

What Is The Church's Work Today (Part Two)

What We Are Involved in and What We Are Doing

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As we enter Part Two of this sermon that I began the other day, I am beginning by reminding you of its purpose. I want to make a bit of review here at the beginning, but I will add some things hopefully to clarify some things that I felt might have been a little bit vague as I reviewed the sermon in my mind.

The purpose of this sermon is to give you what I perceive happened in the greater church of God. The second thing is what I feel the church's work is today as a result of that. And, three, therefore, why the Church of the Great God is doing what it is doing.

I want to remind you that I nowhere said that I am against the preaching of the gospel to the world. I also told you very early in that sermon that we *are* preparing for that very thing, just in case. But, right now, it is not the main thrust of what we are doing. We are aware that that is a responsibility that God gives to the church, but we do not feel that at this time it is of the highest priority of the church. Other things need to be done first.

Now, bringing a person to *holiness* through the preaching of the gospel within the church, that is, the feeding of the flock, is a far more difficult, hard, time-consuming part of a person's trek to the Kingdom of God. The preaching of the gospel to the world at the very beginning is the easiest part of the entire process (and also the shortest part as well). *God's work is creating*. He is the Creator. Salvation is creation, and God is right in the middle of His work according to Psalm 74:12. A major portion of God's work is creating faith within us (John 6:28-29), so that we will respond in trust.

We also saw briefly that the church is compared to a human body that consists of many parts. The parts, that is, the members, do not all have exactly the same function. That is why Paul said God placed some apostles,

some prophets, some pastors and teachers, and so forth—and it goes right down into every portion of the body. Some parts of us are eyes, some are ears, some are nose, some are mouth, and on and on. So we do not all have exactly the same function, even though there are also many similarities as well.

Secondly, we also saw that the entire body that God is working in and through does not always have the same function either. I began to give you examples. Noah, who was doing the work of God just before the Flood, is called a *preacher of righteousness*. But God's work through Noah *changed* dramatically in one-year's time—from what he did before the Flood until what he did after the Flood. Abraham's work was different from Isaac's. Joseph's work was *greatly* different from that of Jacob's.

It is the same God, though. But He called them, and placed them, and used them to do different things—even though the general path was all pointed in the same direction, that is, the successful culmination of God's purpose that He is working out through men. Joshua's purpose was to settle the land. Moses' purpose was to get them there. Same group of people, but there was a change in their operations and functions.

Now turn with me to Numbers 9 (while we are speaking here about the Israelites) because I think that there is a verse that catches the essence of this principle that we were talking about as that sermon concluded.

Numbers 9:21 So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey.

Do you see the purpose of this section here? Beginning in verse 15, God is teaching us that He is sovereign. He is running the show. He determines *where* and *when His work* will go. He determines if we rest. He determines if we move. And He gives the indication of the direction that He wants us to go. Now, in this case, that was revealed by the moving of the cloud or the pillar of fire. So whether by night, by the pillar of fire, or by day, by the cloud, God indicated the direction.

If you know anything at all about the history of the children of Israel walking through the wilderness, they did not always go in the same direction. They did not always go in the direction that the people thought they should go. Remember when they came out, right away it says God did not take them directly into the land of Palestine. Instead, He suddenly made a right-hand turn and they went directly south, away from Palestine.

That must have seemed awfully strange to people. "Hey! We want to go to the east!" The One who is running the show said, "No. I want you to go to the south. And, not only that, I'm going to take you into a box canyon. And I'm going to open up that box canyon by dividing the sea. We're going to get on the other side (after you're all baptized); and then I'm going to take you to a mountain. And then I'm going to give you My law; and then we're going to march for a couple of years before we get there." God has His purposes. God is doing the leading.

Numbers 9:22-23 Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey. At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LORD at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

We are going to show you (eventually) that it was God who blew the church apart. God decided that. That was His work; and He wanted the church blown apart, for whatever His reasons were. I think that we can see that a lot of the reason had to do with our spiritual attitude.

Every time that God indicates a change, the church has to adjust to that. We have to operate *our faith*; and our faith is based upon what is written in this Book! God wrote what is in this Book so that those "upon whom the ends (the goals, the purposes) of His work are come" would be able to look and see the direction that they were to go. It is already written here. The patterns are here. They are in the Book. They are primarily in the prophecies. Some of them are in the historical things, and some of them are in the law (as we see right here). So we are to receive our faith from the patterns that He has laid down already.

Obviously then, if He has blown the church apart, He is expecting a different pattern to be followed from the one that has been followed these past forty or fifty years. Something has to change. So the conditions—forced on us by our environment and what God wants us to accomplish—are going to determine the direction that we go in. See, that is what we learn from the Israelites. The conditions that were created by their sin; the conditions that were created by the attack that came from the Amalekites; the conditions that were created by not having enough food, not enough water, fornication in the camp, you name it. But when something happened, Israel had to adjust to the circumstances.

We can now read those things and recognize that a change has to be made now from what we have been doing in the past. Israel's journey did not always follow the same unbroken path for forty years. I could use kind of a crass statement from the world, but I will not use the crass statement. I will only say to you, "things happen." I think you get the point.

Let us turn to Psalm 11. We will just anchor in on that verse once again and head in a direction that I think will be helpful to us in determining what we feel needs to be the church's work today.

Psalm 11:3 If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

I just want you to be aware that it does not say, "If the foundations are shaken." It says, "If the foundations are destroyed." That is worse than the foundations just going through an earthquake. We will look at a verse a little bit later that connects the foundations with the rest of the building, and we will see what it says there.

So what do the righteous do when the foundations are destroyed? I think that we can agree that the church is not in the same condition that it has been in quite a number of years. And I think that we would generally agree that the condition of the church is *not* good at this time. Eighteen years ago—Mr. Armstrong was warning then that it was in mortal danger! And now, eighteen years later, I propose to you that it is even worse. I mean, we are scattered all over the place! Then we were at least in one body. So things

have not gotten any better. We are badly divided; and the dividing has not stopped. In fact, brethren, it is worsening. We have not reached the bottom yet.

Now I am going to use something—a ploy, I guess you might say—that Amos used in Amos 3 where he asked a series of questions. The answers to those questions are actually very obvious. But, he did what he did in order to make us think about the answers because we will be led to see that there is really only one logical answer.

Do organizations like companies and corporations break up because things are going well and they are in sound condition? Well, the answer to that is obviously, "No."

Do churches (congregations) divide because everybody is in agreement as to what their beliefs are and what the policies ought to be?

Do families divorce—husband go one way, wife go another way (and who knows where the children go)—because they are strong in their trust of each other? Obviously, the answer to that is, "No."

Did the church break apart because of persecution from the world? Did you see screaming headlines proclaiming "Christians: Enemies of the State"? Were Christians being jailed, thrown to the lions, burned at the stake, machine-gunned over bulldozed pits? Were Christians being herded into prison camps?

Were the problems internal? Was what drove us apart a matter of the heart—matters of belief, of doctrine, of policies, of attitude?

Brethren, what happened is that the church imploded—woof!—before it exploded! And it imploded because we were spiritually sick, weakened by years of poor spiritual diet combined with huge doses of self-righteousness and neglectful application. As a body, we lost our first love. We fell asleep and became self-concerned. We drifted from God.

Now again, a series of questions: When sheep scatter, what is the first responsibility of the shepherd? Is he to ignore them and go his own way? Or,

should his first job be to begin re-gathering them? Again, I think the answer to that is obvious.

Then what should he do? Do you not think that it is logical that the shepherd's next job—his highest priority—should be to fix whatever it was that caused the sheep to scatter? If a wolf came in, you would get the wolf, see, once you get the sheep back together again. If the fences have broken down, then you fix the fence. If there is something wrong with the sheep themselves, you have got to do something about that. Sometimes that occurs.

I do not know how many of you have read, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. But Philip Keller described one particular sheep that he had, a ewe, which he said was the best one in terms of the way it looked. But this ewe had a problem. She "worried" the fence. She would lean against the fence, and lean against the fence, and lean against the fence until she finally broke the fence. Then he found out that this ewe was teaching her lambs to do the same thing. He said despite his desire to continue a line of sheep coming from this very good-looking ewe, he had to destroy the ewe because she was destroying the flock.

So sometimes those things have to be taken care of. The shepherd's first responsibility after he begins to re-gather sheep, is to get at the problem that caused the sheep to be scattered.

Let us turn to Ecclesiastes 3, and I am going to read a number of very familiar scriptures to you. If you know your Bible (if you know Ecclesiastes), then you understand what I am going towards at this time. Solomon writes:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-7 To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to rend, and a time to sew.

And on and on it goes. I am trying to help us to *see* that what caused the church to implode—and then to explode—was no minor scratch on the surface of a great body. Eighteen years ago, Mr. Armstrong was warning that the church was already in mortal danger. God was stirring him up in order to confront us with our choices—"Repent! or I will follow through with the curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28."

I remind you, brethren, that there are no hollow warnings with God. God is not like parents who keep telling their kids, "Johnny, don't do this" and "Johnny, don't do that," but never do anything about it. Constant warnings, until the parent is finally so irritated and angry that he explodes. God patiently stirred up Mr. Armstrong's mind and let us know that there was something seriously wrong already well in development. Mr. Armstrong said in that 1978 sermon that he first saw disunity developing as early as 1969—nine years before that—and that that disunity was a signal of our internal spiritual problems. By 1978, Mr. Armstrong was very alarmed.

Now, the fact that it was a major problems is *now* clearly seen; and there is no quick fix! It took us since 1969 to get into this condition. How quickly are we going to turn this around? I do not know. But you see, if God has commissioned me to be the one to tell you what needs to be done, *then* I will fulfill my responsibility. The quickness by which we are turned around depends on your individual responsibility and accountability in responding in your own personal life. I do not know what your sins are. I can only see John Ritenbaugh, and I am held accountable for what *I* do in turning around, and what my contribution was to the internal problems of the church.

I told you the other night, I was asleep. But God in His mercy, I think, woke me up earlier than He did you in order to provide at least some kind of a shepherd to help turn you around. Listening to Mike's sermonette, I do not think that He could have called a worse person, a weaker person, a more fearful person, a more ill-prepared person. Yet on the other hand, I do see some wisdom in it because I *will* turn to God for strength, because I know that I just do not have it within me to do the kind of job that I have been given to do. The last thing in the world that I want to do is to seemingly shout and rant and rave at people about what is going on in the church. I want people to like me.

So a Band-Aid is not going to do whenever major surgery and a body cast are needed—because we did become morally and spiritually corrupt.

Do you not think that it is time for us to do something else in order to fix the problem? When people find themselves sick, should they not reconsider what has been done in the past—the way they have been living—and stop doing what they have been doing and make a change so that it will give their body a chance to heal?

I say this because I want to remind you that, as early as 1978, Mr. Armstrong was really warning the church. That warning (plus what has happened since) proves that we were deteriorating morally and spiritually. All the time and all the while that this deterioration was going on, the church was preaching the gospel to the world. Therefore that is not the answer to the problem.

It is a time to make a change—a shift in direction, a shift of focus, a shift in the intensity of what we have been doing—because something else needs to be done *to straighten us out* before we can again be used to preach the gospel to the world. I think that what has happened has happened (at least in part—maybe a major part) showing us that God is displeased. And that He wants to *prepare us* so that He can be pleased with what we do; and we can really give Him an acceptable sacrifice, because things will be done in the right attitude.

Jeremiah 7:3-4 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. Do not trust in lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, are these.' "

Do you understand what these people were saying? If we can update it, we are saying here in a modern sense, "I'm in the church. This is the church. This is the church of God. God dwells in this church. Everything is fine. I'm safe in the church. God's going to take us to a place of safety. Everything is all right..." God says those are lying words, in this context. It might be the temple of God; but everything is not all right.

Jeremiah 7:5 "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor . . ."

And then it goes on and on and begins to describe some of the sins those people were involved in.

Jeremiah 26:13 "Now therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; then the LORD will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you."

Mr. Armstrong quoted Revelation 2 and 3 several times during the course of that 1978 sermon, but the references were basically to two general areas: the message to Ephesus, and the message to Laodicea. When he referred to the message to Ephesus, he said that this church had "lost its first love." When he referred to Revelation 3 and the Laodiceans, he referred to us becoming lethargic and sleepy. These two are very closely related, but I want you to see what it says in Revelation 2 and verses 4 and 5 in the message to Ephesus.

Revelation 2:4-5 "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; and repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly."

Well, there is excellent advice here. Whether we understand it or not, the first works had to do with what they believed about and in the gospel. One of the major things that drove the church apart was in 1991 they *changed* the gospel of the Kingdom of God and began preaching "another gospel." Our faith comes from hearing the Word. Our faith comes from the gospel. If the gospel is changed, faith is going to change. If it is not the right gospel, then we are headed down straight into hell fire—because what we do is conditioned by what we believe. We conduct our lives according to what we believe. If we are not hearing the right gospel, then everything changes.

Now what happens when the foundations are destroyed? Turn with me to Jeremiah 50. The message here is not against Israel. It is against Babylon.

Jeremiah 50:15 Shout against her all around; she has given her hand, her foundations have fallen [just like 'the foundations are destroyed'], her walls are thrown down.

What happens whenever the foundations are destroyed? The whole building comes down! Are we going to reach that point where there is not one stone upon another? You know from I Peter 2, or ought to understand from I Peter 2, that *we* are the stones in the temple. Are we going to become so badly divided that we are atomized? Well, if God wills it because that is going to be good for us, that is the way it is going to be going. But I feel a responsibility—as a shepherd—to do what I can to stop that (to do what God permits me to do). He has led us in this direction. Of course, I hope and pray that I am doing the right thing; that I am not misleading anybody at all, because I certainly do not want to do that.

Let us ask a question. What is *the* spiritual foundation of our life? I have already told you the answer. It is faith. What does Hebrews 11:1 say? It says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." The *King James* translators chose to use the English word 'substance' for that Greek word that was written there. Do you know what 'substance' means? It came into the English language through the French language. "Sub" means *under*. "Stance" means *stand* (in English). Faith is what *stands under*! Faith is "the foundation." Faith is the motivator. It is the mover. It is what we believe in. That is where our faith comes from. It is what we believe in. So it is faith that supports the whole structure—all the superstructure that is up there. That superstructure is you and me and what we believe.

I am going to tell you two things that happened to me and to Evelyn back in the late '80s. They are personal things, but I can look back on them now as something that played a significant role in our lives and, at least partly, what we are doing now. The first one happened, I believe, in late 1987 or early 1988 when Evelyn and I were beginning to become concerned already about what was going on. The thing that triggered this was the first edition of the new healing booklet that they put out.

Those people at headquarters already knew that she and I were not pleased with the things that were going on in the church. It was not because we were vomiting all over a congregation or secretly trying to subvert or undermine anybody at all. There are people here from the North Hollywood and Glendale churches, and they will tell you that I never did anything like that there (and neither did Evelyn do anything like that). We did not in any way express our displeasure before the congregation—even though we were beginning to become troubled by what we were beginning to become aware of and observe. We wondered where it was headed.

The first printing of the healing booklet, I read in my automobile while waiting for Evelyn to do something. I do not know what it was, but when she came out, my first comment to her was: "Boy! They need Mr. Armstrong to write for them." It did not make a great deal of logical sense to me. There was something missing out of it. I could not perceive exactly what it was. Evelyn was the one who picked it up, what the real problem was there. At any rate, they were beginning to call us in to the office and talk with us. It was not angry. They were not angry with us. I sincerely think that they were trying to help us to see things from their perspective. And we could not see things from their perspective.

Well, we were before two of the very top echelon men there (whose names you would recognize immediately), and in the course of the discussion that was going on about the healing booklet, the one man made an incredible statement. I want you to think about this a little bit. He said to me, "I can disprove *anything* you say about healing." And he meant it. Such vanity! He meant that if I picked up something like this Book here and said to him, "It says in this Book that God heals," that he could disprove it—because he was trained in those things (in arguing, debating). "Convoluting reasonings," is what he meant.

But that was not the worst one. A little bit later Evelyn said very plainly, "The thing that we don't like about the new healing booklet is that *faith* has been taken out of it." And then came the most incredible statement of all. This other man replied, "That's because we didn't want any faith in it." These people were representatives of Jesus Christ and of the church of God, and they did not want *faith in God* in this booklet? I will tell you, that set our heads spinning.

Well, it was probably about a year later that something else happened to me. Evelyn was not involved in it at all. I think this happened in late '88 or early '89, something like that. I have lost account of the exact time, but it was some time in that area. I had an unusually vivid dream. My dreams are normally the kind where they are just absolutely stupid (all mixed up), and I make no attempt whatever to think about them even. But this one was unusually vivid, and another headquarters' personality appeared, just briefly. Just *poof!* like that, and he was gone. Looking back on it several years later, I can begin to understand why he might have been in there. This man was evangelist rank, and he is with the Worldwide to this day. He was not a main part of the dream at all.

What I saw in my dream was Magic Mountain, which is an amusement park just outside of Los Angeles on Interstate 5, as it goes north out of the city. What I saw in particular was the roller coaster. I was looking up at Magic Mountain because it is on a high place, and I was looking up at it. Suddenly the roller coaster broke away from its track and began flying through the air in kind of a serpentine manner, like a roller coaster would go on its tracks. It did this for a considerable distance. It was carrying a full load of people, as those roller coasters usually are. But suddenly, it plunged in a slanting direction, and it crashed into the corner of a light buff (or yellow-colored) slab-sided building that looked exactly like the building that the Norwalk churches that I pastored in for six years, looked like. The crashing roller coaster blew a major hole in the corner of the structure, and the whole building shook considerably. It remained standing but there was a big hole there now.

I did not understand everything instantly. I did tell Evelyn about it in the morning, because it was so arresting. We began to think about it a lot more seriously—that maybe there was something to this. I did know that it affected me emotionally, and I did understand almost immediately that what the church was going through was going to be an emotional and stressful time. We did not figure out for quite a while that I think the corner of the building represented *faith*. There was going to be a major effort made to destroy the very cornerstone of God's spiritual building—and that is *faith*.

The building would remain standing, but it was going to go through a very earth-shaking period of time. Looking back on it, I think that you would agree that it did happen. And now, here we are, scattered all over the place.

I think the thing that we need to begin doing is, first of all, looking at God's part in all of this.

Matthew 10:29-30 Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin?
And one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.
But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Now think just briefly about the theme of Psalm 139, where it is expounded there how close God's attention is to you and me. How the psalmist said that even if he was at the bottom of the sea, God would be aware of him. He could not go anywhere on earth that God would not be aware of him. That God knows our thoughts from afar off. Another place it says that we are "the apple of His eye."

And so we have to ask the question, "Is God sovereign over His creation and His church?" Do things that happen in the church take Him by surprise?—when He is aware that even a sparrow falls, and that a sparrow cannot fall without Him giving permission. That is mind-boggling! That is stunning! I cannot comprehend a mind like that—that is so *aware* that even little birds do not escape His notice, no matter where. Even if they are on the other side of the earth (in Australia, somewhere), He is aware of what is going on!

Do you think that something could happen in the church, "the apple of His eye," where the focus of His attention is, without Him being aware of it? Or that somehow or another Satan sneaked in and he destroyed the church? Or somehow or another, Joseph Tkach sneaked in. And God said, "Oh no, I didn't want him, but what am I going to do now? He's in there."

If we think of things like that, I do not think that we have the right picture of God. Does God merely react—react to what Satan or to what His children are doing? Brethren, *He is the Creator*. He is leading the show. He is the one that is forming and shaping. He knows what is going on. It is not the creation

that is making *Him* do something; He applies what needs to be done to His creation. Let us not take His job away from Him! Satan did not force God's hand or force his will on God.

I think that what happened was that God could see, from afar, where the church was drifting. And, like He did with Job, He commissioned Satan to do what he did. Satan may have suggested it, but God had already thought of it. Did you see the taunt that God gave to Satan?—"How about My servant Job there?" Do you know what God said that is not printed? He said, "I'll bet you can't break Job." And I think that is happening to the church. I think God said, "I don't think you can break My children. They have their problems. They have their weaknesses. But those who are really My kids are going to remain faithful."

God will help us do that! You can tell that Job really went through it. Boy! His faith was tested, and he was purified by what he went through. But he came through with flying colors too. He was not perfect. He had things to learn. We have things to learn as well, but all things do work together for good for those who love God, and for those who are *the called*. But I think that we have to understand that *God* blew the church apart. Nothing happens in God's creation without *His express will* permitting it, doing it. Remember what Psalm 74 said? "God is right in the middle of things, delivering."

He has let us get into this. We have got to get out of it. It is our problem now. He is with us, but nonetheless He wants to see what we are going to do. Will we respond like Job? I hope so. Maybe even better. Did you notice that God drew the line and said to Satan *this far and no further*? God never gives us a test that is too great for us. He always provides a way of escape. But brethren, we have to exercise our faith. We have to be turning to Him for that strength. The purpose of this trial is to drive us back so that we *see God*. You cannot see God when you are asleep. (I will show you more of that later.) We were losing sight of Him.

Back again in the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 8. This is something that we have to work with—a very important principle.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

I wanted this verse only to provide an anchor for *a* principle to reinforce something that I said a little bit earlier; and, that is, that with God there are no hollow warnings. When God says something (as Isaiah 55 says), "His word goes forth out of His mouth and it accomplishes what He wants it to accomplish." So, if God gives a warning, then it is going to come to pass unless the conditions are met. We read the conditions. He said, "Amend your ways, and I'll put you in the land. I'll let you dwell in the inheritance." So we have some changes. We want to understand that there are no hollow warnings with God.

One of the most poignant illustrations of this is Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God told them that "in the day you would eat thereof, you would surely die." On the surface, God did not tell them the truth; but did they die? They sure did. So we can understand that to mean that *in the day that you eat thereof, you are as good as dead*. They violated His Word, they ate, and they died, just like He said. It was not a hollow warning. Humanly, they could have said, "Hey! I took a bite of this thing and nothing happened. I didn't die."

We have to be careful we do not allow human nature to deceive us. We can sin, and because the penalty seemingly does not occur immediately, we begin to think that God was looking the other way, or that He did not care, or that His Word really does not have the authority that He says it does. But indeed it does.

Now let us look, briefly, at how God does judge some of the parameters of that judgment by first turning back to I Peter 1.

I Peter 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who partiality judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.

God does not judge with respect of persons. What this means is that converted or unconverted, sin is still sin. *Sin, sin, sin*. It does not matter whether a person is converted or unconverted. It does not matter whether a teenager does it or whether an eighty-five year old person does it. *The wages of sin is death*. In that case, His judgment is without respect of persons. It does not matter whether the king does it, or whether the king's slave does it. Sin is sin. Sin kills—regardless.

What God does, in His mercy, is that there are patterns that He works within so that we can recognize His hand in what is going on. Let us look at a couple of these patterns.

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

Even though God judges without respect of persons, some receive closer inspection than others. In this case (you can understand that) God's scrutiny of me is going to be more thorough than His scrutiny of you, because He has put me in this position and He has given me whatever gifts are necessary to fulfill it. I have to measure up to that responsibility, and so part of the cost of that is that I am held more accountable than others. That goes up and down the whole body. If it is good for the ministry, it is good for others as well. God does take that into consideration so that we will understand.

Back in Luke is (I guess you might say) a variation of this same pattern.

Luke 12:45-48 "But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

That is very clear. "To whom much is given, much is required." This puts us, as a church, as a body, into a somewhat precarious position because of what God has made available in terms of technology—the printing press, the radio, television, telephone—all of these means of mass and personal communication. In addition to that, He supplied us with an apostle through which He raised up the end time church to do a work, and then supplied us with a multitude of ministers. Congregations spread all across the United States, Canada, and much of the world besides. I believe that we have been given more knowledge of more important spiritual things than any comparable group of people since, at least, the first century.

Now a question. How intense then is His *scrutiny* of us going to be? Well that is something that we need to seriously consider in terms of repentance. We have been given very much. Maybe the food lately (the last number of years) has not been good, but there was still (for most of us) plenty of things available from the years in which our spiritual level was very high—on through the '50s and '60s, and even into much of the '70s. The material that was being churned out by the servants of God was of very high quality then, even though we (ourselves) were a pretty ragged bunch—compared to the way we looked physically, as we moved into the '80s and '90s. It almost seemed as though as the church progressed materially, it regressed spiritually. That leads right into Laodiceanism, which I am going to get into in the next sermon.

We have used up our time for today. But I want to remind you that because much has been given to us and because there are no hollow warnings with God, the curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 did come down upon the church in increasing intensity through the years, until finally we have been scattered. I do not want you to feel down—because God did what is *good* for us. He has not abandoned us. He is with us; and He did these things for our good.

Whether we like to give him credit or not, Mr. Tkach (despite what happened) did us a favor. It has caused us to re-evaluate, first of all, our convictions, and then our convictions in terms of our life. From that is going to come the blessing of God, because as we amend our ways He is going to bless. He will not withhold those things either.

My next sermon will conclude this series. We will lead up to that point where I can describe to you very clearly what Laodiceanism really is and give you a very graphic picture of it from which you should be able to evaluate where we need to change.