

What Is The Work Of God Now? (Part Two)

Why Disunity?

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This sermon will continue the message I gave on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. Matthew 28:19-20 had a great deal to do with that sermon. In fact it, indeed, was the foundation for the sermon.

Matthew 28:19-20 Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

The previous sermon on this subject of "doing the work" laid a foundation covering some of the history of the church's approach doing the work under Herbert W. Armstrong.

I stated in that sermon that the church's public persona regarding "doing the work" was almost totally on "preaching the gospel to the world." Even though I feel Herbert Armstrong did an admirable job in feeding the flock, he rarely ever mentioned it in his letters, articles, booklets, or in sermons. That is because his mind was on preaching to the public.

Toward the end of his life the emphasis shifted even further to preaching to the world as a witness. Gradually, preaching the gospel to the church—the "feeding of the flock"—slid into the background.

These things played a large role in making members believe that all the church was responsible to God for was "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God *to the world*." However, we saw that the great commission's emphasis is on "making disciples." There are significant differences between "making disciples" and "preaching the gospel to the world."

Let us turn to a quote of something the apostle Paul said in Acts 20. Paul uttered this whenever he was making his last goodbye to the Ephesian elders. He was on his way to Jerusalem. Eventually, from there, he went to Rome and had to face the authorities there. He said to these people:

Acts 20:27 I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Paul had spent many years in his journeys crisscrossing the area of what is today western Turkey, preaching the gospel to them, as well as to the world. In making this statement, he is saying in effect that a disciple is not made merely by preaching the gospel to him as a witness. There is a vast difference between the two. A disciple of Christ is created through much preaching, personal study, prayer, meditation, fellowship, and experience in a relationship with the Father, the Son, and the church. Jesus clearly said, in Matthew 28:20, that the disciples were to be taught "*All things whatsoever I have commanded you.*"

We saw that scripture in the book of Galatians about "Christ being formed in us." Brethren, it takes a long time. We are learning in our experiences as a Christian that it takes a long time for Christ to be formed in us. Preaching "all the counsel of God" takes a long time. This *is* "feeding the flock," and it takes a long process for it to be completed. Without a doubt, the largest portion of the "great commission" requires the expending of the greater amount of time, effort, manpower, and money be spent on the preaching of the gospel to the church [i.e., "feeding the flock"].

I stated in that sermon categorically that I am not against preaching the gospel to the world. We are doing it, in a small way. But I *am* against the ignorance and intensity of feeling that states it is the only thing that identifies the true church, especially at this time when the church is so badly divided. I am against the fact that it is causing the expenditure of a great deal of time, energy, and money which I feel very strongly should be spent on the church—healing the church. The dividing is continuing unabated which, to me, means that the problems the church is having are not yet solved.

I mentioned in that sermon I have heard of four generalities justifying the present condition of the church.

- 1) That God could not possibly be responsible for the splitting because He is a God of unity.
- 2) That if we just get out there and preach the gospel to the world, unity will occur.
- 3) That Satan has split the church.
- 4) That the ministry is entirely responsible.

The most interesting thing to me about all four generalities is that they allow the individuals claiming them to escape any responsibility for being part of the cause of the splitting.

Not everybody is saying these four things. Usually if they talk to me they only mention one of them. But, in talking to enough people, these four seem to rise to the surface as the justifications. Most of these people see themselves as innocent victims of somebody else. They see themselves as victims of Herbert W. Armstrong. They see themselves as victims of a harsh ministry. They see themselves as victims of a church governmental structure. They see themselves as victims of wrong doctrine. Well, my thought on that is—*nonsense*! Where does personal responsibility come into this? How quickly people forget that nobody dragged us into the church of God, and nobody put bars on the doors to hold us in and keep us from leaving.

Now I wonder if any of this might sound familiar to you. In Romans 15:4 the apostle Paul said, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning [instruction]." That teaches me that if we see things happening within the body of Christ, the Old Testament is a great reservoir of instruction regarding God's relationship with those who have made a covenant with Him.

God faithfully recorded the way those people acted and reacted to Him, as well as the way He reacted to them. He had people like Moses, Samuel,

David, and Ezra, and on and on—to write those things down. So that when the time came for His Son to come, die for the sins of the world, and start the church, the church would have at its fingertips all the instruction that it needed to find out what's happening, why, and what to do about it.

There is an interesting scripture back in Exodus 16.

Exodus 16:2 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

Do you think those people who were doing the murmuring did not think that they were victims of Moses and Aaron? They most surely did. Of course, in their carnality, they turned around and blamed *them*.

Exodus 16:3 And the children of Israel said unto them, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for you have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Human nature never changes. Turn to Exodus 17. This was a little bit later after what happened in chapter 16.

Exodus 17:2-4 Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide you with me? Wherefore do you tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me.

The Israelites were only too happy to receive liberty from their bondage to Egypt, but were very unwilling—complaining loudly, even rebelling in the wilderness, accusing Moses and Aaron and, by extension, God Himself to accept the hardships the *very* liberty they received from God through those men they now possessed.

Being in the church is no different, in that sense. We have become part of a body—a nation, the body of Christ, a royal priesthood. But God looks at us both *as individuals* and *as a body*, and He leads and guides that entire body. He expects those who are now part of the body, when they signed up by going through baptism and the receipt of His Holy Spirit, to be willing to endure whatever that body goes through. We can see that Israel was unwilling to do that.

God is creating us in His image. These things—like "preaching the gospel to the world" and "feeding the flock"—are responsibilities—duties—that He gives us to carry out. Certainly He is involved with us, and in that sense these things are His work too, but they are far more like assigned duties.

We saw in the book of Numbers—it was thoroughly demonstrated through circumstances, conditions, situations that these things [duties] were not always the same for Israel in their wilderness pilgrimage. Brethren, neither have they been the same for all of God's people all the way down through the ages. Life is difficult. Life does not stay in a nice, smooth, easy mode forever. There are bumps in the road. There are turns in the road. Sometimes you are up, sometimes you are down. It is that way with individuals. It is that way with the body of Christ as well.

Things were not "peaches and cream" all the time for David. There were good times, and there were bad times as he carried out the work that God gave to him, which was to unite Israel into a nation. He did an excellent job.

Moses suffered through the same things that the rest of the body of Israel did in the wilderness. When he made a bad mistake, he paid for it by not being able to go into the land.

The same is true with Samuel and Elijah and Nehemiah and Ezra. These men faced great hardships in carrying out the assignments that God gave them to do. Each one had duties to carry out within God's overall purpose. The same principle is true of the church, and *it must adapt*. It must adjust to the circumstances that God provides, or the chastening will continue.

There is an interesting scripture in Ezekiel 33, "the watchman" chapter. I want you to think of this in terms of what the church is going through right now.

Ezekiel 33:9-12 Nevertheless, if you warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. Therefore O you son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus you speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, says the Lord G_{OD}. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn you, turn you from your evil ways: for why will you die, O house of Israel? Therefore, you son of man, say unto the children of your people, the righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turns from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sins.

"Turn you" is a very common theme in the prophets. They may not say "Turn you" all the time, but they will say "Repent." They will say, "Why do you continue in this way?"—the implication being "Turn! Go in another direction."

Assuming that we are merely victims—while at the same time accusing others of being the cause during the splitting of the church—is a very dangerous, self-righteous position. We need to very carefully examine ourselves and our relationship with God.

The first point we examined in that sermon was that the ministry is entirely responsible. I think I showed you clearly, in Matthew 25, Jesus prophesied that just before His coming that the whole church would go to sleep. That parable also shows that only one-half of the virgins had sufficient oil.

I did not mention this at that time, but I have a transcript of a sermon given by Herbert Armstrong somewhere in mid 1978. I believe it was in June of

1978. He gave that sermon to the Pasadena PM congregation. The sermon of course was recorded, and then it went out within the next couple of weeks to the entire church. So everybody, at that time, should have heard that sermon from God's apostle.

He said *fifteen times* in that sermon, "WAKE UP!" Do you think that he did not understand that the church was going to sleep under his leadership? He most surely did. He was never able to wake everybody up, but he knew that something was afoot in the church that was not good. At the end of the sermon, he gave a very heart-wrenching appeal to all the people to repent, to get themselves back to God. It was only six months later that the church was attacked by the State of California. We never really did come out of our lethargy. We were "off the track" and we were "bumping down the ties," right up to Mr. Armstrong's death.

I also showed you regarding that first point, from the Old Testament, that just prior to the scattering of both Israel and Judah, God clearly recorded they were sick as a body from the "top of their head to the soles of their feet." He said there was "no soundness in them," meaning that they were in an unhealthy state.

The important instruction for us here is this establishes God's pattern, so we will understand the point at which He scatters. When there is no soundness in the body, He scatters.

The second point touched on Satan being the real cause. The real issue here is a lack of understanding of God's sovereignty. Satan is nothing more than a dupe in God's hands. He can do nothing more than God permits.
Interpretation: God scattered the church.

Now let us go back to the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 5:7-9 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared: Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

Brethren, those who care about the church and its condition are suffering. It is very important in this regard that we see very clear evidence that God is much more deeply involved in the cause of our suffering than our faith will frequently admit. We have also got to understand that suffering is not necessarily because of *our* sins.

I read these verses in Hebrews 5 because Jesus is the One who is the subject of what is being said there. Jesus committed no sins, but He suffered nonetheless. It is a truism. I know that you understand that frequently the innocent suffer right along with the guilty. Sometimes the innocent suffer, and the guilty do not seem to suffer at all. Certainly that is the way it was with Christ. He had to suffer for them. I showed you other examples. Job was not guilty of any gross sins, nor was Abraham, nor Joseph, and yet they faced great calamities.

Regardless of the cause, calamities are exercises. The church is in a calamity of the first order right now, but we have got to look at this thing in the right way. They are exercises that we are required to adjust to, face, and overcome. The problem now is for us to extricate ourselves from this condition regardless of whether we were directly a cause, or we were only a small part of a cause, or whether we were maybe no part of the cause at all. The fact of the church being scattered is there.

In this scattering situation, it is very clear that our sins were the cause, but we have got to understand that it was God Himself who reacted to bring the consequences on us very pointedly, and also very quickly.

Satan cannot be blamed for this—except indirectly. He is nothing more than a dupe in God's hands. He is a very cunning, destructive, angry, and a hate-filled dupe to be sure, but he can only go as far as God is willing to use him. He could never scatter the church without God willing it so.

So point 2 is: Satan did not scatter the church. God did—in reaction to our sins.

Now we are going to look at the notion that God would never scatter the church because He is a God of unity. We are going to go back to the book of

I Kings and destroy that idea. I want you to notice what God does when He is angry.

I Kings 11:9-13 And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of you, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely rend the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Notwithstanding in your days I will not do it for David your father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of your son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to your son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen.

Is God saying there that He is going to split Israel—the people who made the covenant with Him? It most surely does. Let us see it even further in I Kings 12:15. Rehoboam is now king. Some Israelites came to King Rehoboam (a Jew) and said to him, "Look, there's talk of splitting away up there in Israel, but we will stay with you, we will stay united with Judah if you will just lower the taxes that Solomon imposed upon us, because it's a yoke that is heavier than we can bear."

Well, Rehoboam consulted with his advisors. The old men told him, "Lower the taxes." The young men said, "Make it harder on them." He took the advice of the young men, and so Israel let the war cry out and said, "To your tents, O Israel." What that meant was, "Let's go home and split off."

I Kings 12:15 Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people: for the cause was from the LORD.

Do you see what that says there? God hardened Rehoboam's heart so that he rejected the wise counsel and accepted the foolish counsel, because God was determined to split Israel asunder.

Are some people trying to tell me that God will not scatter those who have made a covenant with Him? Oh yes, He will.

Jeremiah 3:6-8 The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Have you seen that which backsliding Israel has done? She is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there has played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn you unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

God divorced Israel. Divorce is splitting, dividing, scattering. Now did God want unity then? Yes. God wants unity always—but it always has to be on *His* terms. It is not unity at any price. It is unity on *His* terms.

We are to live by every word of God, and He clearly warns us in Leviticus 26:33 that if His covenant people do not obey Him, He will scatter them. That is His warning, and that is His promise. It has been fulfilled in the church just as surely as it was fulfilled with Israel and with Judah.

Does God spit out the Laodiceans? I even read in a Protestant commentary (and they used these words) that "spitting out" represents "a casting out of the body." That is *splitting*. They see the principle that is there.

Now if people are unwilling to consider in the face of biblical evidence—even the little bit I have shown you, and there is a great deal more that I could have shown you—that there are times that God will scatter those who have made a covenant with Him—even His church—then I submit to you that those people are in denial. They are in denial as to the reality of what the cause of the scattering is. They are blinded by self-righteousness—to the reality that they might be part of the cause—because maybe they think they are too insignificant to matter. But when you have an awful lot of insignificant people, who are doing the same things, it adds up to a very significant problem.

In an overall sense, what is being left out of this present-day picture by many people is God's sovereignty, as well as His love. God's intent, in everything that He does in relationship to His people, is the destruction of sin—so that those people can be prepared to live with Him in His Kingdom forever and ever. Brethren, God is serious about carrying out His responsibilities, and sometimes He is extremely patient, but when He acts it can be very painful.

I have heard of people—remarking about a weakness that they have—say, "Well, God is just going to take me as I am." God will not take us as we are. We have to change, and that is why there is so much in the Bible about overcoming, growing, resisting sin, changing, and turning to Him. If we wait for our patient God to take a hand in helping us, it is probably going to be a very painful process. He would much rather that *we* take it in hand to overcome, and He will help us through it. In almost every case, we are probably going to deal easier with ourselves than He would. By the time He deals with us, He has got to use pretty stern measures so that what we are doing or failing to do does not become totally engraved in our character, in our thinking.

I know that I cannot make judgments for Him. But I do understand that He wants us in His Kingdom. He will do whatever it takes to get us there in the condition that He wants us to be in.

Let us turn now to Hebrews 12. You have to understand—in light of the context of the whole book—that Hebrews was written to a group of people who were fading away as far as salvation is concerned. They were going through some pretty difficult trials for them and they really facing up to them either.

Hebrews 12:4-11 You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children. My son, despise not you the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him [Rebuking is pretty hard]: For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chastens not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had

fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure: but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

There is a goldmine of instruction here regarding the current situation in the church, and the sense—within the context of the whole book—is on "chastening." But many modern translations will use the word "discipline," and technically it is closer in meaning to the Greek word that is here in the King James translated "chastening."

Discipline covers formal instruction, as you are receiving now. You are sitting in a classroom and you are going to school, as it were. That is part of the discipline of God, but it also includes drill. Drill is very similar to: spelling drills, math drills, drills that an army recruit goes through like marching drills, rifle practice, or any kind of drill that is associated with learning something repetitively. "One-two-three-four," "One-two-three-four," "One-two-three-four," over and over again till we get it.

Discipline also includes punishment—spanking, rebuke, stern correction. Paul is saying that the sons of God should expect correction; should expect even rebuke. Brethren, we were not scattered because we were good. We deserve what we are getting, and we are probably not getting as much as we deserve. God has a way of starting off easy, but the punishment, the rebuke, the discipline becomes more stern as we fail to respond, until He finally gets our attention. And you understand that, as far as getting our attention, it goes right into the Tribulation—which I personally, brethren, do not want to have to go through. I do not think any of you want to either.

If we learn our lessons now, maybe God in His mercy will take us to that place of safety. God's discipline is always corrective. He is not a sadist. He does not discipline us for the fun of it. He disciplines us because we need to be turned in another direction. What He is doing is removing impediments to our spiritual development—so don't get discouraged.

Hold your finger there and let's flip back to the book of Job:

Job 2:9-10 -said his wife unto him, Do you still retain your integrity? Curse God, and die. But he said unto her, You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

Now like Job, I feel certain that God is doing this for our good—the good being that we might be in His Kingdom. We are being pruned. I do not know how a tree feels when it gets branches cut off it. I do not know whether it can feel at all. But if it could feel, I do not think that it would feel good to have a branch or many branches cut off.

We are being pruned and we can at least console ourselves—understanding the principles that are in God's Word that we are being pruned in order to be able to produce more fruit, just like a tree. We are being trained in godliness through learning how to deal with adversity. Like Job, we must learn to look beyond the trial, understanding that God is working with us.

The point in Hebrews 12:7 is that God Himself is educating His children. The people to whom Hebrews was written, had a history of having made light of His working with them, and the result was that they were neglectful of it.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

That is exactly what was happening to them. They were slipping away and God was putting them through a discipline in order to get their attention, so that they would use their free moral agency to turn themselves away from whatever it was that they were slipping in.

Hebrews 2:2-3 For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward: How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation:

which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.

Is it possible, brethren, that the same accusation could be made against us? If Paul were writing today, is it possible that same accusation would be made—that we were slipping away?

The Laodiceans say, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." They say this by being careless about the way that they conduct their lives, and especially their personal relationships to God. That is why God accuses them of that.

Discipline is a sign to God's people that He accepts us as His children. It is a sign that He loves us. Discipline is a privilege that God gives to His children: if He did not love us, He would simply let us go on by doing nothing.

Unfortunately that is what so many parents are doing, or are failing to do with their children. They just let them grow up—doing nothing—and somehow think that, by magic, they are going to turn out to be good citizens and bring honor and glory to their family.

Are you aware that the world does not receive discipline from God? It receives judgment. It is very easy for me to look at that thing that happened out in Columbine, and see that was a judgment.

II Corinthians 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Brethren, do not neglect this circumstance that the church finds itself in. Use it for growth. God has a definite purpose in mind for disciplining us. God disciplines us for holiness. It is the father's responsibility to train his children to behave. God is a very responsible, faithful, loyal Father to His children. He wants to share His holiness with us so that we can take our place beside Jesus Christ. He is going to follow through and discipline us. He loves us.

Proverbs 13:24 He that spares his rod hates his son: but he that loves him chastens him betimes [early].

We are getting it now.

Proverbs 22:15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child: but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

Proverbs 23:13-14 Withhold not correction from the child: for if you beat him with the rod, he shall not die. You shall beat him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from hell [the grave].

Love and punishment are not incongruous. They are complementary and absolutely necessary aspects of training. I think that the foolishness that is bound in the church's collective heart is in some measure a departure from doctrine—from "the faith once delivered"—and this has left many confused and uncertain as to what to believe. So many are lackadaisically going through the motions—neglectful of self-discipline—with major losses of faith and devotion to duty.

The end of this point is: God wants unity, but it has got to be on His terms. He is the only One wise enough and loving enough to know what the terms have to be.

Now let us look at that other notion that if we would all just get out there and preach the gospel, unity would occur. Deeply involved in this second notion is that many are overlooking the history of the Israelitish people, recorded in God's Word.

Again brethren, the Bible is written for the church, and human nature is the same today as it was then. Even though we have made the New Covenant with God, because of human nature we still have a strong tendency to follow the same patterns as they did. And you know there is very much written about Israel's stiff-necked attitude.

We have to take these things into consideration to be advised and to hold ourselves in check. If we fail to do that, we can very easily follow the same

path as our ancestors. The Israelites—it is shown in the Bible—are very independent-thinking people. It is hard to weld Israelites into a team. We seem to want to kind of go off in our own direction all the time. But learn this truism: Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are condemned to repeat it.

John 8:38-41 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and you do that which you have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said unto them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. You do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.

Now they believed this—perhaps ignorantly in their deception—but it was not true. God was not their father. Satan was their father.

John 8:42-44 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, you would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do you not understand my speech? Even because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning: and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Brethren, there is a very far-reaching principle here. The Israelitish people have a long history of being a rebellious, dividing people. After entering into the Promised Land, supposedly united under Joshua, it took them 400 years to become a single united nation—which happened under David. The book of Judges tells us why. Twice it tells us. The last verse in the book of Judges says,

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

That is the history of our people. It is also a trait that is in every one of us; if left on our own, we would scatter to the four winds.

Long before Israel went into the land—the Bible shows in Numbers and especially Exodus—they were constantly curious as to how other nations worshipped their gods; how they operated their governments, their military, and their economic systems. They looked and then they would introduce those ideas into the system given to Israel by God, and create splits.

God warned them to not learn the way of the heathen. But they would turn right around and do it anyway, to their own detriment. Now fast-forward to 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989. Was the Worldwide Church of God learning the way of the heathen and introducing those teachings—those doctrinal concepts—into the system given by God? It is exactly the same pattern! We think we are so modern sometimes.

And even though we have the Spirit of God, and even though we have made the New Covenant with God, human nature is right below the surface, ready to push itself in and make itself felt. It very quickly moves to syncretize with the world—just like Israel did, just like the Worldwide did. They went so far as to send their ministers to Protestant seminaries. That is a head-scratcher. It is no wonder that this happened—but we have all been affected by it to some degree.

Matthew 12:39-42 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly: so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah: and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon: and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

The unspoken implication is that if Jesus was preaching to the Gentiles, they would repent. The unspoken implication is: Israel, why are you not repenting? They are hard-headed. They are stiff-necked. Those are our fathers.

How much of the attitude of that pagan system that was introduced into the Worldwide Church of God was absorbed and is still driving the splitting? I do not know the answer to that, but that attitude is still there.

Let me remind you of something. You can compare these two scriptures:

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 For you are an holy people unto the LORD your God: the LORD your God has chosen you to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, has the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

This is the same pattern. This is the same God working. He followed the same general pattern with the church as He did with Israel. So we have no wherewithal to brag before God. We are the descendants of a rebellious stock. The reason the Old Testament is preserved for us is so that we *do not* follow the same general paths. But we did.

Jeremiah 7:3-10 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust you not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, are these. For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom you know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?

Let us extract another principle from here. These people had put their trust that they would be alright in the principle that they were "in the church." The Temple was right there. They could look at it and God dwelt there—therefore they were close to God. Why does God mention these sins? Because they were guilty.

Now in the same manner, many in the church had unwittingly put their trust in the fact that they have God's Spirit—He dwells in them—therefore nothing like this could possibly happen. But do you know what was overlooked? The overlooked fact is that God's Spirit does not make—force—us to make the right choices. It leads. It guides. But it does not force. It does not make us obey. That is *our* choice.

Paul shows very clearly in Romans 7 that human nature remains with us even though we are converted. It is always just below the surface, aggressively forcing sin into the choices of our lives. And in the midst of all this, what is being overlooked is that the church was dividing—and divided while it was preaching the gospel to the world. If the preaching of the gospel was going to pull us together, why did it not *hold* us together?

A simple question: Are you aware that the church under Herbert Armstrong has a history of dividing from time to time? We are going through what is,

undoubtedly, the most serious experience with it. Herbert Armstrong lost entire congregations during his early years in Oregon. These splits usually occurred while he was out of town, "doing the work."

If you are familiar with his autobiography, it can reasonably be concluded that these splits occurred partly because he was "doing the work," because those congregations split away—following another elder—while Herbert Armstrong was in another city, holding an evangelistic campaign to spread the gospel of the Kingdom of God. He would return home to find that he had lost a major portion of the group there.

I think it can be reasonably shown that preaching the gospel was, to some extent, a cause of the divisions, because some in those congregations in Oregon believed it was foolish for him to go to those areas and preach. "Why not just stay there?"

In 1974, there was a major split, all the while Herbert Armstrong was preaching the gospel. In fact the split occurred when he was on his way, flying to the Philippines, to preach.

I think we can reach a conclusion on this second point: Preaching the gospel to the world will not of itself hold the church together. The church deteriorated and broke apart while it was doing just that. The problems lie elsewhere.