

Work Out Your Own Salvation

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About a month and a half ago, my son went out to dinner with a friend of his from one of the other group of God's churches. Over the course of dinner the topic of church came up, like it usually does when visiting with brethren.

This friend of his made a statement that did not sit well with me, a statement I feel is incorrect, a statement that is not reality, and is not true. The statement that this person made was, and I quote, "It doesn't matter what church or group of God you go to or belong to."

I guess in one sense of the word that is correct as long as that group or church has the 5 signs of God's true church. I think we all know what those signs are, but let us go over them again. Before we go over them I, would like to make a comment. As we go through this sermon, I am not saying that if you do not go to the Church of the Great God, you are on your way to the lake of fire. That is not my intention at all.

When Debbie and I travel we attend other churches of God if we do not have a church in the area that is part of the Church of the Great God. I talk to and get together with a lot of people, from a lot of the other churches of God, quite regularly, even John Ritenbaugh has told perspective members he could not serve them because he did not have a church in their area, and he gave them another minister's number so that they could be served.

I have never tried to get anyone to come over to this church. It is not us against them, we need to love all the brethren and respect all the churches of God. That does not change the fact that there *are differences* between the churches of God.

We are told to work out our own salvation, with fear and trembling, and that is what this sermon is really about.

The five signs of God's true church are,

- (1) The Sabbath and preparation day. You must observe the Sabbath and keep it holy; we all know this is a sign between God and His people.
- (2) You must have and observe the plan of God, which are the holy days.
- (3) You must be baptized by submergence of water and have hands laid on you. You must have the proper questions asked of you and proper words spoken over you. We all realize that this is the contract from our agreement we entered into with God.
- (4) You must have the name of God in the name of the church. Worldwide Church of who? Worldwide Church of God; the Church of the Great who? Church of the Great God. United Church of God, Philadelphia Church of God. The name of God in the name of the church indicates whose church it is, and whose church it belongs to.
- (5) You cannot have or embrace the trinity doctrine. Now if you remember one of the very first changes the Tkach's made in the breakup of the church and the scattering of Gods people, was the doctrine of the trinity or the doctrine which he called the "God Is" doctrine, which was no more than the trinity doctrine.

So if a group or a church has all five signs of God's true church, *it is God's true church*. There is a lot more to it than having the signs when it comes to yours and my salvation. That is what I would like to talk about today.

Philippians 2:12 (RSV) Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

Do you know what God is saying here? He is saying to cultivate or carry out to the goal and complete your own salvation with reverence, awe, and trembling. With self-distrust, that is, with serious caution in everything you

do. Be watchful against temptation, timidly shrinking from anything that might offend God and discredit the name of Christ.

God is giving us instruction here. He is telling us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. He is not telling us to work out our mate's salvation, or our kid's salvation, or Aunt Emma's salvation, or Grandma Gertie's salvation. He is talking about working out our *own* salvation.

For all of us to do that, I think we need to come to the realization that there are huge differences between the different churches of God. Just like there were huge differences between the seven churches of Revelation. I will come back to the seven churches of Revelation later.

I would like to bring to your attention some of the glaring differences between the groups without pointing a finger at any of the churches. That is not my intention. There are differences, and I would like to list some of the differences, and this only *some* of them.

Some of the churches of God do not believe in third tithe, even though it is one of their doctrines. I have been told that you need to have mercy on people, because thirty percent of a person's pay check, first tithe, second tithe, and third tithe is a real hardship on families.

Well, you know what brethren? God only requires us to pay third tithes twice every seven years. Do you think the families who receive third tithe might be going through a hardship too? Or are *you* only going through a hardship? You and I cannot out-give God. There is also a matter of a blessing in paying third tithe that comes from God. These arguments do not hold water.

Some churches keep Pentecost, on the odd year, a week later than other churches. This is another difference that is easily proved, biblically, regarding the proper way to count the days of Pentecost. I encourage you, if you have not proved this to yourself one way or the other, to do so. You and I need to be as biblically correct on all of God's Word and laws as possible, as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Some of God's churches do not use the preparation day and feel it is okay to cook and prepare food on the Sabbath.

There is a huge difference in what is acceptable behavior, and Sabbath dress, between the different churches. A few examples: Some cook and prepare for potlucks on the Sabbath. Some prepare for weddings on the Sabbath preparing food, setting up tables and chairs, putting flowers together, and decorations. Some prepare for sporting events and church dances on the Sabbath.

Some of God's churches do not teach prophecy or even talk about prophecy at all, again, one third of the Bible is prophecy. God put it in the Bible for a reason and we must learn from it. Some of God's churches feel they need to check you out spiritually before they allow you to attend their church; also they will not let you visit their feast sites without permission.

Some of God's churches will marry people when one party is not baptized. They will also marry divorced people without checking to see if one party or the other is still bound. Some of God's churches use the brethren as merchandise. What does that mean? They go out of their way to make sure they preach sweet words, even at the expense of God's truth and His Word, as to not offend any tithe payers, in other words it is all about the money.

We could go on and on about the differences between the churches. There are huge differences between the different churches or groups of God.

Romans 1:16 (RSV) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greeks.

If we are not ashamed of the truth of God, should the ministry candy coat things, should the ministry be warning us of what God expects of us spiritually? And of what could be coming up on us, the nation, and the entire world? Were there differences between God's churches in Asia Minor? Or in Arab (modern Turkey)? The answer to this question to the seven churches in Revelation, is yes, huge differences.

Revelation 1:20 (RSV) The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden candle sticks, The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candle sticks which you saw, are the seven churches.

What we see in Revelation 1:20 is that the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 belong to Christ. He holds them in His right hand.

Revelation 2:1-3 (RSV) Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things says He that holds the seven churches in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candle sticks. Christ says, I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear them which are evil and you have tried them who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them to be liars. Have born and have patience for My names sake, have labored and have not fainted. [All pretty good qualities, would you not you agree?]

Christ sees their works and the good or righteous qualities in this church. But this church is not perfect, it has problems.

Revelation 2:4 (RSV) Nevertheless I have some what against you, because you have left your first love.

Now do you remember when you were first called? You could not wait to be taught, could you? You studied the correspondence course, and you stayed up late at night with other brethren and talked about God, God's work, and the Bible. We sat in the hot tub at the feast for as long as the hotel would let us, talking about God. We were excited about the Sabbath, Feast, Spokesmen Club, and spending time together. We were excited about our calling, what we were learning, and the whole church culture. It was an exciting time in our lives. That was our first love.

Now my family and I today have get-togethers with 30, 40, 50 people, that might represent 4 or 5 different churches or groups of God, in the Portland

area. There is very little excitement about talking about God, God's way of life, or God's laws when we get together. That was what the church of Ephesus was lacking in. Church had become just another thing in their lives that they did. Sort of boring, same old-same old, week after week—they took it for granted.

Revelation 2:5 (RSV) Remember therefore from where how far you have fallen, and repent [or change], do the first works, or else. [Christ is giving them a warning here, an ultimatum] I will come unto you quickly and I will remove your candle stick out of its place, except you repent or change.

Christ is saying that if you do not make changes and try to keep My word perfectly, and try to become holy like My Father is, you will cease to be My church. Then Christ encourages them in verse 6.

Revelation 2:6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate.

You know what the problem with the Nicolaitans was? They mixed pagan rites and Christian holy days. They mixed up God's way of life with the ways of the world. And they were also indifferent to adultery and fornication, that was their problem.

Revelation 2:7-11 (RSV) He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him that overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. [let us go to the next church, Smyrna, verse 8.] And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, These things says the First and the Last, which was dead and is now alive. I know your works, tribulation, and your poverty, but you are really rich and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which you will suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried or approved, and you shall have tribulation ten days, Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

There is a big difference between the Ephesus church and the Smyrna church. God tells Ephesus that if it did not change, they would cease to be God's church. Then God tells Smyrna that they were going to suffer and some of them would be put to death. But if they stayed faithful, He would give them the crown of life. In verse 11 God reiterates everything by saying, "He that overcomes will not be hurt by the second death, which is the lake of fire."

Revelation 2:12-14 (RSV) [And God says to Pergamos, that He has a sharp two-edged sword.] I know your works also and where you dwell, even where Satan's seat is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even when Antipas My faithful servant was a martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you also, because you have there, them who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak, to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.

The doctrine of Balaam is that you can have it both way: God's way and man's way. You can have it all, brethren. You can everything that the world has to offer, and you can have what God has to give you also. We know that is a false doctrine.

Revelation 2:15-16 (RSV) You also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly also and I will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Another one of God's churches that is not right with God and needs to make changes.

Revelation 2:17-26 (KJV) [In spite of things I have against you], If you will overcome these things I will give you hidden manna to eat, a white stone and a new name, that no man knows except he that receives it. [To Thyatira, Christ says], I know your works also. And charity, service, faith and patience, and your works, and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few thing

against you, also. Because you suffer that woman Jezebel, which calls herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to change her fornication and she did not repent. [Brethren, He is giving us time]. I will cast her into bed and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches will know that I am He which searches the reigns and hearts. And I will give to everyone of you, according to your works. Unto the rest of you in Thyatira, as many has not this doctrine and which has not known depths of Satan as they speak, I will put on you no other burdens. That which you already have, hold fast till I come. He that over comes and keeps My works to the end, to him I will give power over the Nations.

Thyatira had some very good qualities, charity, service, faith, and patience. God said part of you do not have everything correct. And because you are not righteous, or at least some of you are not, I will bring great tribulation on you and will kill her children. God says this will happen unless they repent of their deeds. Brethren, there truly is a difference between God's churches. And we need to try to be as correct as we can when it comes to Gods laws, and this way of life.

Revelation 3:1-5 (RSV) [Christ says to Sardis], I know your works also, that you have a name that you live and are dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard and hold fast and repent, If therefore you shall not watch, I will come among you as a thief and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis which has not defiled their garments. And they shall walk with Me in white for they are worthy. He that overcomes the same shall be clothed in white raiment and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life but I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angles.

Christ is telling us that we need to overcome. In chapters 2 and 3, God tells the church to overcome five separate times and tells them to repent eight

separate times. This is another difference between the churches of God, today. Some of the churches are not telling their people to repent or to change. Some of the churches are not warning their people to get ready spiritually, mentally, and physically for what is coming. Christ is telling the churches to get ready, make the changes, repent, overcome, draw close to Me, and I will give you to eat of the Tree of Life, you will not be hurt by the second death, you will eat of hidden manna, and the promises go on and on.

Revelation 3:8-10 [God said to Philadelphia], I know your works also, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it. For you have a little strength, have kept My word and have not denied My name. Behold I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie, behold I will make them come and worship before your feet, to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of My patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Revelation 3:15-20 [God says to the church of Laodiceans], I know your works also, you are neither hot nor cold, I wish you were, one or the other either hot or cold. Because you are lukewarm and not hot nor cold, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say you are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and know not that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. I count you to buy Me gold tried in the fire that you may be rich. And white raiment that you may be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear, and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love I rebuke and chasten, be zealous therefore and change or repent. I stand at the door and knock, if any man hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and will sup with him and he with Me.

It is easy to see that there are huge differences in the seven churches of God in the book of Revelation. There are also huge differences between the different groups of God's church today. That is reality.

So what does this really have to do with us, you and me, the everyday lay member? First off, in my opinion, God is testing us as never before, most of

us have been in God's church for 20, 30, 40, or even 50 years. For a lot of years God has worked miracles with us, as he was building our faith. God was teaching us about the Sabbath, the holy days, tithing, and how different we are from society and the ways of this world in general, and we are different, brethren.

I can remember sitting at the feast site in Squaw Valley and they announced that a hurricane was headed toward the feast site in Jekyll Island, Georgia, and everyone prayed about it for 2 or 3 days and at the last minute the hurricane made a left turn, the Feast and God's people were spared. We were used to things like this when we prayed, we even expected them.

I can remember a number of physical healings over the years also. You know Bob Dick, who was my minister when I attended United Church of God. He gave a sermon on how God is with us, and protects us.

He told us a story about an older lady in one of his congregations who lived in Mobile, Alabama, a hurricane came through where she lived, and Mr. Dick could not get through to her for 2 or 3 days because the roads were blocked by debris, and he was quite concerned about her. You know what he saw when he finally got through to her? Her house was completely intact, all the damage she sustained was the loss of one awning and a few shingles, both of her neighbors' homes to the right and the left of her house were gone. All that was left of either house were the foundations. Her property was completely protected and spared. We were all used to these kinds of stories.

Another story I remember, was in Squaw Valley. A couple of weeks before the Feast that year, a huge infestation of yellow jackets took up residence in the valley. We were asking our local congregation to pray about the situation. (That was our assigned Feast site.) Two days before the Feast was to start, a storm with a lot of wind came in and blew all the yellow jackets away. Again we prayed, and God performed.

God was *building our faith*. Things have changed in the last 6 to 8 years, have they not? It seems that God is now *testing that very faith He built in us*. It seems that we all have trials like never before, one right after another. A lot of people have health problems of one type or another. There has always

been sickness in God's church to one degree or another but not to the extent that we now have it.

Just our little group here has a pretty healthy prayer list. When have you ever heard of one of God's people losing all 4 limbs? That happened a few years ago to Mrs. Amora who attends the United Church of God in Houston, Texas. We were used to just the opposite, were we not?

A miracle and a healing—a family whom I know quite well and have been friends of mine since 1978, lost their home and 5 vehicles due to a tornado in Arkansas, about 3 or 4 years ago. You did not hear of things like that with God's people 8 or 10 years ago. Those things just did not happen.

Our faith is now being tested. Another example, just happened recently, a family who lives in Portland, Oregon and who attends the new church COGWA, (that, we all know, is a split from United Church of God), have family in Joplin, Missouri, a mom, dad, and a grandma who also attend COGWA—brothers, part of God's church.

These people lost their homes to the tornado that tore through that town. Mom and Dad lost their home and just about everything they owned. The Grandma also lost her home, and if that was not enough the parents did not have homeowners insurance on their home because they owned it, they did not feel they needed it. It was paid for.

These people are now starting life over again financially. Brethren we are being tested and tried spiritually, we all have tests and trials we are going through. Some of us are being tested severely, monetarily. Some of us have lost our homes already; some of us cannot find employment no matter what we do. Some of us that are employed are being tested at work by the boss or by other employees, or are just flat under-employed. We still are not making it even though we work every day.

I just heard of a family of 6 that live in a camp trailer in a local campground here in Portland. This family also attends God's church and they have lost everything. We are all being tested and tried, some have huge marital problems, and some of us are going through trials due to our children.

The point is that God is allowing those things to happen. God could take care of all our problems in a New York minute, if He did not love us.

But He does love us, that is why we are being tested. God is preparing us for the Kingdom of God, and His promises. And He promises that He will not give us more than we can endure. That is a promise, brethren, even though we are going through what we are going through.

Matthew 24:13 But he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved.

So, we know that we have to endure to the end. We also know we have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. We also know that there are huge differences between God's churches. In the times we are living in and being tried in, do you not want help with what you and I are going through? I do. I want help, brethren.

We know we need to stay strong spiritually. We do this through prayer, Bible study, sound sermons and sermonettes, through repentance and trying to keep God's laws and way of life correctly, by talking to one another and encouraging one another. And all these things are important, but there is more to it than just this.

To help ourselves spiritually, we also need to be strong mentally. As we go through tests and trials, we really need to live in reality. That is part of the mental equation. The commentary in this church each week is designed to help you and I understand what is happening in both America and the world. It is warning us what our government is doing when it comes to the economy, how our rights as citizens are being lost, how the weather is effecting our world, and a whole host of other things that can and will effect all of us.

God is testing and trying us for the Kingdom of God. He is allowing us to go through some pretty severe trials. The ministry of the Church of the Great God is trying to prepare us mentally, through the commentary each week, because our mental state of mind and attitude have everything to do with our spiritual well-being and growth. They go together.

We should not get discouraged or depressed by the news, or the commentary. We understand the plan of God; we have understood it for years. We know what is coming; we should prepare ourselves mentally, for what ever God requires of us.

I Thessalonians 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

Luke 21:36 Watch you therefore and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

God is saying in this verse to keep a constant watch and pray that if possible you may arrive in My presence without having to experience these horrors. Christ is warning and preparing his disciples mentally in both Matthew 24, and Luke 21.

Instead of getting discouraged or depressed by the news, or the commentary, we should be thankful for the warning. It prepares us mentally for what is coming.

What happens to us when we get discouraged or depressed? We usually stop studying regularly, we stop praying regularly, it becomes hit and miss. We get in an attitude with God. We say things like, “Why me? Why is this happening to me?”

We think God does not love us any more. We might even get sporadic in our church attendance. Now we all know if this condition goes on long enough it can affect us spiritually. That is why when we are prepared mentally, we do much better spiritually.

There is a third part to this. The ministry is trying to prepare us. First, spiritually, second, mentally, and third, physically, for what is coming on this nation and all of Israel—and *it is coming*.

How do we get physically prepared? We have been warned to try and pay off our debts. We have been warned to try to pay off our homes, if possible. I know these things are not easy. We have been warned to try to pay off our

credit cards. We have been told to buy food and set it aside. And about 4 years ago we were even told that we might want to buy some silver, because it was a good investment. If you or I would have invested in silver, at that time, we would have done very well in our investment. At that time, if I remember correctly, Silver was \$7.00 an ounce. Today it is about \$35.00 per ounce.

I realize that a lot of us did not have the means to buy a large quantity of silver at that time, but I think most of us could have afforded one ounce per week. If we would have purchased just one ounce per week, we would have about 208 ounces of silver today, it would be worth about \$7,280.

Some people think of silver as evil because of what the Bible says in James 5:3.

James 5:3 (RSV) Your gold and silver is cankered and the rust of them shall be a witness against you and shall eat your flesh as if it were fire. You have heaped treasure together for the last days.

Now you and I, I hope, do not have the attitude of the rich man described here in James 5, which I do not have time to go through. Buying silver is an investment, that is all it is. It is no different than buying real estate, or investing in the stock market, or antiques, hot rods cars, as my son and I have done over the years. It just happens to be a good place to put some money, today, at present. Eight or ten years ago real estate was a much better investment, but that is all they are—investments.

If you and I are in good shape physically, that helps us tremendously with our mental state of mind, and attitude. So if we are mentally prepared, in good mental attitude, it helps us with our spiritual attitude, our prayer life, and our Bible study—not to mention it helps us grow closer to God.

You and I should be looking for help from the ministry. We should be looking for (1) spiritual help, (2) mental help, and (3) the physical part of it. Now that does not mean that everything that is said and taught that has to do with the mental and physical part of this, we have to do, or even completely agree with. We get to make choices on these things. The commentary is a tool or a helpmate, to help us prepare spiritually for what lies ahead, and the

Kingdom of God. That is what it is all about, is it not? There are instructions for God's ministry, also.

II Timothy 4:2-5 (AMPV) [First we had instruction for us and now we have instruction for the ministry] Herald and preach the word! Keep your sense of urgency {stand by, be at hand and ready}, whether the opportunity seems to be favorable or unfavorable. {Whether it is convenient or inconvenient, whether it be welcome or not welcome, you as a preacher of the word are to show people in what way their lives are wrong.} And convince them, rebuking and correcting them, warning and urging, and encouraging them, being unflagging and inexhaustible in patience and teaching. For the time is coming when {people} will not tolerate (endure) sound and wholesome instruction, but, having ears itching {for something pleasing and gratifying}, they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold, [I believe that we are there now, I think we are there in the churches of God. That is my opinion, you do not have to agree with me on that.] and will turn aside from hearing the truth and wondering off to myths and man-made fictions. As for you, be calm and cool and steady, accept and suffer unflinchingly every hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fully perform all the duties of your ministry.

Verse 2 and 5 is exactly what the ministry of the Church of the Great God is doing. First, they help us with our spiritual growth and well-being. Second, they prepare us mentally for what is coming on the entire world, not just America. And third, they are preparing us physically, so we can do all that we can do to get ourselves out of debt, put some food and water away in case of a disaster, and so we can help and serve others with the things we put away. After that, it is all up to God anyway. We can only do so much.

This has nothing to do with faith—the faith is in God. And God will come through for all of us, as long as we are doing our part, and growing spiritually. That is the key, is it not? I would like to ask you a question?

Which of the seven churches of God, in the book of Revelation, would you want to be part of? Which one would you want to attend? I think the majority of us would choose the Philadelphia Church of God.

Well, today we get to choose where we will go to church. I think there are over 500 churches, from what I heard. But we need to choose wisely. God has a problem with 5 of the 7 churches of God. He had a problem with Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodiceans. And God tells them to repent or change or there will be consequences to pay.

God did not have a problem with Smyrna, but they were going to be persecuted. God says I know your tribulation, and I know your poverty. God says the Devil will cast some of you into prison, and some of you might be killed. I know God did not have a problem with Smyrna, but I would not like to go through what some of these people were going to have to endure. That did not sound good at all. I would not want to go through any of that.

So the clear choice is the Philadelphia Church of God. God said He loved those people. If we are really trying to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, we should want help from one of God's ministers. First, spiritually. Second, mentally. Third, physically.

If we go to church for the social part of it, or where our children have a lot of other children to kick around with, or go for the great feast site, or for anything other than working out our salvation, then it does not really matter which of God's churches you go to, pick one, go wherever you like. They are all God's churches, but they all have huge differences just like the seven churches of Revelation.

I hope I did not offend anyone by what I said. I am not pointing the finger at anybody. I am not knocking anyone of God's churches. But I do live in reality and I am just making the point that there are major differences between the churches of God. And it is your responsibility, and mine, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. So choose wisely!