

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

Conclusion

John W. Ritenbaugh

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In the last sermon, I continued to cover some of the facts that the church is clearly compared in the Bible to a human body in which its various parts have differing functions. Every part is to function for the benefit of the whole. That was not the only thing that we covered, but that was at least the beginning of what that last message was about. We spent a great deal more time covering a variation of that first principle and, that is, that even as an individual member's function changes from time to time, so also does the entire church's function change.

Probably, there is no place (at least, to my mind) that shows it more clearly than in Numbers 9. There some of the background, I guess you might say, in regard to what the children of Israel did during their period of time in the wilderness on their pilgrimage to the Promised Land is that they zigzagged their course back and forth. Sometimes they stayed in a rest area one day, sometimes two days, sometimes weeks, and sometimes months. Sometimes they went in one direction and then (seemingly) doubled themselves back, turned in a different direction, and made right angle turns. At any rate, it took them forty years to get there.

One of the lessons that we can extract from that is that God does not always lead His church in the same direction. They are not always doing the same thing all the time. But here again, this principle that every part of the body contributes to the whole—so does every zigzag, so does every turn of direction, so does every change in the work that God has the church doing. It also contributes to the perfection of the whole of His purpose. So, what may seem a detour by one person is seen as a necessary move by God to make sure that His purpose is completely accomplished.

In Romans 15:4 it says that these things that happened before were written for our learning. They are directions for you and me so that we are receiving instructions as to what we are to do at any given time. We need the direction.

So we look back at what God shows regarding Israel, and we compare it with the events that the church has been going through. And then, from that, we reach a conclusion that the church needs to be doing 'thus and such' at any given time.

Ezra 2:69 According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments.

I was most interested here in terms of the phrase "for the work." That phrase is used there in exactly the same manner that we have used it in the church of God over these past fifty years. ("It's the work of God.") And indeed, it was the work of God. But I want you to focus your attention, just for a second, on what you know about the book of Ezra. What was "the work" that they were doing in behalf of God, that God had involved them in at that time? "The work" at that time was *rebuilding a destroyed Temple*. That was "the work." And the money that they contributed is (to you and me) an understanding that they were contributing of their resources (financial, as well as their intellectual powers, as well as their muscular powers) in order to *do the work*. These are the same principles that we are involved with. Only in this case, instead of building the Temple, they were rebuilding a destroyed Temple. At that time, the work of God had to take on a different direction for a period of time.

Now turn with me to Nehemiah. This took place just a bit later than the book of Ezra.

Nehemiah 2:16-18 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work. Then said I to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no more be a reproach." And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they set their hands to this good work.

Now what was "the work" there? "The work" there was different from what they did under Ezra, but it still had a connection to the overall purpose. In this case, they were rebuilding the wall that went around Jerusalem. They were not rebuilding the Temple, per se, they were rebuilding the wall. A wall in biblical symbolism means "a means of protection." They were building up the defenses so that the Temple would be protected from incursions. All you need to do is understand what Ephesians 6 has to say about the armor of God. Most of that equipment there has to do with *protecting*. There is only one offensive piece of equipment that is mentioned in all the equipment there. So what needs to be built up here, as it were, are the defenses of the church. So the Temple has to be rebuilt and the defenses of the church have to be rebuilt as well.

Now, that was not "the work" all the time. But, for a period of time, *that was "the work,"* because conditions required it. God recorded it so that when we come down to our time, and we are in the period of time of the church we can look back in His Word, seeing what is happening in the church, compare it with these things, and then make a decision and set our resolve to do what *work* needs to be done.

Two clear principles are derived from this area, beginning in I Corinthians 3. And that is (1) that God specifically places people in the church to perform different functions, and (2) is that the whole body (that is, the whole church) does not always do the same work. It changes according to God's direction. It changes according to need.

However, in reflecting back on the sermon on Tuesday, most of the sermon time was spent on that aspect that I feel needs the most effort in terms of *repair* and *restoration*. That begins by understanding as an operating fact of our lives that this that occurred to the church did not just happen accidentally. So I asked the question, "Do you *see* God?" In this case, meaning do you see God actively working for our benefit by dividing the church?

We have got to put a positive spin on this, because what happened really is positive in the overall sense. We may not like what occurred. It may have caused us a great deal of pain. But, in the overall sense, God in His wisdom

has directed it in this direction, because it is going to be *good* for us in the long run. If He had let it continue as it were, maybe very few of us would ever make it into His Kingdom. We would not *be prepared* because of what was happening.

Now, something like what happened would not occur simply because it was forced on God. Think about that. Do we force things on God? Well, that would make us more powerful than His ability to save. The only conclusion that I can reach from this is that God actively participated in driving the church apart for our good.

The second aspect of this "Do you *see* God?" question is one of a personal faith, because this is spiritually the quality that has been most affected in the decline that has occurred over the past twenty years or so. Now turn with me back to the book of Jude, verses 3 through 5, where Jude writes:

Jude 3 Beloved, while I was very diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

What in the world was taking place when Jude wrote this? The first century church was falling apart! And here is one of the apostles of God writing to those people that they needed to turn *back to the faith that was once delivered* .

Jude 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you aware of what it says in I Corinthians 11:19? Paul wrote that it is *necessary* that there be "heresies among you." Do you know why? "That those who are proven true and faithful might be made manifest." That is a clear evidence of God backing up the parable that Jesus gave that the wheat and tares are going to grow together. They are going to be right in the

congregation. So when heresy arises, that makes manifest who is going to be true and who is going to be false. Though it causes pain, nonetheless God warns that He is going to allow it to occur.

Jude 4-5 For certain men have crept in unnoticed [This was ordained of old! It happened], ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into [license to do evil], and deny the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

There is the issue. "The faith once delivered" and believing. I contend that that is *the issue today*—the "faith once delivered"—whether we are going to be faithful to it—and whether we are going to *believe* it to the place where we *trust* it.

Now in Jude 3 where it talks about "the faith once delivered," faith has two applications there. The first is *as a body of beliefs* that forms the foundation of our lives. This is of critical importance, because we act according to what we believe. Are the Protestants and Catholics what they are and what they do because they believe in keeping the Sabbath, believe in keeping the holy days, and that we are members of the Family of God, and that the Holy Spirit is not a person? No. You know they believe all those other, false things: such as that the Holy Spirit is a person. They do not believe in keeping the Sabbath.

So what do they do? They keep what they *do* believe, and what they do believe causes them to act in the way that they do. Now, this is of critical importance because all of the wrong beliefs in the world will not make $2 + 2 = 5$. Neither will all the wrong beliefs in the world make a person into *the image of God*. Making a person into *the image of God* requires *the right recipe* and *the right response*! Those people will follow the true teachings.

Now the second aspect of the faith that Jude is talking about there in verse 3 is *faith as a living principle*—that is, the driving force in our lives. Faith—as trust that motivates and relies upon.

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

The kind of faith that Jude is talking about in verse 3 does not need all the answers before it acts, because its power to act is not derived from what it sees, hears, and feels.

Consider this. The first aspect of that faith—"the faith once delivered"(the body of beliefs)—is completely beyond human capability. The wisdom of this world cannot discover it. It must be revealed. Faith as an active and driving force is absolutely dependent upon what is revealed.

Hebrews 11:27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

So the second principle of faith is dependent upon *what is revealed* — not what we see, not what we hear, not what we feel, or anything like that. It depends upon what is revealed. And so Abraham was driven—he was motivated, he moved, he acted, he conducted his life—even though he did not know the answers.

Honestly, I did not know what a significant statement I made the very first Feast that we held. In a sermon, which was sort of a real long announcement about the Church of the Great God, I answered a question that somebody asked me because, you know, when you start out on a journey you want to know where you are going. So they asked me a very logical question, "Where are we going?" In that sermon, I said "I don't know." I told them why. I quoted this verse. Abraham did not know where he was going. We will not always know the answers if we are operating our lives according to the kind of faith that Jude 3 is talking about. We will know *what is revealed*, but where what is revealed is going to take us, we will not know every specific of that.

Do we know whether God will heal Kerry Sollars? Yes, in a generality, we know—because His Word is inviolate, and He will heal. But that healing may come in the resurrection. We do not know what He has in mind between now and the resurrection for Kerry Sollars. You have to operate according to what you *cannot* see, only according to what is revealed, and what is revealed is God will heal.

Do we believe that enough that we will trust Him? We are not dealing with simple answers here in regard to faith. We are dealing with things that are tough in terms of living them. You see, we have come to the time in our spiritual life where we have got to "fish or cut bait." It is going to come on us gradually, and it is going to come on us with increasing intensity. God is going to put the pressure on to force us to decide what we are going to do. Either live by faith—either live by *what is revealed*—or live by *intellectualism*. So we have to go on. Let me show you a little bit more on this.

II Thessalonians 3:1-2 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you [writing to brethren]. [Verse 2 is the one that I really want], and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.

I do not have an Interlinear with me. This verse just popped into my mind this morning—that I might use it. I am almost virtually certain that what it says in the Interlinear is that the definite article "the" is in there in front of the word faith; and that it really reads "for all men have not *the* faith."

Almost everybody has faith to some degree. But there is faith; and there is *the faith*! We are to get back to *the* faith once delivered. That is the one that is based upon revelation, and that is the one that is the operating principle of our lives. It is founding everything else that we hoped for.

It is driving or motivating us to do what we have to do—maybe till we come to the place (like Paul was) where he said, "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel." That man was driven. He felt it so powerfully working within him. He felt that if he did not preach the gospel to the world and to the church, he was a dead man because he was not going to fulfill his responsibility to God.

I am sure that God put that driving force within him in order to give him that power (or whatever) to do his responsibility as an apostle. I feel sure that Mr. Armstrong felt that same way. And he filled us with some of the energy he felt about that responsibility that was given to him.

It is this second aspect of faith which tests the validity and the purity of *what is revealed* (you see) in our lives. So, there are an awful lot of people who believe that they should keep the Sabbath. A lot of people believe that they should keep the holy days. There are a lot of people who believe that they ought to tithe, or that they ought not to lie, or that they should not steal. But I will tell you, those who are operating by *the faith* will drive themselves to constantly purify and perfect the keeping of those commandments—not that it is going to save them, but that they might be in the image of God and that they might glorify God. That is what is driving them! It is not to "get" salvation. It is to glorify God and to fulfill the responsibility within the church and to God that is the driving force in their lives.

When some organization wants to do away with the instruction of God by saying that "the law is done away,"...oh ghastly! That is like saying you are taking away *the tool* that is going to put you into the image of God. The image of God will never be in us unless His law is written in our hearts and minds. His law is written in our hearts and minds by a combination of factors, not the least of which is obedience to His law—His instruction. It would be like assigning a potter to mold something into a beautiful piece—a beautiful work—and not give him his hands to work with. Or, to say that 'you've got to do this without any water' or maybe do it without even any clay. It cannot be done! But I will tell you, Satan is awfully subtle in appealing to the flesh and using intellectualism to make sure that those who have that kind of bent think that it can be done without the instruction of God.

Go to Acts 28. This occurred, of course, right at the end of the book. Paul was in Rome there. He was facing death, and he met with the leaders of the Jews there. And, at the end of that session with them, it says in verse 24:

Acts 28:24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

You see, all men believe something. But there is a specific faith that God is concerned with, and this is *the faith* that was once delivered to the saints. The basis of that faith is revelation—not the wisdom of men.

Now Leviticus 26. I think it would be good to just read these things, because it is for our admonition and helps us to understand the connections between the Old and the New Testament. These things were written for our admonition so that we could apply them in their spiritual intent within the church.

Leviticus 26:14-15 But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you will not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant . . .

Leviticus 26:33 I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.

So here is a warning that, should Israel not keep His commandment, He would scatter them. Now, are we to assume that because we are under the New Covenant that these do not apply to us, even though we are the ones that He has made His New Covenant with? You see, these principles do apply. You can see that they are at work from the events that have occurred. You know what I am telling you is true from actual experience.

Turn with me now II Chronicles 7. The context here is the building of the Temple under Solomon.

II Chronicles 7:12 Then the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself for a house of sacrifice.

That is very significant because we are talking about the Temple here. The Temple is **the church** in the New Testament. *You* are the temple of God, and *you* are a temple of sacrifice. We are *living* sacrifices. We are wholly set apart to God—our entire life. Our life, and all of our wealth—all of our

being—belongs to God, because He bought us at a price. We are to be a house of sacrifice, and we sacrifice ourselves in obedience to Him. Notice, we do not sacrifice something we have. *We are the sacrifice!* We are to give ourselves willingly (like Amaziah did, there at the beginning of the Feast).

II Chronicles 7:13-14 "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain [if I bring a famine], or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name [Is this the church of God?] will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

II Chronicles 7:19-21 "But if you turn away and forsake My statutes [like tithing, like the holy days] and My commandments [like the Sabbath] which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them [like intellectualism], then will I uproot them from My land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for My name I will cast out of My sight [He will scatter it.], and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and this house?'

Have you heard those words? You surely have heard them. You may have even said them to somebody else. You surely thought them. "Why is this happening? What's going on?" There is the answer. We were turning our back on God.

II Chronicles 7:22 "Then they will answer, 'Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt [the spiritual 'land of Egypt'], and embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them, therefore has He brought all this calamity upon them.' "

Has God suddenly changed just because it is the church? It tells me in Malachi 3:6, "I am God. I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob [Israel] are not consumed."

It is a good thing He does not change. *Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today, and forever*. God will work to secure our salvation—and He is able to do it—but there are things that we have to do. One of those things that we have to do when we see something like this occurring, is that we have to humble ourselves and repent individually. Quit pointing the finger at Joseph Tkach, and quit pointing the finger at Joseph, Jr., and quit pointing the finger at Michael Feazell, and anybody else (our local minister or whatever), and realize that purification begins with *me*. The body cannot be pure until *I* am pure.

And so, the turn-around, if there is going to be one, begins in our bedroom, on our knees (or wherever it is that you choose to pray). But I think that it should be done with as much of a background and with as much of an understanding and with as much knowledge and insight as possible. That is why I am giving this series of sermons. As I mentioned in the other sermon, I do not like to do things like this, but we have *to know*. These things have hit me like a ton of bricks too.

Please turn to Revelation the 2nd chapter. I was asking the question, "Has God changed His will?" "Has God changed His mind simply because it is the church? In verse 4 He says to Ephesus:

Revelation 2:4-5 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you are fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come unto you quickly and remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

That is pretty straightforward. I see *the same God* writing that as I see tossing those warnings out against Israel in the Old Testament. As I said to you the other day, *there are no hollow threats with God*. He is just as faithful in carrying out curses as He is in giving the blessings. Now, He might be

slower in carrying out the curses, and He will warn before He does it. But His warnings are faithful, and they will happen—unless we repent. Five of the seven churches are warned to *repent*. And that is very strong. It is not just "repent" but also "or else I will take your candlestick out." That means that they would be headed toward the Lake of Fire.

Each one of those messages ends with the same admonishment. "Hear to what the spirit says to the churches" (plural). What applies to Ephesus, applies to Philadelphia. What applies to Philadelphia, applies to Ephesus. God only recorded the characteristics that were intrinsic (I guess you might say) within that particular congregation, but it applies to all seven. Each individual message applies to all seven, even though there are some specific things applied to each one of them. So the lesson from this is very simple—if the shoe fits, wear it.

Now, I want to just quickly review (give an overview) of what has happened in approximately the last twenty-five years, considering that Mr. Armstrong said that he first saw Laodiceanism in the church as early as 1969. Beginning in the early '70s were the sexual scandals of GTA, followed by a defection of 35 full-time ministers and about 3500 people in 1974. Then shortly after that, 1976 began the influence of the S.T.P. Program. In 1977 was Mr. Armstrong's heart failure. In 1978 the disfellowshipping of GTA. In 1979 the lawsuit of the State of California—which was generated from *within* the WCG, and was surely an attempt to take over the church's operations, or its treasury, or both—an insurrection, in other words, a revolution from within.

Then came the campaign to "put the church *back on the track*." If you have ever stopped to think of it, that was an open admission that it was "off the track." *It was 'off the track'!* Brethren, if it was off the track *doctrinally*, it was off the track in terms of *working faith* as well. And so, what was gradually eroding and being destroyed, through the doctrinal shift, plus the witness of the events that were occurring? It was *faith*. The faith of the people was being undermined—incrementally, step by step—until finally, we started scattering in every direction.

Despite the fact that it was getting back on the track doctrinally because he turned things around, as best he could, Mr. Armstrong knew that the church was still deteriorating in its faith. Now, how do I have proof that he knew?

Because of what he published there on June 24, 1984—"The Recent History of the Philadelphia Era of the Worldwide Church of God," which was a warning to your and me—"Lest this happen again."

Now I have even more proof that he feared that when he died the church was going to fall apart. What was Mr. Armstrong's commission to Mr. Tkach? He made it very plain. Do we believe this? Do we believe that he was God's apostle that God raised up to establish His end-time church? I believe it. I know that he was a man just like you and me. He had the kind of passions that we have, and he had his share of sins, just like you and me. But God never said that any of His servants were perfect like Jesus Christ. Each one of us has to deal with the flesh, with the world, and with the Devil.

Mr. Armstrong publicly said that "The preaching of the gospel is done." Now what did he mean? Did Mr. Armstrong suddenly have a vacant mind so that he forgot all about the Two Witnesses? Did he slip a cog somewhere and think that the commission to preach the gospel to the world suddenly was erased out of the Bible? Well, not at all! What he meant was that the preaching of the gospel to the world is done for those people that were raised up under his ministry.

I did not give you the whole commission that Mr. Armstrong gave to Mr. Tkach. The commission was "The preaching of the gospel is done. *Get the church ready* for the return of Christ." That was an open admission that the church *was not* ready. He knew it. He knew its faith was slipping. And because its faith was slipping, its love was waning. He knew (because the love was waning) that we were not keeping the commandments. We were drifting, maybe running away from the covenant that we had made with God.

The campaign to get the church back on track, though a success in terms of actually straightening out what the doctrines of the church were to be, it had not straightened out the people. The people were infected with a *worldliness* that was too great and was overcoming them from the top to the bottom. And when Mr. Tkach came into his office, what we got was what we deserved. He was a reflection of us. But he was in a position to do something about it, where we are not.

I also want to give all of us a little bit of breathing room. Understand, and I think that you know this, that not everybody was in exactly the same spiritual condition. There were some who were still on the stick, as we say. They had not gone down the tubes anywhere near as much as others. And they were doing all they could to protect their relationship with God. You also have to understand that it is extremely difficult to remain in that kind of a spiritual environment and retain what you formerly had. (It is awfully hard to climb Mount Everest.) This is why Mr. Armstrong said the whole church is asleep, and why he said, "*Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!*", because he wanted us all to understand that all of us were sliding as a body, even though there were some who were trying hard to do what they had learned.

I also personally heard Mr Armstrong say on a couple of different occasions that they had not gotten rid of all of the rotten apples. Now, I do not fully understand why this was not done. I do know that there is a biblical example of this. And I know that you know of it, if you know anything at all about David's relationship with Joab. I do not understand the whole situation, but for some reason, even though David was such a godly man, even as we just heard, he was a servant of God. There was probably hardly anybody who had so much favor with God. And yet for some reason—I do not know what; I do not understand it—he could not get rid of Joab. I do not know whether it was a personal attachment. I do not know whether it was because Joab was so politically powerful that David feared that if Joab was put out of the way that maybe there would be some kind of insurrection or revolution within the country. I do not know exactly what it was. But when David was dying, and he was giving his final instructions to Solomon, he said, "Do not let even the sun go down on that hoary man's head." And so Solomon got rid of him through Benaiah.

I do not know how much of this applied to Mr Armstrong, but there were people that he knew—and he said this a couple of times, and I know some of you have heard; he said, "There are people around here, like vultures waiting for me to die." But for whatever the reason was, he did not feel strong enough to get rid of them.

Now there is a familiar pattern that is shown in the Bible when sin was on the increase in Israel. It's especially clear in Judges, and I will just summarize without turning to some scriptures. But I think that much of that is recorded there in order to show that God was not passive in His dealings with them. And usually the pattern went something like this. Not always in exactly the same order, but there would be occasional border incursions from the Gentiles, combined with some internal problems within the nation. God would begin warning—He would send a prophet or something. In other words, there would just simply be a general unrest in the land of Israel, which God seemed to to permit.

But as it continued, famine in some former or another (either from too much rain or too little rain; one or the other would begin to occur), and there would be an increase in pestilence from time to time. But all of this was weakening the general prosperity and indicating a weakness for the covenant people in the facing of trials. Gradually, the attacks, both from within and without, would get stronger until finally, usually, there was a very powerful border incursion from the outside to the inside by the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Philistines—one of those people—and the Israelites would be oppressed into slavery by a neighboring king. And then, if we follow the pattern a little bit further, there would be tribulation, slavery, and death.

Just apply this to the church and you'll begin to see similarities. We've been scattered, but what's coming? The Tribulation. Enslavement. Death. We are we are in that period of time. The the hour of decision is here and we've got to do something personally.

Turn to Matthew 25, the parable of the bridegroom and the attendants:

Matthew 25:5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

Do you know that there is a an Old Testament example of this very thing? It's in Exodus 32:1. You do not have to turn to it for the lack of time, but you know what it says there in verse 1? It says,

Exodus 32:1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain . . .

What did they do? When Jesus Christ delayed (to our calculation), and time seems to be going on, and we see that some things are occurring but His coming seems to be receding into the background—what did those people do at that time? The people sat down and they rose up to play, and they went into idolatry. Isn't that what Matthew 25 is talking about? "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." We turned our attention to other directions, to other things: building a house, buying an automobile, our employment, buying clothing—you you can fill in the details. But we begin to lose patience. We lose our focus. Those people went headlong into rank idolatry.

It says of the Ephesian church that they lost their first love. They lost for their love for Christ. They lost the reason for which they were to prepare themselves for Christ. The first love was not the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The context tells you that because at the end of each context, it says, "To him that overcomes . . ." That's our first responsibility—to overcome.

As time went on, we turned our attention away from overcoming, from trusting God for overcoming. We went to sleep at the switch and we became involved in an idolatry called Laodiceanism. Notice I said "idolatry," because that's exactly what it is. God did something to jolt us out of our spiritual distraction.

I think that we are in the midst of one of the greatest spiritual disasters to hit the church since the first century. We can look into God's Word for examples, the pattern, as to what we are supposed to do. We can see that that whenever something like this happened to Israel that those great men of old repented and they worked on themselves, so that their sins (if they were involved) that caused the problem could be eliminated from their character, because they recognized that the scattered condition was indicative of the low moral, ethical, and spiritual state of the nation. They did not run out and try to convert people into their wretched state.

Are we in a Laodicean condition? I'm talking about the church of God in general. Mr. Armstrong said he saw it begin in 1969. Now if we are, it's going to help us considerably if we understand what Laodicean most specifically is.

Revelation 3:15-16 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

As a generality, we refer to it as being spiritually lukewarm. That's bad enough, but I consider it to be very inadequate because this is a most serious spiritual malady because it's in the church and because God says that He's going to spit these people out of His mouth. In other words, it's kind of graphic, maybe even a little bit crass. But when something is regurgitated out of the mouth, it is no longer part of the body, and as it passes from the body into the world, it is atomized. I hope we get the point of God's distaste. I do not think that God very frequently says in such graphic terms how distasteful something is to Him. But Laodiceanism is so bad that He used some of the most graphic language in the Bible to depict it. It is not just a passing lukewarmness. It is far more serious than that.

We might begin by saying that Laodiceanism is being indifferent spiritually, and that has kind of a "so what?" sound to it. But that word "indifferent" in this case is pretty powerful. Laodiceanism is a worldliness, but it's a worldliness that's within His people.

Revelation 3:17 [Christ is speaking] Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

That's a pretty powerful, pretty forceful, denunciation. I'm going to tell you something that in a way it breaks my heart, but what these Laodiceans are saying, brethren is, "God, I do not need you!" They have need of nothing! They are so self righteous, they're saying, "God, get out of my life!" That's what we were doing!

Did we say that with our tongue? No, we did not. We said it by our actions. We said it because our faith was getting so weak. We were no longer operating by the faith principle. It was no longer the driving force in our life. We were saying, "God, I do not need your grace. I do not need your Holy Spirit. I do not need Your Word in me. I do not need your ministers," now they are saying—a gift from Him to the church. "I do not need your people; I can meet by myself." That's what people are saying. "I do not need Your church; I'm just going to be independent"—the church that He established for their salvation, they no longer need because the church is becoming nothing but a spiritual effervescence or something all over the place.

We do not need His forgiveness. We do not need His grace. We no longer need to spend time studying His Word, getting up early and praying. "I need my house more. I need my car more. I need to stress more. I need (whatever) more."

And so our God and Savior and Creator gets pushed into the background and Laodicean is blind, self sufficient, self satisfied. As I said the other day, it seemed as though as we became more and more comfortable economically, it carried right on into our relationship with God and we no longer needed Him. God warned in Deuteronomy 8, "You're going to have trouble when you become prospered." He said, "That's when you're going to forget Me."

The illusion of well-being blinds to the real spiritual state so that the Laodicean can't even see what he is like. Rather than compare himself to God, he compares himself to other men, and he says, "Hey, I'm all right. Everything is just fine."

The secret of overcoming is in the relationship because it's God in us who does the works. Before He does the work in us, we have to come to see the need in ourselves. And then because we see the need in ourselves—because we are comparing ourselves to Him—we go to Him for the power to overcome. This is why Paul said that "when I'm weak, then I am strong."

Revelation 3:18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich . . .

God has put us into the fire of a trial, and it's not nearly as painful as what's coming. And so, in His mercy, He blew us apart because He wants to see what we individually are going to do, because it's our individual relationship with Him that counts in the long run. And it is that relationship which goes up through the church to Jesus Christ to Him. But only you have power over what you do in your home, how you spend your time, how you drive your automobile, how you work for your employer, how you do everything. You're going to operate according to what you believe. I'll tell you, it really pays in the relationship to God to operate according to what He has revealed in His Word because that's showing Him that you trust Him—trust His Word.

Revelation 3:18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments . . .

Isn't that interesting? Clothing makes a difference. Clothing is a symbol. And the poor Laodicean, just like the Emperor's new clothing—stark naked before God but he thought he was well dressed.

Revelation 3:18-19 . . . that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. [That comes out of His Word.] As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

I was going to go into Daniel 9, but I'll just make that an assignment to you because it is really, really appropriate. It's a prayer of Daniel's, and the reason it is so appropriate is *when* he prayed it. He prayed it when Judah was scattered. He prayed it just before, just prior to the time, that they were going to be released from their slavery and scattering, and to go back to the Promise Land. The timing is tremendous. And what Daniel prayed at that period of time I think is very appropriate to the church of God in its scattered condition right now, when we are waiting for our Savior to take us to the Promised Land. So it's pretty appropriate, and you will find that it's a prayer of repentance that he made on behalf of the entire nation.