apostle—even as Apollos was "an assistant" of the apostle Paul (but he was 'down the line'). So, that is what I am doing.

If you ever do more than just a fair amount of research into the term *evangelist*, you will come up with something very interesting about that word. In the first place, we tend to think of it as somebody who goes out into the world and "preaches the gospel to the world" (like an apostle does). Do you know that there is only one example in the Bible of an evangelist doing that? You all know his name as Philip. Very many commentators believe that Philip later was an apostle. The general conclusion regarding an evangelist is that their evangelizing *wasto the church*. One commentator said this, "Except for Philip, called 'the evangelist', no other evangelist is shown in the Bible preaching to the public." The same commentator said, "The evangelist preaching the gospel was within the church".

He also said that the term *evangelist begins in the Bible as a function* (Philip); *but it ends as an office* (Timothy). It began as a function of preaching to the public; but somehow or another, during the course of the first century, an evangelist became—exactly the way that Mr. Armstrong used the term—the title of a man who was 'supervisor' over other ministers. That is very interesting. So should an evangelist go to the world preaching the gospel? Well, I am not going to answer that definitively; because these are unusual times. I only present to you *that the evidence* (the evidence from the Bible, and Mr. Armstrong's use of the term) seems to indicate the answer to that would generally be "no". Just as an example, he ordained Stan Radar as an evangelist. He ordained Joseph Tkach as an evangelist. (Neither one of which went to the world at all.) Do you see the ambivalence that is there?

At the beginning of the Church of the Great God, I made it very clear (to those who were with us at the beginning) that we would not attack even those who were tearing the church apart. The reasoning behind that is that, if they were doing God's will, then it would be the same as calling God into question for exercising His authority to do what He wanted to do with His church. You can undoubtedly second-guess me; but that was the reasoning behind that. We still will not attack them. I do not like, at all, what they did. I do not like what they did to the church of God and the anguish that they have caused so many people. But God is the One who is calling the shots. My responsibility is not to call Him into question, even indirectly. My responsibility is to take care of my responsibility, which is to pastor people converted under Mr.

Armstrong. I will leave those other things to Him.

I also told those people that we would not proselytize and try to take sheep from some other pastor. We would be *led by faith* to let God give us whom He desired (and be content with whatever He supplied). We would preach (in greater detail) the basic things that we learned under Mr. Armstrong. We would speak out in regard to the truth of the doctrines that God gave us—*the faith that was once delivered unto the saints*. And, in that regard, we would let the chips fall where they may because I wanted this to be a work that was guided by faith—a work of *faithguided* and *governed* by God. I want to stay as far as possible from all of the business aspects that occupy so much of churches. So much of that effort (in the business aspects of "the work") was simply to grow for growth's sake, and to get big, and to have a name. Well, my perception of that is it is not godly. We will let Him determine the size of things.

I want to go into something that I wrote some notes on. It has to do with numbers. I just thought of this this morning. We've been conditioned to being *deceived by numbers* (by size)—despite the indisputable fact that God's Word teaches just the opposite. We have been conditioned in this society to think that bigger, higher, faster, farther determines *quality*.

Deuteronomy 32:29-31 O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! [A question...] How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up? [In other words, God had gone to work in their behalf.] For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges [of this truth].

Now what do we have here? Israel won a lot of great victories, even though they were vastly outnumbered. In God's Word, God keeps presenting us with illustrations that lead us to something that is inescapable to Christian life—size does not matter a hoot! One man (with God on His side) is more than any army that man can put together. And so, He gives us illustrations like *Goliath was the big guy. David was the little guy*. But who won the fight? David's brothers were the ones that looked impressive and strong and really manly (robust, big-muscled characters). David was just a shepherd boy (a stripling). But David, the little guy, was the one that God chose to be Israel's king. Gideon's army was only 300 strong; but they put a huge army to flight—because God was with them. Israel itself (God says in Deuteronomy 7) *is the least* of the nations. Elijah was *one* seemingly, against an entire nation. The Jews, who returned to Jerusalem to build the temple and the wall, were pitifully small in number (considering the size of the task, and the power and number of their enemies). The greatest Teacher and Preacher who ever lived ended His ministry with only 120 converts; and they all fled Him (and abandoned Him).

Today, the people that God calls (He says) are the weak, the foolish, and the base. There are two reasons for this. The one is that God wants us to 'redefine' (in godly parameters) *what success constitutes*. Success, to humans, is *to grow big*, to jump higher, to leap farther, to make things go faster than anybody else. That competitive drive that human nature has within it is satisfied with those kinds of things. I will not turn to the scriptures (because you know them); but God makes it very clear what constitutes success to Him. He tells it in the letters to the

seven churches that are read by those at the end-time. He tells us two things there. He praises people for *overcoming*. He praises people for *being faithful*. Now, *that is success!* Do you know why? Because it is *that which achieves God's purpose*. (It is not complicated.) It is from 'overcoming' and 'being faithful' that God is glorified. It is from 'overcoming' and 'being faithful' that the witness is made. It is from 'overcoming' and 'being faithful' that we mature and are perfected. That is what success is!

The second thing is just as important as the first—that we understand what success is in God's eyes. Get our eyes off 'numbers'. I am trying so hard (in a way) to do this. You will notice that we have not even announced how many people are here. We do not announce what the offering was. The reason is because of John Ritenbaugh. I do not want to get people focused on that kind of thing! We are not trying to hide anything. We have 'the books' right over there on the table, if you want to see them. But you know (especially those of you who were at Ambassador Auditorium during the time that Mr. Tkach was Pastor General) that, always, they were trying to wring more and more money out of you—and using competitive means to stir you up *You have got to beat Hawaii. You have got to beat Alaska's offerings*. Is that carnal, or what? It is. We have got to get our minds off those kinds of things.

I will tell you, I bet Gideon was shaking in his boots (unless he really understood) when his army went from about 22,000 down to 300 people. Ooooooh, boy! You have to be a man of faith and that is what counts with God. Success is *living by faith*—not by sight, not by numbers, not because we are big. We have got to understand God's definition of success and then we will start going in the right direction.

The second factor in this is: In order to do this, those who recognize this principle of what success is are *forced* to go to God for the strength, the power, the will, the understanding, and the wisdom to accomplish overcoming and faithfulness. They find themselves too weak to overcome and stretch out *to the perfection of God*. And so, what does that make you do? If you really want to reach what God terms as success, it is going to force you to go to God for the strength and the power to overcome because you know *you* cannot do it. Now, in short, God then forces *the relationship* upon us.

Philippians 2:12-13 Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

I want us to understand that this *going to God* is not merely a matter of going to Him with the "*gimmies*"; but, rather, it is going to Him within the framework of a dynamic relationship. It is good that we put these pieces together, just to be reminded of them. One of the major reasons that Jesus Christ died for our sins is given in Matthew 27: 50-51.

Matthew 27:50-51 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.

What I am picking up here is that 'tearing of the veil'—opening the way (symbolically) into the

presence of God (into the Holy of Holies), so that we can enter in. There is no barrier between Him and us. The barrier has been 'bridged'. The barrier (that was caused by our sins) is bridged by our High Priest, so that we can go into the presence of God. This is something that comes up very frequently in the Word of God. Sometimes it is a little bit veiled and maybe we do not see it; but it is there.

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: [Yes, we have peace, through the blood of Christ] By whom also we have access [into His presence, you see] by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Hebrews 6:18-19 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation [encouragement], who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil.

There is the strength! There is the hope! There is the power! There is the wisdom—for those of us who are 'the weak' and 'the foolish' of the world. But we will not ever *tap into that* unless we *take advantage of it* within the framework of a *dynamic relationship*.

Hebrews 10:19-23 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)

The purpose of Christ's death was not merely to pay for sins but also to provide *the means* to establish a relationship with God. If you are at all concerned about salvation, you had better be even more concerned about *the relationship*, because *that is the means of overcoming*. It is the relationship that counts! Not merely that we are forgiven.

Ladies, how would you like it if you were supposed to marry a man who, instead of spending time with you and giving his attention to the things of common interest to *your relationship*, paid attention to everything else? What if he gave his attention to his work and worked all hours of the day and maybe of the night. By the time that he came home he was so tired that he could not give you any time (or there were other things that he had to do); and so you never had much of a *relationship* with him. What if he gave his attention to his entertainment (his hobbies, his sports)? I will tell you, if you were intending to marry this person, it would not be very long before you would move on with your life. This guy is a loser. There would be nothing in terms of relationship there.

Now, if you were God (in that type of situation), would you help that person who was ignoring you, neglecting you? Come on now! God is no dum-dum. He is no sap.

How about you men? Would you be inclined to help a lady that you were supposed to marry) if

she was giving her attentions to every man who came along? Do I have to be more graphic, kind of like the Bible is? All she wants to do is to party, to drink, to play games, to be frivolous and silly, while some guy lies to her and makes every effort to paw all over her? How much and for how long would you be willing to help her if you had the power?

God gives powers to those who concern their lives within the framework of His concerns. And His concern is to reproduce Himself. To those, God gives strength. So, once we understand *what success is with God*, we have to make every effort to get into harmony with that—through prayer, through Bible study, through meditation, through fasting, through submission, through obedience. God gives His spirit to those who obey Him, to those who submit, to those who communicate with Him, and those who allow Him to communicate with them. There is a relationship there. Those kind of people God will bend over backwards for. He has already proved it because He has already given His Son. There is no more that He could possibly give that would be more valuable.

Before we leave, there is something that I want to warn us of. There is a trap that we have to be very careful to avoid.

I Peter 1:16-17 Because it is written, Be you holy; for I am holy. And if you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

I want you to see that God judges without respect of persons and God judges according to every man's work. The emphasis there is on the word "*every man's*." Our judgment by God is individually based. So, the trap that we have to be very careful to avoid is to make sure to resist attaching "labels" to groups (by that, I mean some of the spin-off churches or whatever) by saying "*We are Philadelphia*" and "*They are Sardis*" or "*They are Thyatira*" or "*They are Laodicea*." We just read here that *God judges without respect of persons*; and God judges each and every one of us *according to our works*. Even though there may be a measure of truth in what we may have discerned (from the attitudes that we are able to see), that kind of an approach subtly becomes a deadly trap of self-righteousness. It is an "I am better than you" syndrome. It ensnares a person into a "The temple, the temple, the temple of the Lord is here" syndrome. In other words, what the Judeans were saying is, "I'm going to be saved because I am a part of the covenant people" or "I'm going to be in the place of safety because I am part of this." Do not let yourself be taken into that! Those "labels" define *eras* and *individuals*, not groups (at least, not in the sense that we would like to get ourselves into).

So, it is *the quality of each person's—each individual's—relationship with God* against which we are judged. We are judged against His Word (as we read in Revelation 12). If we understand this importance, we will *drive ourselves* to improve the relationship through communication with God. What God is looking for in the relationship, it will show you in Revelation 2:11—"*him that overcomes*." It will show you in Revelation 3:8—"*his faithfulness*." *Growing and being faithful*. Those are the kind of people that can be trusted.

One of the things that is occurring (in the confusion of the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God) is that Satan is deceiving people into an intense interest in 'twiggy' issues, like "the calendar". Those things are a trap. What he is doing is he is leading people into forgetting *the*

faith once delivered. That is what is important to God. That 'fixed calendar' was a part of *the faith once delivered*; and it served the church very well, considering how He blessed it (both spiritually and physically).

In one sense, the answers to these things are so simple. God caused Jude 3 to be written for our admonition so that we would understand what is important when this happened to the church. Do you know why Jude wrote it? Because the first century church was scattering all over the place (just like the last century church). You look at the writings of John (probably more than any other person), 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John are powerful warnings to get back to the faith that the apostles taught. He said: *We were the ones who walked and talked with Him. We were the ones who handled Him. We were the ones who ate with Him. We had our fellowship with Him* . He was talking about the faith once delivered. In fact, James, 1st and 2nd Peter, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John and the book of Jude are all addressed at the same thing—what we are going through here right now.

Another thing that I think is important to us to consider (about what we are witnessing in the Church of God). Let us begin with that principle, "*Is Christ divided?*" Well, certainly the *church* is divided. But let us ask another question: Is God disorganized and confused? Are we witnessing the same thing that happened to Protestantism, so that now there are literally scores of different 'messages' competing for the public's attention (in order to get new converts), with each group marketing its own particular 'brand' so that people are free to choose according to their conceptions? Another question: Where is God in this picture? Does God have Philadelphia [Church of God] out competing with Global [Church of God]? Somehow, that does not ring a bell. I mean, that does not seem logical to me—that God would do something like that when the messages and the attitudes are significantly different. So what are these two groups doing? They are *competing with one another* over the same "sheep". So, what we have are "sheep wars" going on. Brethren, to me that stinks! 'Brother' competing against 'brother'.

You know, there is an answer right in God's Word. In II Corinthians 10:12. Listen to this apostle, who said that he was the hardest worker of them all.

II Corinthians 10:12-13 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. But we will not boast of things without [or beyond] our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God has distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you.

Think of this in terms of John Ritenbaugh, because I receive guidance from this verse. "The measure of the rule" that God extended to me was that I was to pastor those people converted under Herbert Armstrong. That is the extent of 'the measure' of my rule. Now, I am not an apostle. Here Paul says that the measure of his rule (given to him by God) extended all the way out to the Corinthian church.

II Corinthians 10:14-16 For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ: not boasting of things without our measure, that is, [Notice

this] of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.

Did you ever wonder why you never hear of many of the other apostles? Do you know what I think happened in the first century? The apostles got their heads together; and they said to one another, "Okay Peter. You're going to Babylon. Somebody else is going to India. Another person is going to go here. Another person is going to go there." Do you know what they did? They divided up the world (the Roman world). Why did they do that? So there would be no confusion! When people were converted within the sphere of their influence, those people converted under [say] Andrew (or under this person, or that person), they looked to the apostle that they were converted under. Do you know why it has to be that way? Because that is how *unity* is achieved. That is why Paul said he was not going to go 'beyond his authority'. (But of all the apostles, at least in terms of geographical area, he had the greatest authority; because his authority extended to all the Gentile areas, which was pretty good.)

We have heard this a couple of times during the Feast. Unity occurs when people look to one person leading them. Then they are willing to drop their own privately held doctrines in order to conform to the doctrines of the leader. (We know for sure that God is going to raise up *the David* and, of course, *the Christ*; and "unity" will occur under them.)

Just understand this principle: In order to keep the church from splitting all over the place (as far as God's church is concerned) the government must be hierarchical in form—from the top down—just like family government, just like God's government in heaven. This is why Mr. Armstrong said in 1969 that people knew who the leader was; and there was unity. As soon as that 'head' began to be divided, disunity began to occur; because people began to say *Well, I relate to this man* and *I relate to that man*.

In the United States, we have a form of 'government by consensus'. This is a safe form of government carnally; but it also tends to promote division. Now, Republicans and Democrats really '*love*' one another and they express it daily (in the news), how much they '*love*' one another. You know, the only time we have *real unity* in the United States is when we go to war; and the President, in fact, becomes the Commander-in-Chief. Then the whole government and all of the people throw their weight behind him. We have one leader.

Revelation 17:12-13 And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.

These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

Do you see it? The beast unites when ten diverse kings give their power to the 'one'. Israel united when the thirteen tribes gave themselves to the one leader—David. The disciples gave themselves to the one Leader—Christ. And, for quite a number of years, we gave ourselves to the one leader—Herbert W. Armstrong. And there was *unity*.

Today in the church of God this may not occur until the Two Witnesses begin to arise; and because of God's way, *one* of them will be in charge. Competition is a form of fighting in order

to win. That is what is going on in the church. You can read the scriptures in James 4: 1-4. Of special concern to me is a verse that I hope that you will add to your memory banks:

James 3:18 The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

The fruit of righteousness, the fruit of keeping the commandments of God by the Spirit of God, is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, kindness, faithfulness. Do we have that now in the church of God? Or is there competition and fighting amongst the groups? *The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace.*

This principle is so powerful God will permit a divorce of a marriage that He has bound. If there is no peace in the family because husband and wife cannot get along, and, let us say, both of them are converted, He will allow them to divorce and to separate from one another. Not to remarry, but to separate and divorce in order that they might be able to produce the fruits of righteousness. If they stay together (fighting with one another day after day), they will not produce the fruits of God's Spirit.

In order for us to produce those fruits and glorify God, there has to be *peace*. And peace occurs within a group when we turn our attention to the One Leader—Jesus Christ. We give ourselves over to Him (first of all); and let Him begin to get things organized and put things in right shape—first things first. And then, *if* there is something wrong with "the calendar", we will let Him straighten it out. He will give the inspiration because He will respond to the needs of His people but "first things first".

I do not expect that the Church of the Great God is ever going to be large (at least, in my conception right now—as it stands). It has nothing to do with the fact that nobody knows me. (That is a truth that we have to face; but I am not concerned about that.) It is because I know that *the message that we are preaching* is not popular. We are telling people what a very large number of them do not want to hear. They do not want to hear the solution to the disunity problem—that we have to get back to the faith once delivered. A very large number of people think that Mr. Armstrong did not know a thing. Well, they may agree with the Sabbath (or the Holy Days), but boy! They begin to deviate off into all kinds of things. It seems so strange to me that it worked so well for fifty years and that God blessed it so mightily and opened up so many doors; but, suddenly, Mr. Armstrong did not have anything revealed to him, could not put one foot in front of the other.

We have to get back to the faith once delivered. Then, things will begin to get straightened out.

There are other things too. Isaiah said, "Lord, who has believed our report?" That is a very common concept (I guess you might say) that appears in the Old Testament. It seems almost nobody ever *responded* to the prophets that God sent. I do not mean to say that I am 'a prophet'. But I am a prophet—not in that 'classical' sense. I am a prophet though in the sense that I believe that I am speaking under the inspiration of God, because that is what a prophet does—but it is to the church. (I'm not 'a prophet' like some other man "out there" thinks he is.)

There is a very interesting chapter in Matthew 11. We are not going to turn to it; but I am sure that was stuck in there by God for good reason. What Matthew did is he showed (in verses 1-6) that Jesus—our Creator, the greatest Preacher ever—was doubted by His own cousin John. The

same John who said, "This is the Lamb of God." The same John who said, "I'm not worthy to tie this Man's shoelaces." A little while later, this same John said, "Are you really the Christ? Are you really the One who is to come?" In verses 16-19, Christ was rejected by the common people. In verses 20-24, He was rejected by the cities that He did most of His preaching in. But the important thing was that He Himself, was faithful, regardless of the fact of what people were doing in response (or lack of response) to His ministry.

Now look in Matthew 11 at the end of all this rejection, He says, at that very time:

Matthew 11:25-26 At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in your sight.

Well, it "seemed good" to God to drive the church of God apart. I feel that He is making a small beginning to turn some of His people around. It may be that our responsibility to the church will be short. It may be that He will choose to have us join up with another group. I do not know. Do not get the idea that I am thinking of these things, because I am not; but I have to consider—"Are we going to be willing to humble ourselves if we begin to recognize that God is working through somebody?" Yes, we will. It may be that our purpose is merely to make available this kind of thing to the church of God at large—that it will be thrown out to them; and people will have to make their choice. Just like some of the prophets of old, their ministry was very short. Amos' was very short. Jonah's lasted just less than a year. Amos' (they figure) could have been possibly just a few months; and, yet, what a powerful work he did in that short period of time. Some of them lasted a long time, like Jeremiah's—virtually his entire life. And so, it may be that we will last 'only a short while'. Then, our responsibility in that part will be done; and we will go on to something else. So, if it is advantageous to do that in the future, we will do it. But we are pursuing what I feel is most important for the church at this time. That is, we were scattered because of sin; and that has to be reversed. If we were ~~scattered~~ *scattered because of sin*, we will be *unified because of righteousness*. We have to begin—each one of us—with ourselves; and not wait for anybody else—not wait for somebody else to straighten it out. *We straighten out our own lives and go on*; because that is what "seems good" in God's sight.