

Unity (Part 1): God And HWA

Could God Control Herbert Armstrong?

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 24-Sep-99; Sermon #FT99-01

Daniel 5:5 In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

Daniel 5:17-23 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let your gifts be to yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O you king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, and glory, and honor: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appoints over it whomsoever he will. And you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this; But have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before you, and you, and your lords, your wives, and your concubines, have drunk wine in them; and you have praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, have you not glorified.

The past number of years, I've been beginning each Feast of Tabernacles with a survey of some problem that is affecting some large part of the world in a serious way. But mostly things that concern the United States and Canada. And I have used these verses because of the handwriting-on-the-wall proverb that is in here. This proverb—"handwriting on the wall"—has become a cliché. It has universally come to mean that we have been clearly warned before hand that danger or pain to one's person, or the collapse of an institution (like one's marriage, or the church, or even a nation), or perhaps even death is imminent. And the cliché carries with it the sense that

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

those warned should have understood, or should have known better what to do. Maybe they did the wrong things. Maybe they did nothing at all. That seems to be that the most frequent response—no response.

We have, historically, before us (most of us, anyway) what happened to the Jews who were in Germany prior to World War II. There were plenty of indications in Germany, and even in the rest of the world, where the things going on in Germany were being reported. And so a number of Jews fled—to Holland, to France, to England and to Switzerland. But the overwhelming majority did nothing! They may have fretted, but they stayed put. Why? Why did they do nothing? That's a rhetorical question that may have many answers, but it illustrates the point of the cliché.

This sermon also poses another rhetorical question, continuing with the foundation from the sermon that I gave on the Day of Atonement, *Reconciliation and Unity*. There can be no unity amongst the members of the church unless there is, first of all, unity with God. And we need reconciliation with God. We aren't scattered because we're good. We've been scattered because God is displeased with us, and we need to be reconciled to Him before there can be any unity in the church.

Each individual carries that responsibility. But, is it possible that the handwriting was on the wall, for us, for maybe a pretty long period of time? And that the Bible gives us plenty of instructions in regards to what was happening, while it was happening? So, if we didn't learn then, maybe we can at least look back—it's not too late to repent. It's not too late, yet, and there might possibly be unity within the church IF enough people will turn themselves to God and be reconciled to Him.

So I began this series with that thought. And, God willing, I'm going to be carrying through this sense of possibly being unified—and what we need to do—and pointing to things that would be very helpful for us to understand if we are going to understand what we are going through.

My rhetorical question for tonight is "**Where was God during the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong?**" Where was He? Was God really with him? That's a question that each one of us is going to have to answer so that we can be convicted one way or the other—rather than just being a hanger-on, doing nothing. IF he was not an apostle, THEN there is one course of action. But IF he truly was an apostle, THEN there is another course of action that very definitely needs to be followed. So, "*Where was God during the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong?*"

I'm going to be following through with other aspects of the life of Herbert W. Armstrong

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

as we go through here. But I want you to understand, right at the beginning, that I am not concerned about Herbert W. Armstrong *per se*. I am concerned about where God was in all of this. The focus really is upon Him; and, of course, Herbert W. Armstrong is involved because if he was an apostle of God, well good. If he wasn't... (I'll leave that one hanging—for you to figure out.)

Now there is no doubt that the scattering of the church is continuing. Since last Feast of Tabernacles, we've been witnesses to the splitting of Global (into Living and Global). We are seeing the Pasadena-based "underground" church being ushered right out of the Worldwide Church of God. We have seen Dave Pack break away from Global forming the Restored Church of God. And just in this past week, Global has shut down. I am sure that they are going to re-incorporate under a different name and re-form, probably as a Texas-based corporation—rather than under the Global Church of God banner.

So, at this point, there are several ways that I can go with addressing this rhetorical question. But on looking back on the twenty years prior, let's say, to 1992—I think that we should have understood that what has happened in the church was a very distinct possibility, even while we were going through it. We should have been warned. Do you know why? Because there is a great deal of history in God's Word that shows that we were "on track" for what has occurred.

We are going to go back to the book of Judges. We're going to spend a little bit of time there, as we continue to lay the foundation here. I am doing this in order to show you a pattern, and this is the beginning of the pattern (as far as I can see it) in relation to a "called out" group of people's relationship with God. This pattern that I am going to show you occurs over and over and over and over and over again, and again, and again, and again. And this is why I say "If we had really been on top of things, maybe we should have realized that we were on track for what occurred."

Judges 2:11-12 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LOORD, and served Baalim: And they forsook the LOORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LOORD to anger.

Now, as I read through this, instead of thinking just only about ancient Israel, I want you to think about the Israel of God (the church). Are we immune from these kinds of patterns that God shows? **No, we are not!** That's why it's written down—to instruct us,

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

to warn us, to help us to understand.

Judges 2:13-14 And they forsook the LOORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. And the anger of the LOORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

Brethren, the walls that surrounded the Worldwide Church of God are down! And the enemies have streamed in.

Judges 2:15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LOORD was against them for evil, as the LOORD had said, and as the LOORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

That "swearing unto them" is given in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Judges 2:16-19 Nevertheless the LOORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LOORD; but they did not so. And when the LOORD raised them up judges, then the LOORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LOORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers...

Can we put "Herbert W. Armstrong" in there, when he was dead—that **we** corrupted ourselves more than our fathers?

Judges 2:19-21 ...in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. And the anger of the LOORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people have transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; I also will

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died.

The pattern repeats itself over and over again.

Judges 8:33-35 And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god. And the children of Israel remembered not the LOORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: Neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shown unto Israel.

Judges 13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight on the LOORD; and the LOORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years.

And, of course, there's that very well-known last verse in the book of Judges:

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

I want you to see what it says (in Judges 6) in regard to Gideon, when God was raising him up. I want you to see what Gideon said when he was called of God to carry out this responsibility. And just ask yourself, "Have I said what Gideon said?" And the answer to it is, very likely, "Yes."

Judges 6:2 And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.

Does this have anything to do with us? What does it show the people doing? It shows them scattering and gathering together in small groups in areas where they feel safe and secure (at least, for a little while).

Judges 6:3-4 And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them. And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till you come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.

We could go on with that. I will get back to that thought in just a bit. Now, let's drop down to verse 12. This is when Gideon was confronted by the angel of the Lord.

Judges 6:12 And the angel of the LOORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LOORD is with you, you mighty man of valor.

That is kind of ironic because, at the time the angel said that, Gideon was hiding—protecting himself. He was anything but "a man of valor" at that point. But the angel was speaking of what was going to be, rather than what was—at that very moment.

Judges 6:13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord [Here comes Gideon's response], if the LOORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us?

"Why has this happened to the church?" Every one of us has asked that question, I am sure—if we have any regard for the well-being of the church, if we have any regard for our part in it, if we have examined ourselves to see whether or not we are **in the faith**. "Are we in the right place, in the church?" "Why are these things happening to us?"

Judges 6:13 ...and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LOORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LOORD have forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

Invaders were infiltrating, destroying Israel's food. Did you notice the attention that God draws to that? What is the food of a Christian? It is the Word of God. It is the teaching. It is the doctrines. It is what we are fed with, from the pulpit. It is what we are fed with, right out of the Word of God. And so what God is showing is that when the general character, spirituality, degree of spirituality of the people within the Body of Christ begins to deteriorate the whole Body begins to weaken. It begins to be invaded with what? Instead of Midianites (instead of Canaanites), it is false ministers. False doctrines begin to come in; and a Christian cannot live on falsehoods. He cannot be strengthened on

falsehoods.

We are strengthened by the truth. We have to have faith in the truth. It takes truth to keep a Christian headed in the right direction and strong enough to resist the wiles of Satan, who is invading—infiltrating—the church with things that are not true.

Now we're going to go on. Drop down to verse 25, because I want you to see now the very first thing that God ordered Gideon to do.

Judges 6:25-26 And it came to pass the same night, that the LORD said unto him, Take your father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the grove that is by it: And build an altar unto the LORD your God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which you shall cut down.

And then Gideon went through with his responsibility.

Judges 6:28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built.

The first thing God had Gideon do was destroy the altar, destroy the place of worship, destroy the false gods, and to destroy the false teachings. If there is a false god, the teaching is not going to be correct. If the people of God do not have the right teaching, they cannot become in the image of God! It takes a true minister, speaking the truth of God to people, in order for them to be prepared in the image of God. And as long as there is a false god that is before us, we are going in the wrong direction!

It was idolatry and Sabbath-breaking that Ezekiel pointed out. The same pattern keeps repeating itself over and over again. I picked up an interesting quote from the wife of the founder of the Salvation Army. I can't think of her name right now. But he died and so she had to live on into (you might say) the second generation—those who took over the administration of the Salvation Army. And she saw the chaos that was created in the wake of his death, as these people were vying and jockeying for positions. She made the lament (in some sense, blaming it on God; but I think that in her heart-of-hearts she did not blame it on God; but she understood this principle). She said, "Why can't God keep things straight for more than one generation?"

Herbert Armstrong's period in the ministry was somewhere between forty and fifty years. It fits right into the pattern that we see in the Bible. And as soon as the shepherd was smitten, things went from bad to worse. They were already deteriorating, and he knew it. He knew that the church was sliding, slipping away from him and that the people in the church were taking his word (or whatever) less and less seriously. And it was because they were sliding ever more deeply into Laodiceanism. I should say, **we** were sliding ever more deeply into Laodiceanism.

And so the first area of repentance is shown over and over again. We only went into the book of Judges, but if we continued right on through (I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, and into the prophets), we would begin to see the same pattern. When Israel had good leadership, the prosperity of the nation rose. If there was a good king (good leadership), everything in Israel was very fine. But then an evil king would arise, and everything went down the tubes.

Are **we** *in the pattern*?

When a good king came along, what was usually the first thing that he did? He tore down the altars (of Baal, or Ashtoreth, or Milcolm).

Now what each one of us has to do is to examine ourselves in the light of what the Bible shows so clearly and understand that we are a part of this Body. We are an important part of this Body. We are not insignificant to this Body or we would not be here. And God loves you. God is concerned about you. And He wants your personal relationship with Him to be strengthened in every way. When your personal (individual) relationship with Him is strengthened, the whole Body is strengthened.

And so the word has to go forth to every one of us that our problem is very likely in the area of *idolatry*. Somewhere, between God and us, a false god (an altar) needs to be torn down. Sacrifices need to be made—that is, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—to establish the relationship with God once again. The atonement has to be made, so that we can go on and receive the strength of God's Spirit from Him—because He sees, once again, that we are responding (individually and personally). Nobody can do that for us. It's something that each one of us has to take care of individually. It is your responsibility to the Church of God, and to God, to take care of that yourself.

I feel that there were a couple of things that need to be brought to our attention in regard to what was going on in the church. These things that we see here in the book of Judges were written for our admonition. But in our pride, brethren, we did not consider them seriously. And there are reasons for that as well. "*After all, these things only*

happen to the unconverted." Oh, is that right?

Well, brethren, we had two very powerful illusions that needed to be shattered. First of all, we were all too focused on being the end time generation, and so we were looking other ways when the train hit us—that is, the train that was **our vanity** hit us. We thought that somehow we were above this kind of thing. No, we are not above this kind of thing.

I and II Thessalonians records for us that some in the first century church went through the same illusion. And some of them (as Paul addresses in II Thessalonians, especially in chapter three) had literally quit work in order to wait things out until Christ returns. He said, "If you don't work, you don't eat."

Now our second illusion was that, because we were "in the church," such things couldn't happen. It was unthinkable. And what we had, brethren, was that "the temple, the temple, the temple of the Lord is here" mentality of Jeremiah 7. But, if you go on and read that, you will find that God said, "Oh, is that so? Don't trust in lying words." He said, "Amend your ways; and then I will be a protection, a wall, to you."

Am I saying that we are not in the end time? Or, that we are not in God's church? Not at all! I am saying that we were far too carnal for God to allow that kind of thinking to pass right by Him and go right on into His Kingdom in that kind of an attitude. And so those illusions had to be shattered and replaced with correct thinking—and with it, then, correct attitudes and works. Our vanity led us to give far too much dependence on sheer knowledge of God. (You know that puffs up—I Corinthians 8:1-3.) So, we put too much emphasis on that—and not near enough emphasis on the application of His Word.

Matthew 24:1-3 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See you not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down and as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?

I want you to see Jesus' first warning. We're going to concentrate on it a bit.

Matthew 24:4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceives you.

Have we (have some of us) been victims of a deception that came from preachers (false prophets, false ministers)? There are several directions that I thought that I might go with this, but there are only two that I want to touch on. The first is that we should consider that there is both a physical and a spiritual application to the word "temple." The physical application is, of course, a physical temple that was in Jerusalem, and the spiritual application is, of course, the church.

Using the spiritual application ought to give any church member who cares about the state of the church some very sobering things to reflect upon, because we are apparently witnessing the spiritual dismantling and scattering of the church. We are living right through it. (I had put the word "apparently" in there, but right now I'm wondering why. It's happening!)

The church is being dismantled. It's not going to be destroyed—because Jesus said that the gates of the grave would not pervade against His church. But it is going through a very serious circumstance.

Here's His first warning:

Matthew 24:4-5 Take heed that no man deceives you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

Brethren, the church was blown apart. It was scattered by men who preached that Jesus **is** the Christ. They came "in the name of" Christ. They didn't deny that Jesus is the Christ. They preached that Jesus **is** the Christ. And yet, all the while preaching that Jesus **is** the Christ, they were working to deceive through the teaching of doctrines that do not belong in the Church of God. And so the church was thrown into confusion (by the change of doctrines). And, with the confusion, it destroyed our convictions. It destroyed the direction that people were going in, and it put us into disarray. And we scattered in every direction!

That ought to tell you something about the necessity of having correct doctrine. Without correct doctrine to provide the things that we need to keep us headed in the same direction (i.e., if the doctrine begins to be changed and people believe the changes), the church is going to split. It's going to divide. It's going to scatter. At the very least, even if you hang on to your belief, it is very likely that some measure of doubt is going to creep into your mind. Your conviction is going to suffer. And you are not going to go as positively in the right direction as you did before. But you are going to be going almost as if you were in a fog and feeling your way through—and wondering, "What should I

do?"

That's one direction that I want to go in, at least to some degree, because the sum total of that was that it severely damaged our faith. What happened from 1986 on, especially, severely damaged our faith. The church is going through a crisis of faith. And if we do not have faith that the doctrines that we believe are correct, it is going to stunt our growth—because we'll be unsure. We'll be uncertain. We won't know quite which direction to go in. Salvation is by grace through faith. We need strong convictions to get us through what we are headed into.

You cannot get strong faith from false gods. That's why the altars had to be destroyed. That's why the groves had to be destroyed. That's why the idols had to be destroyed. Those things, in the Biblical terminology, represent false teaching (false doctrines).

The second application, that I want to make from this prophecy, is actually the concluding purpose of this whole prophecy. Jesus went through one sign after another of things that were going to occur. When He finally got to His conclusion, it was basically this: His advice—His admonition; His instruction—to us is that we should not become so distracted by the times and the events that we are living through—including the destruction of such seemingly permanent things as the church—that we fail to maintain a close relationship with God.

Keep your eye on the ball! Now, what "ball" are we looking at? I mean in terms of leadership, in terms of truth, in terms of doctrine. Herbert Armstrong is beginning to come back into the picture. Were the correct doctrines given, by God, to Herbert Armstrong? And, if they were, those who are altering the configuration of the doctrines that were given by God through him are getting off the path. It was that very thing that drove us off the path! What we have to determine is, "How seriously have I been affected?" Do you get the point?

On the one hand, Jesus said (earlier) that not one stone would be left upon another. I believe that is a bit of hyperbole. It is not to be taken literally. And the reason that I believe that is because, even today, that temple that was destroyed in Jerusalem in 70 AAD has portions of it still standing. There are portions of that where the stones have not been knocked down. There are still stones that are one on top of another.

In addition to that—if we apply the spiritual application—we have the promise that Jesus made (there in Matthew 16) that "*the gates of the grave will never prevail against the church.*" It will always go on. So you put these things together and you can understand then that Jesus did not say that the church would never suffer very severe damage. On

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the contrary, He is telling us that it may indeed suffer very severe damage, but you can have the hope—because He has promised it—that the gates of the grave will never prevail against the church. It will never disappear totally. It will recover.

But when it recovers, it is going to be purified from what it was before the disintegration took place. That's where **we** come back into the picture once again. Each one of the stones has to do his part in repenting before God and changing life. And so the first warning is, "Don't get distracted! Keep your eye on the ball! Follow the vision that was set before and keep your eye on it. Don't let it get very far from you."

Matthew 24:36-39 But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

What can we learn from that? It's very simple. No matter who, or what, a man is—he is never, never, never actually going to know when the return of Jesus Christ is going to occur. Nobody will know until it happens. So my question is "Why waste time trying to figure it out?" Isn't that flying in the face of what Jesus said? He is warning us here: Don't get your mind on this.

He is not saying, "Don't be aware of events that are going on." He is saying, "Don't get distracted into a study that is going to take you nowhere." (A very time-consuming, number-crunching study.) It's just an illustration of the kind of thought that our Lord and Master has. Keep your mind focused on the most important things. This is secondary. Nobody's ever going to figure it out; so why spend time trying to find something that nobody is ever going to figure out? We can watch the world news; and we can see (in the headlines, and so forth) that things are occurring. We know we are on track. But don't let it get out of hand.

Matthew 24:42 Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord does come.

"Watch" here means, "be alert!"

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Matthew 24:43-44 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken up. Therefore [Here it comes:] be you also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes.

Then, beginning in verse 45, is a section that is directed at the ministry primarily. It applies to everybody to one degree; but it is primarily focused on the ministry.

Matthew 24:45 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord have made ruler over his household, to give them **meat** in due season?

That's how I know that it's directed at the ministry. It is my responsibility, as a minister of God, to feed you. And He is encouraging me (instructing me) that I'd better be taking care of my responsibility.

Matthew 24:46-51 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delays his coming [See, he's alert; and he knows that he's in the time.]; And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looks not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder [Incidentally, that is not a little nicey-nice thing. He is literally talking about being cut in half. "Cut asunder" literally means that], and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now, I'll just go over the rest of this generally because the chapter-break there is, in a sense, in the wrong place. The Olivet Prophecy continues right on over into chapter 25, where Jesus is continuing His instruction, following on the heels of the signs of His coming. The next one goes to everybody in general. And so the Parable of the Ten Virgins comes. What is the lesson that is contained within this parable? The lesson is: Make sure that you have enough of the Holy Spirit.

Then comes The Parable of the Talents. Now what is the general lesson that is here? Talents represent those gifts that are given by God so that you will be enabled to fulfill your responsibilities within the church, fulfill your responsibilities of glorifying Him in your

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

life, fulfill your responsibilities by growing and overcoming.

The ministry is addressed: "Take care of your responsibilities. Feed my people." Then everybody is addressed: "Make sure you have enough of the Holy Spirit." Remember—this is Jesus' advice for the end times. Then comes the Parable of the Talents. He says, "I want to see that, when you are in this period of time, you are not distracted. You are continuing to pay attention to growing and overcoming.

Then comes The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. And what's the lesson here for us in the end time? Right in the context, He says, "Make sure that you are serving My brethren because, when you serve them, you are serving Me."

What's the overall advice? Feed my sheep. Let's all be growing in the Holy Spirit. Make sure that we are growing and overcoming personally in our lives and developing our talents (the gifts that God gives to us). And make sure that you are serving My brethren. He is saying, "*That will keep everybody on track.*"

It'll keep everybody on track IF they have the faith to do it. But we are suffering a crisis of faith. That's what was destroyed. That's what was weakened. That was where God permitted Satan to hit us, so that we would be exposed to our weakness. Are we going to make the adjustment, or not? Are we going to pull down the idols in our lives and then restore the relationship with God by applying the sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

Doctrine is the very element that facilitates growth, overcoming, and service. I have a question here, and it pertains to what He said in verse 45.

Matthew 24:45 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord have made ruler over his household, to give them **meat** in due season.

There's that word *meat* again. You can read into that *food*. You can read into that *truth*. You can read into that *My word*. So the question I have in the light of what has occurred (especially since 1986) is "Be faithful **to what**? Give the people what?" Anybody who's known me long enough ought to know that I have determined that I am going to be faithful to **what has been given** to me, I believe, **by God, through Herbert Armstrong**. And so I have never stopped preaching those things. That's what brought us into the church in the first place. That's what unified us in the first place—as a Body. And that is, I believe, what is going to keep me united with the work that God is working in my life (and in your life). So, that's what I give you.

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

I speak often of God showing us patterns in the Bible. In fact, I began this sermon by taking that one from the book of Judges. Of course, I could have gone on into the Kings. We are going through a period of doctrinal changing that is almost a carbon copy of what happened to the first century church. The apostles give us clear evidence of that. I want to give you a series of verses so that you will understand that God has these things written down because the first century church went through it. They followed the pattern that was in the book of Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles. We are no better than they are, and we're going through the same pattern.

I Corinthians is a letter written to a very badly divided congregation, and Paul writes:

I Corinthians 11:2 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to **you**.

Let me change the emphasis there a little bit. "I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as **I** delivered them to you." This is an apostle writing to a church that he raised up. His instructions to them (this badly divided church) was "keep the doctrines as **I** delivered them." Not somebody else, but as **I** delivered them to you.

Now I look at that. Should we apply the same thing to Herbert W. Armstrong? Was he God's apostle? Where was God during the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong? Was He really with him? Did He deliver, through Herbert Armstrong, the doctrines **as He wanted them for the end time church**? The doctrines that He wanted **us** to be conformed to. The doctrines that He wanted **us** to follow in order to be in the image He wanted **us** to be in by the time His Kingdom is established on earth. This is a question that needs to be evaluated by everybody, and they need to do it thoroughly.

II Thessalonians 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

Now that applies to **you**, just as much as it applied to them—from the beginning God has chosen **you** to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

II Thessalonians 2:14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, these things that he's going to speak of in just a minute have been given to us so that we can obtain to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ—that is, these doctrines. Here comes a concluding statement; this is what he's been leading to.

II Thessalonians 2:15 Therefore brethren stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or **our** epistle.

Again, this is an apostle speaking to a church that was dividing as a result of false prophets teaching doctrines that the apostle had not given to them.

I am heading toward a pattern again, or instruction in a pattern. And God gives these patterns so that we can have faith, so that we don't waver, so that we're strong in the faith. *God never changes His patterns.* He establishes these patterns early in the Book. All the way back in the book of Judges, He shows you a pattern of relationship—of His people with Him. That it will last about a generation; and then, at the end of the generation, it's very likely going to go into a tailspin. And in order to recoup things, He's going to have to raise a prophet up to restore the church (I'll put it that way once again.) and get it back on the track. It'll go along again for about another generation, and we will repeat this over and over again. It's always going to happen because God never changes, human nature never changes, and Satan never changes.

Let me add one thing here. **It doesn't have to happen!** But, as someone once said, "Those who do not learn the lesson of history are doomed to repeat it." It happens to God's people too.

I Timothy is a letter to an individual minister who was pastoring a congregation that was under attack. And so Paul says:

I Timothy 4:16 Take heed to yourself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this you shall both save yourself, and them that hear you.

Please brethren, take that as being addressed to **you**. Forget about Timothy. "Take heed to **yourself** and to **the doctrine**." Paul didn't want the doctrines to be changed. Why? Any woman knows this. If you change the recipe, the product that is produced is not going to be the way it's supposed to be.

Now what is the issue here? It's the faithfulness of God—not Herbert Armstrong. **God is**

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the One who's on trial. Is He faithful? In the sermon that I'm planning for tomorrow, I'm going to show you how He follows this pattern over and over again. It doesn't matter whether it's through the prophets, or whether it's through the apostles. He always puts doctrine into the church in exactly the same way! And He does that for our benefit—so that our faith can be strong and we can be sure of the direction to head in.

This is why all this is written about the past—so that we can see the pattern!

I Timothy 4:16 Take heed unto yourself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this you shall both save yourself, and them that hear you.

We have to follow *those doctrines* if we're going to be in the image God wants us to be in, when our life is over.

I didn't even begin to go into what Peter said, or what John said, or what Jude said. But do you know what? They said slightly different words; but they said essentially the same thing that Paul said. "Earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Everybody knows Jude 3). In I John 1, he pleads with the people "follow the doctrines **we** gave you." Peter says the same thing. And on and on it goes. They are just repeating the pattern that the prophets before them had to do—because every time God raised up a prophet, He did so to do the same thing that Herbert Armstrong did. What did Herbert Armstrong do? He restored the truth to the church.

Herbert Armstrong wasn't the first one to do that. All the prophets had to do that. They had to restore what had already been revealed, up to that point, in order to get the people back on the track once again. And every apostle that God raised up—from the first century to the twentieth century—had to do the same thing; because when God raised one of those men up, the church had deteriorated to such an extent that it was just about out of existence. And so He raised up an apostle and raised the church back up again by restoring the truth. The pattern goes over and over and over again. And so God provided us with this instruction, so that our faith can be strong, that our hope will not waver, and that we will go in the right direction.

Now I have to give these things to you because you have to make the choices in your life as to whether or not what I am teaching you is true. You see—it's your choice. My head's on the guillotine if I'm the one that's teaching you wrong things. So I have to make sure that I'm crying aloud and sparing not, with the truth.

There are two elements that I feel were the main ones in triggering what has occurred to

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the church. This first is a spiritual element that we identify as Laodiceanism. *Laodiceanism is a deceptively subtle, but nonetheless very destructive, self-righteousness that deceives one into thinking that he is well off; but, in reality, it renders a person **blind to his spiritual poverty and the reality** of what is going on in his own life and in the church.*

I will give that to you again, because I think that it succinctly describes what Laodiceanism is. It's a deceptively subtle, but nonetheless very destructive, self-righteousness ("Oh, I'm all right.") that deceives one into thinking that he is well off; but, in reality, it renders a person blind to his spiritual poverty (You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.) and the reality of what is going on in the church and in his own life.

Christians are particularly susceptible to Laodiceanism because it creeps up on a person **because he is in the church** and therefore feels safe. But, in reality, he is sliding into the world. The attitude gradually renders him neglectful of things important to his relationship with God—so neglectful that God's response to such a person includes that it renders them "blind." And they are telling Him, by their actions, that they have need of nothing! (Self-righteousness. "I'm okay.") Apparently, they don't even need God.

That attitude sets the stage for the second element, and that is the mechanism that made the scattering work. The mechanism for scattering the church was to change the doctrines that we believed in and that united us under Herbert Armstrong. ("The faith once delivered to the saints.")

During the past year, I gave a Bible Study a number of times titled "*Who Was Herbert W. Armstrong?*" I know that it created a certain measure of irritation in some quarters, because—even though they essentially agreed with what I said—they also understood that some of the ramifications of what I said might cause them some personal embarrassment. They might have to relinquish some concepts that they had developed through the years.

It's essential that we understand the concept in Romans 10:17. I'm not going to go into it a great deal here, because I know that both others and myself will probably hit on it a number of times during this Feast. But we need to understand that "**Faith comes [It is produced; it is transmitted] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**"

So, was Herbert W. Armstrong the messenger sent to revive the church during the end time? I am not talking about him being the Elijah. I am talking about him simply being *the apostle God used to restore the correct doctrines which God's people should believe.* Or,

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

was he merely another evangelist—like Billy Graham? Again, that's a question that only **you** can answer. But the answer to this is important because it was the message that **he brought** from which our faith arose—and that united us, under him, as "his children in the faith" in the Worldwide Church of God.

If he was not a true apostle, then I submit to you that we are not part of the church.

Zechariah 13:7 Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of host: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

You have lived through that. That scripture has been fulfilled in your life. Of course, the major fulfillment of it was with Jesus Christ. But we had a secondary fulfillment of it take place in our life. The shepherd was smitten and the hand (meaning, God's hand) was turned on the little ones (us); and we were smitten, along with him. This is exactly what happened.

Long before his death, Herbert W. Armstrong was already being "smitten" in attempts to destroy his credibility. There were all kinds of whispering going on—that he was senile, that he was confused, that he was "out of touch" with what was going on. And I have a question for that; and, that is, "So what if he was slipping just a bit?" All the doctrines were put into the church when he was in full command of all of his faculties! That doctrinal base had been put in many years before.

How many times did I hear Herbert Armstrong say that God can control everybody except Herbert Armstrong? Do you understand what he meant by that? People were biting at him, snipping at his heels all the time, and saying that he would not listen to them. Or, that he was out of control. That he was setting policies and changing doctrines and all kind of things like that. **Where was God? Could God control Herbert Armstrong? Was God *capable* enough to get the truth, through him, to us?**

This is why I am saying to you "It is God who is on trial—not really Herbert Armstrong." Isn't this what God said to Samuel?

I Samuel 8:7 They have not rejected you [Samuel], but they have rejected Me [God], that I should not reign over them.

There are principles two or three times in the New Testament—statements made by

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Jesus to His apostles—"If they reject you, they have rejected Me. And if they reject you and Me, they are rejecting the Father. There is a direct, unbroken connection between Our government in heaven right down to the man that He is using to head up His work."

That doesn't mean that the man God uses is infallible. It doesn't mean that he's without sin. But God is able to control him so that the correct doctrine gets to His people. That's where the faith needs to be! The faith needs to be that God is able to take care of things. God is able to oversee things. God is able to make sure that the truth is gotten to His church—so that His people can be in His image when their lives are over.

When Mr. Armstrong died, the "movements" really shifted into high gear. One doctrine after another was changed—thus, smiting him (by calling into severe question his authority as a teacher from God) and leading the Worldwide Church of God right back into what we came out of. Psalm 127:1 is a scripture that we all know; but the principle here is what I'm after.

Psalm 127:1 Except the LOORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LOORD keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain.

This psalm is teaching us that, unless God is involved in what we are doing, all of our labor, our time, our efforts, our agonizing, our hopes and dreams are just so much vanity. Do you see why I asked the question "***Where was God during the ministry of Herbert W. Armstrong?***" Unless the LOORD builds the house, everything that we are doing is in vain! Is God in this "house," or isn't He? Was God working through Herbert Armstrong? Was God working through the Worldwide Church of God?

If He wasn't, brethren, *why are we here?* Why not run with the world? IF God wasn't with Herbert Armstrong—IF God wasn't with the doctrines that were given through him—THEN the handwriting is on the wall. We are doomed!

Do you see why the idols have to be chopped down? Do you see why the sacrifice and the right altar need to be established? So that there can be reconciliation, and then we can go on. I am sure that many of you have already made that reconciliation. You have started on that way. But remember what Jesus gave to us there at the end of the Olivet Prophecy. Keep your eye on the big goal. Yes, be alert; but keep on going. Fill yourself, as it were, with the Holy Spirit. Continue to grow and overcome. Devote yourself to a life of service to the brethren. That's our Lord and Master's instruction.

If we take care of those things, then He'll take care of the other things. If we are going to

Unity (Part 1): God and HWA by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

be taken to a place of safety, it'll be His calling and choosing that will decide who goes and who doesn't. And whatever the decision is that He makes, it'll be the right one. It'll be just what He needs and just what we need. Our life is in His hands.

The one who is "on trial" here is God. The man who represented him during that period of time is not the one who's on trial here. It is God, and we need to know that we are directly connected to Him. Herbert Armstrong did not stand between Him and us. He was simply another servant; and, in this case, one that God used to get the instruction to us. Our relationship with God is one-on-one. The ministry is here to serve, and we will do all we can to help point you in the right direction.

I think that we have laid a foundation that we can continue to follow right through this Feast. Let's finish in Lamentations, chapter 2. If you are familiar with the application that we've made of the book of Lamentations, then you'll understand that spiritually he's talking about the destruction of the church. I want you to see a couple of simple principles here.

Lamentations 2:1 How has the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!

Now, if we're to understand this properly, I have to come to the conclusion that we should not be blaming Satan or the ministry for the destruction that has occurred. Yes, we all participated in it. We are all guilty. And Satan is guilty too. But God wants us to understand that none of this would have happened if **He** hadn't taken action.

"**The Lord has** covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud." Do you understand what that is saying there? What is a cloud? It's fog. And God says here, "I have put you into a fog." When you are in a fog, your perception of what is around you is very severely limited. Your visibility is affected. You cannot see very far ahead. He is saying that "the vision" has been pretty much damaged. And we need to get our bearings oriented so that we can walk through, until the cloud begins to lift and we see our way clear to go in the right direction.

A very homey thing there—He's put the church into a fog. He did it by allowing confusion of doctrine. Now He's going to see whether we will have the faith to turn in the right direction for the guidance we need during this period of time, so that we personally can come out of the fog and begin to contribute to the well-being, to the strength, to the good health of the church. It starts with your personal relationship with God.