

Redeeming The Time For Unity

Unity Through God and Christ

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In the introduction section of *Mystery of the Ages*, Mr. Armstrong recounts his early life as God was bringing Mrs. Armstrong and him to conversion. He recounts the vivid dream his wife had only days after their marriage in 1915. It seems to be the first of many revelations from God to direct him in what would become the most significant life in the twentieth century, even though he did not see it then and was merely embarrassed by it.

He wrote,

In a matter of days after our marriage, while living in Chicago, my wife had a dream so vivid and impressive it overwhelmed and shook her tremendously. It was so realistic it seemed more like a vision. For two or three days afterward everything else seemed unreal—as if in a daze—and only this extraordinary dream seemed real.

In her dream she and I were crossing the wide intersection only a block or two from our apartment, where Broadway diagonally crosses Sheridan Road. Suddenly there appeared an awesome sight in the sky above. It was a dazzling spectacle—the sky filled with a gigantic solid mass of brilliant stars, shaped like a huge banner. The stars began to quiver and separate, finally vanishing. In her dream, she called my attention to the vanishing stars, when another huge grouping of flashing stars appeared, then quivering, separating and vanishing like the first.

As she and I, in her dream, looked upward at the vanishing stars, three large white birds suddenly appeared in the sky between us and the vanishing stars. These great white birds flew directly toward us. As they descended nearer, she perceived that they were angels...

He continues a little further down:

Then it seemed in her dream that Christ descended from among them and stood directly in front of us. At first I was a little doubtful and afraid of how He would receive us, because I remembered we had neglected our Bible study

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and had our minds too much on things apart from His from His interests. But as we went up to Him, He put His arms around both of us and we were so happy! I thought people all over the world had seen Him come. As far as we could see, people were just swarming into the streets at the broad intersection. Some were glad and some were afraid.

Then it seemed He had changed into an angel. I was terribly disappointed at first, until he told me Christ was really coming in a very short time.

At that time we had been going quite regularly to motion picture theaters. She asked the angel if this were wrong. He replied Christ had important work for us to do, preparing for His coming—there would be no time for 'movies' (those were the days of the silent pictures). Then the angel and the whole spectacle seemed to vanish, and she awakened, shaken and wondering!

As Warren Lee mentioned at the beginning of his sermonette at the Feast this year, the very first gift that God gave to man as recorded in the book of Genesis was TIME.

Genesis 1:1-5 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

Genesis 2:1-4 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all of the host of them. And in the seventh day God ended His work which He had made. And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made and God blessed the seventh day and He sanctified it. Because that in it He had rested from all his work which God created and made. These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

In these two sets of verses, God shows us that, before this, time as we know it did not exist. Now, however, God had created a distinct frame of reference for us, in which things were to be accomplished by men and He used His own work within a finite period as an example to us of accomplishing specific works that lead to His perfection! The

very first thing with which God has gifted man is a way to measure his progress!

It really struck me a few weeks ago, as I re-read that account of Mrs. Armstrong's dream, that the very first and only command God sent to Mr. Armstrong in the beginning of His direct relationship with him was to be careful in his use of time as he prepared for Christ's return. God warned Adam, too, that the correct use of the time He had given to Him as a gift would result in life or death.

Genesis 2:15-17 Then the LOORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LOORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Our use of the time that God has given us will either result in something very special that has been set apart for perfection—as we see by the example of God's own work in Genesis 1:31: "and God saw everything that He had made, and it was very good"—or it will be wasted as we pursue our own road to perfection and end in destruction—as we saw in Genesis 2:17: "...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Just as Mr. Armstrong had been told not to waste time in vain pursuits because he had a very important job to do—in a specific way, in a specific time—to fulfill his part in the purpose of God while God moves all men toward His Family, we, too, have now been called, not to waste our time in vain pursuits, but to do what God has chosen for us to do as our job as He moves His plan to perfection. We have been invited into a very special relationship with God, which has a measured success in our cooperative work over a finite period of time now as we prepare for the return of Jesus Christ.

I would like to string a couple of scriptures together here, to help us consider just what the Great God thinks of us and what He expects us to do with the breath of time each of us has in this life.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Ephesians 5:15-20 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but

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as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These two scriptures give us just a slight glimpse into what God thinks of us and what He expects from us. He has given us an extraordinary position and responsibility, and we must not try to force our own ideas of *the* work He has given us to do into a short lifetime that was intended, by Our Father, to produce something else. To do that is paramount to the same thing that Adam and Eve did when they took from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil!

Just as Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong were told at the beginning of their calling that "Christ had important work for them to do," we, too, have been called out of this world to be a royal priesthood. We do not have time to waste on things other than our responsibilities within this end time of God's church.

Those of us who were part of the Worldwide Church of God had the great privilege and opportunity to support Mr. Armstrong in a particular work that God had given him to preach the Gospel around the world at the end time. We had the privilege of being part of a work that restored and/or revealed, as plain truth to God's people, things that had been lost or may not have even been understood before. Things like God's plan and purpose, revealed through His Holy Days, and the fulfillment of the promises that He made to Abraham became clear to us because God made them known at this time to continue the road to the perfection of His Work! We had a renewed reference point to understand prophecy, and that became part of "the work."

However, brethren, through all this, we were missing the point of the bigger picture, and we fell asleep and with our eyes closed and a smug complacency from knowing that, "We were part of Herbert Armstrong's work." We lost sight of our own responsibilities to walk circumspectly and wisely, and we wasted much of the precious time with which we have been gifted by God, thinking we were okay because we were doing "the work." In fact, many of us became no better than the Pharisees, who had started with the best of intentions but lost the real focus of what God was really doing and got caught up in something else.

In His pity and tender mercy, God blew apart the corporate body of the Worldwide

Church of God in order to shake us up! He placed us in the groups where He saw fit to refresh our health and strengthen our ability to do our part in "the work" that we were called to do, the work on which we have been given the privilege to spend every moment of the breath of this life that we have left. We have to do the work to which He has called us!

What is this work that must be the primary focus of our time? What are we to do to make sure we are not wasting time trying to force something other than what God expects from us? It is rather simple and elementary, but it is absolutely critical in order to live the life that is pleasing and profitable to our Father. The work of God has never changed; we just keep losing our proper focus on it, even now!

Turn with me to John 17, where we come into the middle of the last public prayer that Jesus spoke to His Father:

John 17: 14-26 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

This is the work of God that should consume the time of our brief lives. Mr. Armstrong knew this and that his particular efforts were only a part of this overriding work of unity of the people in the Father and the Son! The irony here is that Worldwide, in many instances, sought unity the way the world does, and it just brought about disunity—but

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God has scattered His chosen people to unite us, to shake us from our complacency and refocus our minds and hearts on the ultimate work of God! Unless we put all our time into the work of God we will continue to scatter because we still do not get it!

Brethren, the prayer that we just read in John 17 was prefaced by the last words of warning that Jesus spoke to His disciples and, by extension, to us in John 16:

John 16:29-33 His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! 30 Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God." Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The disciples finally thought that they got it, that they were safe and secure in their own understanding and faith, and that because of this there was nothing that would knock them off course. However, Jesus showed them they had not quite understood the whole point of their calling yet, by telling them what was going to happen to them as they would be scattered and go back to what they felt comfortable with while He would remain faithful in His duty throughout. Our salvation does not depend on our own faith in ourselves but on our faith in Christ that He will pull us through this whole thing.

Barnes' *Notes* commentary on John 16:32:

[Ye shall be scattered every man to his own] That is, as in the margin, to his own home. You shall see me die, and suppose that my work is defeated, and return to your own dwellings. It is probable that the two disciples going to Emmaus were on their way to their dwellings, Luke 24. After his death all the disciples retired into Galilee, and were engaged in their common employment of fishing, John 21:1-14; matt 28:7.

We now live in the times about which Paul told Timothy in II Timothy 2: Perilous times in which men are lovers of themselves more than lovers of God; times full of pride, contention, pleasure-loving; and times when the whole world is rushing along at a pace so great that we feel, as Martin told me the other day, as if we are running down hill just

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ahead of an avalanche that will consume us at any moment if we slow down. These are the times that are forcing God's people to choose: either go back into the arms of the world or into the holiness of unity in the family of God.

Psalm 133:1-3 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forevermore.

This psalm comes right on the heels of Psalm 132:

Psalm 132:13-18 For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: "This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There I will make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon Himself His crown shall flourish."

Adam Clarke writes that these verses are a prophecy, spoken in the person of God, for the stability of Christ's church. Just as Jesus prayed in John 17, the Father has chosen His elect to be together in the same unity with Him and the Father that they have with each other.

What does Psalm 133 tell us about what will be produced in this work of God in which we are to invest all of our time? Adding John 17 into this psalm tells us that the sanctification process and the anointing with oil and the flow of refreshing from the Holy Spirit to the very body of Christ can take place only through this unity together with the Father and Son first! The unity that we thought we had toward the end of the association with the Worldwide Church of God was, in many ways, only a surface unity of "We are Family," generated by activities that may have created a terrific social environment; but when push came to shove, it only caused "every man to go back to his own."

All that being said, what does God expect from us now? Keeping in mind what Jesus prayed to His Father in John 17, let us turn to just a couple of the many scriptures where God gives us what should be occupying our time today, as His chosen generation.

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Acts 2:42-47 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

They were in singleness of heart, brethren, and God added daily as He thought best.

Romans 15:5-7 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

We are to receive one another as Christ received us to the glory of the Father, in single-mindedness with the same mind as Jesus Christ. That is an awesome responsibility.

I Corinthians 12:12-14, 18, 25-27 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many....But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased...that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

We have been set, as this chosen generation, into the Body exactly as it suits the Father's purpose. If we really believe this then, it is a matter of loyalty to the Father, shown in our lives as we remain loyal to the place and responsibilities where He has set us to do our work!

Ephesians 4:3-13 Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Brethren, we are endeavoring to be bound together in unity through a proper relationship with the Father and the Son—not individually, but together in the very throne room of the Great God.

Our unity is not achieved if we consider only our individual relationship with God, but through being one with the Father and the Son together. In a few moments, the second message of this Sabbath service in the Church of the Great God, where we have all been placed by God as it pleases Him, will shift from here in Tinley Park, where a very few have physically gathered together, to John Plunkett in Victoria, but what we must keep in mind is that we are not alone. As we are united with the Father and the Son, we are united with each other!

I would like you to consider one more thing as I end this split sermon.

Matthew 6:9-13 "In this manner, therefore, pray: *My* Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give *me* this day *my* daily bread. And forgive *me my* debts, as *I* forgive *my* debtors. And do not lead *me* into temptation, but deliver *me* from the evil one...

It does not say that, brethren.

Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven and sits as our intermediary. We enter there

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together with Him, through His sacrifice and His life, every moment of our lives that we loyally remain in the place in the body where He has set us accordingly as it has pleased Him. Then we will find true unity and peace as we come before the Father, together with Jesus Christ, in every minute of the time left in our lives; and together we will say,

Matthew 6:9-13 *Our* Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give *us* this day *our* daily bread. And forgive *us* our debts, as *we* forgive *our* debtors. And do not lead *us* into temptation, but deliver *us* from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.