

The Handwriting Is On The Wall (1997)

The Decline of the Churches

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Daniel 5:5-6 In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosened, and his knees knocked against each other.

The last three or four years I have begun the Feast of Tabernacles with this scripture in order to impress upon our minds right from the very start of the Feast that progress in the fulfillment of prophecies is continuing unabated. They may not be moving any near as rapidly as we would like, but believe me, to the all-wise and all-powerful Sovereign God in charge, things are moving exactly as He wills. They are not too fast for Him. If they need to go faster, He gives them a little shove.

We get impatient with Him and think they are not moving fast enough. We'd like all this to wrap up tomorrow. "Let's flee. Let's get into a place of safety. Let's hug one another, and everything will be all right." Unfortunately for us and our desires, and God's desires, He has willed something else.

The context of Daniel 5 took place in a very tumultuous period of time. I will give you just a little bit of a rundown. Nebuchadnezzar reigned for 43 years. As far as Babylon itself—the home area—was concerned they had it pretty good. It was the "golden time" for the Babylonian era during that period of time when Nebuchadnezzar was running the ship there.

However, after Nebuchadnezzar died, his son Evil-Meredach came to the throne. He lived for about 2 years until he was murdered by his brother-in-law. A man named Nergal-share-zer took over, and he reigned for 3 years, and then mysteriously died. Nobody knows exactly what happened to him, whether it was a natural death or what. Considering the times, I think it was probably not natural. At any rate, he disappeared from the scene after only three years, and he was succeeded by a man named Labashi-Merduk.

Labashi-Merduk reigned for almost two months. Somebody did him in. He was assassinated, and that was the end of him. He was succeeded by Nabonidus who reigned for a few years—eight or ten years, something like that. He decided that he had had enough and that he had better get out of town before somebody got him. He turned the operation of the country over to his son, the fabled Belshazar. They were co-regents for a number of years.

Nabonidus actually reigned for sixteen years altogether, and he is noted by historians of having been a pretty good ruler. He restored some of Babylon's glory during that period of time, and then this occurred.

I am sure that all the while this was going on, God was marking time. He could see what was going on. He was not sleeping on His throne, and He could see all of the intrigue that was going on there in Babylon—"Business as usual" I guess you might say, and so He sent this message to Belshazar when the "impious feast" (what the commentators usually call it), was taking place. They were drinking their wine from the bowls that were taken from God's Temple in Jerusalem. From that has arisen this

cliché, "The handwriting is on the wall." It has come to universally mean that a mysterious warning has been given that, when looked at in retrospect, it was so obvious that we should have understood what it meant when we first encountered it.

Now such is the way with much of prophecy. I think that we all have a natural desire to be able to look into the future, and it satisfies our curiosity. In some cases it is the vanity of others, because they want to be "in the know." It is so intriguing, and the very mysteriousness of it attracts us to apply our hand toward mining it for understanding.

But brethren, in regard to prophecy, have we ever been right on anything? Very little, at best. I think the church of God has been right on a number of generalities pertaining to prophetic fulfillment, but when we get to the specifics our batting average drops considerably. Now this is not meant to stop anybody from looking into prophecy, and even if it were meant, I do not think it would stop anybody, because our curiosity is such that we want to look into it. It is the Word of God. We kind of want to know what is going on.

What I am saying here is not intended to stop us from looking into it. I do not mean to give the impression that it is wrong to look into prophecy. I think that if we have that inclination within us, we had better have the understanding that we are going to very likely have to make some adjustments to our interpretations as we go along, because it is very likely that we are not going to be right. I am going to prove that to you by scripture in just a little bit. Do not ever bet the farm on your interpretation of some kind of a prophecy.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 29.

Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Pay a little bit of attention to that last phrase, "that we may do all the words of this law." That is why things are revealed. I offer you as evidence that prophecy is among those things that are secret, the fact that almost nobody ever gets them entirely right.

The Hebrew word 'secret' in this verse is more closely related to our English word 'covered,' and it is contrasted to the word 'revealed,' meaning "uncovered." Covered things cannot be seen. That is, they cannot be understood. Let me give you a simple illustration.

You could walk into a room and see an object that was covered by a sheet. You could not see through the sheet, but you could see a general shape. You could see that this thing was rectangular in shape, or square in shape. The actual shape does not matter. You would have to actually guess at what was under that sheet, would you not? You might generally say that what is under that sheet is a rectangular box, or a square box, but you would not know specifically what was there until the sheet was pulled off, and you might find that it was something entirely different. Maybe it was a piece of furniture and not a box at all. All you get is a generality. The specific aspect of what is actually there is not known until the sheet is pulled and revealed. Prophecies are not to be understood until God uncovers them, so that we can understand them.

Verse 29 is actually an admonition to properly prioritize our lives. Studying into covered things is almost always going to lead you only, at best, to generalities. What we see here is actually in perfect accord with,

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

God knows all things, and human knowledge is severely limited by comparison.

Turn to Isaiah 42. This is a declaration by God regarding the way He operates.

Isaiah 42:9a "Behold, the former things have come to pass . . ."

The implication is, the former things that He had said before or prophesied of, have come to pass.

Isaiah 42:9b ". . . and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

Let us be careful here though, because He may tell us the prophecy, but He may not tell us what it means, but He will warn us beforehand. He will begin to reveal things so that we begin to understand.

Now let us go to Isaiah 48. This is very interesting.

Isaiah 48:5-6 "Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it you, lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my carved image and my molded image has commanded them.' You have heard; see all this, and will not you declare it? I have made you hear new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them."

Isaiah 48:8 "Surely you did not hear, surely you did not know; surely from long ago your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb."

Do you know what that says there? I will paraphrase it. God says basically, "Don't get your heart so set on your understanding of My prophecies, because as time goes on I'm going to throw some new things in to keep you on edge."

Why does He do this? Well, the answer is actually given in verse 5, and that is that neither we nor any idol will get any glory. The glory is going to be His. It is His creation. It is His purpose. It is His salvation. He is the Author of it, and He is going to make sure that by the time we are in His Kingdom, we are going to know without a shadow of a doubt that we are saved in spite of ourselves. We are going to be thoroughly humbled as we go along.

We are going to have to live by faith, even though we do have a measure of insight into the prophecies that He has given. He is going to open them up a little bit at a time. Do not be surprised if some things happen that we never figured on.

Did you ever have it all figured out that the church was going to be all split up like this? God may have known for centuries. We certainly did not.

One thing is certain: We do have a clear revelation of God in His Word of things that on a daily basis are far more important to God's purpose. These are things pertaining to forgiveness, to repentance, to mercy, to kindness, to doing good works, to growing and overcoming; things that have to do with becoming in the image of God. God is admonishing us to pay the strictest attention to them and to be obedient to them. God has revealed those things that we might be instructed in how to keep His law (Deuteronomy 29:29).

We are going to continue to pursue this last thought, that we are to pay the strictest attention to what has been revealed. This time we are going to go back into the New Testament.

Acts 1:6 Therefore when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Is that not the same question that we are asking so frequently? When? How long is it going to be? When will we flee? When will Christ return? That is basically what was on their lips.

Notice Jesus' reply.

Acts 1:7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."

Now I submit to you that it is far more important that we live trusting God than that we know answers even to God's own prophetic utterances. The inference is that these things (Deuteronomy 29) is what we should apply diligently to ourselves so that we might clearly understand and know those things, and not be overly concerned about the things which God has for His own purpose not yet uncovered. Can we be patient enough?

Let us go back to Daniel 12.

Daniel 12:4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."

Here we are at the conclusion of the longest, and arguably the most important and specific prophecy in all the Bible. Even if it is not that, perhaps it is certainly one of the most important—and it is sealed! Now God says that at the end He will open it, but is it opened yet? That is questionable.

If it is sealed, how can we know it, except only generally at best? How could we open it? We cannot. Only God can do that. It will be uncovered, but if I am any judge at all of the way that God does things, it will be a little at a time. There is nobody in the church of God that has a corner on accurately interpreting these prophecies.

Let us go back to the New Testament to I Peter 1. We are breaking into a sentence here because I want to pick up one word—salvation.

I Peter 1:9-10 Receiving the end of your faith [or the goal of your faith]—the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you.

Notice what the prophets did. They received the prophecies, did they not? And then after they got them,

I Peter 1:11 Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating . . .

Now again, is this not what we do? We are searching diligently the times that we live in, and we want to understand whether or not the events that we are reading of in the newspapers and seeing on television and hearing on the radio are fitting in some way to the unfolding of the prophecies.

They searched into the prophecies when they received them, and here we are, the recipients of them, and we are doing the same thing that they did.

I Peter 1:11 Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Peter narrows it down to a specific set of prophecies regarding the coming of Christ and things pertaining to His life and crucifixion.

I Peter 1:12 To whom it was revealed . . .

God uncovered the prophecies to the prophets enough that they would understand this.

I Peter 1:12 . . . that not to themselves, but to us [somebody in the future] they were ministering the things, which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven—things which the angels desire to look into.

In many cases what was revealed to all the prophets who received the prophecies from God were generalities. We just read of that in Daniel 12. "Seal it up." Daniel wanted to know. He said, "What does this all mean?" Daniel was told, "This is as far as we're going to go." And so they knew that it was not for them, and that there was nothing that they could do. All they got at best was the same as we get. We get generalities. Maybe, in some regard, because of time going on and God continuing opening up a little bit at a time, we may know more than they did. I would not bet the farm on that, but nonetheless, we may know more than they did. Verse 12 says that they were clearly ministering to us-to the church.

Usually prophecy has both a near application, and a far application. That is, it is dual. The prophets would tend to understand the near application in terms of time. It would be that period of time that they were living in. The far application would be something that they would not have any insight into. They were completely befuddled by it.

I think one of the things that is interesting is this last phrase in verse 12, "Things which the angels desire to look into." I think we all have the idea in the back of our mind that the angels know what is going on. Well this verse indicates otherwise.

If there is something that you want to scrutinize a little bit more closely to get a better view of it, and get a better picture of it, to see it a little bit better, you squint your eye, and you get out a magnifying glass. If necessary, you stoop down to look at it to see it a little bit more closely. That is exactly what God is picturing the angels doing—stooping down to look at it more closely, because they do not get it either! The whole picture has not been revealed to them. They see generalities, even as we do. They are probably ahead of us, but God reveals to them as well, as this thing is going along.

The implication from this series of verses is that God has revealed very little beyond the generalities the prophecies pertaining to Christ, to salvation and grace, other than that they were not for their time, but for a future time.

Now let us continue to develop this. We are going to go back to the book of Ezekiel and we will see this principle expounded in a little bit different way.

Ezekiel 32:15 'When I make the land of Egypt desolate, and the country is destitute of all that once filled it, when I strike all who dwell in it, then shall they know that I am the LORD.'

Do you see what that is saying? Let us go to Ezekiel 33. We will lead into it with verse 28.

Ezekiel 33:28-29 "For I will make the land most desolate, her arrogant strength shall cease, and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that no one will pass through. Then they shall know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed."

"Then shall they know that I am the LORD." This is a phrase that appears very frequently in the Bible, especially frequently in the book of Ezekiel. It is so often in the book of Ezekiel that it seems like maybe seventy-five or eighty percent of the chapters have that in it.

Remember, Ezekiel is addressed to Israel. It was written after Israel fell, and so we are looking at prophecies pertaining to, as we understand it, modern times—our times—just about the time of the return of Jesus Christ. He is talking here about things pertaining to the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. The general sense is that people are not going to understand, that they are not going to come to know God until the prophecies are *being* fulfilled at best, and sometimes it will not occur until after the prophecy is completely fulfilled.

I submit to you that again, even though God gives the church a bit of lead time, that the same general principle applies to us. We are not going to recognize God's hand in something until it is actually beginning to take place, and the pieces then will begin to fit. Let me give you an example of this that happened during the life of Christ. This happened on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection.

Luke 24:13 Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem.

Drop down to verse 22. The two men that Christ is walking with are talking.

Luke 24:22 Yes, and certain women also of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us.

Luke 24:25-27 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

"Then you shall know." It was not until He had been crucified, it was not until He had been buried, it was not until He was resurrected, and it was not until Christ Himself uncovered it for them right out of the Scriptures, that they finally saw it.

Now how many times they had actually read it, and how many times they had pursued an interpretation of it and maybe thought that they had a handle on it, I have no idea. I think that we have to assume, as God-fearing men, as part of Christ's disciples, that they must have at least read over it from time to time anyway. But it was not until Christ Himself opened it to their understanding, until *He* revealed it, that they got it. That is the principle that we are working with here.

I am sure that God has no problem with us looking into the prophecies and trying to understand them as long as we keep a handle on this thing. We must understand that this is secondary in importance to overcoming, growing, developing character, and being in the image of God. We must be developing the right attitudes, praying to Him, getting along with our brethren, fellowshipping with Him and our brethren in the right attitude. Those are things that mean something to Him right now, because our time is limited.

"The secret things belong to God, but those things that are revealed belong to us so that we might keep His law"—His instruction. The Scriptures tend to show that the interpreting and the foretelling aspect of prophecy is going to be a difficult proposition and needs to be handled with a very great amount of caution. However, the generalities themselves are extremely valuable for giving us at least a vague vision of the direction events will be moving, even though we may not be aware of the particulars.

Daniel 12:7 Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and a half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.

Now here maybe we are dealing with a prophecy that is in process of occurring. I still said "maybe," because I think that many generations of Christians who have preceded us also thought that this might have been occurring in their time as well. But maybe it is being fulfilled, and maybe we are living right in the midst of it, experiencing it, feeling its pressures, and reacting to the stresses that it is creating.

In verse 4, the last phrase there says, "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." In all probability the knowledge being spoken of there is knowledge of what was sealed. That is the context of what was covered; that is, the prophecy. And the "running to and fro" relates more directly to men casting about in their minds for the correct application of what is sealed. If you care to look it up and do some research, you will find that this is a permissible interpretation of that "running to and

fro." I am not twisting the scripture there. The Hebrew permits the "running to and fro" to actually be taking place in a person's mind.

Now connect that thought with the earlier thought of God's oft repeated claim that "Then you shall know that I am the Lord"—that is, during or after a prophecy's fulfillment.

I will tell you that I personally believe that God is beginning to reveal Himself in this prophecy. What is interesting is that the interpreters see two different ways to apply the last phrase in verse 7 where it says "when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished." Let me give this to you.

American Standard Version: "And when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people."

That is the common interpretation.

The Knox Translation: "The strength of God's holy people must be broken utterly."

That is kind of a chilling thought.

Moffat Translation: "And that when the power of him who shattered the sacred people should be over."

Very interesting. The American Bible Publication Society agrees with Moffat.

The American Bible Publication Society: "And when the power of the shatterer of the holy people shall cease, all of these things shall be completed."

One of the things that we can learn from these various translations is that regardless of whether the first part of the prophecy is applied to the one doing the shattering, or to the church—the church is shattered! We can be absolutely sure, I think, of that. The church is going to be broken into many, many, many pieces. That is what the word shatter means, so who is doing it in a way is irrelevant.

If you are part of the church, the church is going to be shattered. The Hebrew word rendered scatter or shatter most literally means "to dash in pieces," or "to beat in pieces." It can also mean to scatter, shatter, overspread, or disperse. So the word gives a portrayal of something forcefully and thoroughly broken for the purpose of being rendered useless almost to the point of total destruction.

There is a dangerous phenomenon taking place within the greater church of God that discourages me greatly, because it is such a time-consuming distraction for me personally and it is causing disunity. I feel that it may very well mean a great deal of frustration and sorrow is coming for many of those who are involved in it, and in some cases people may lose their eternal life as a result of it.

This group has already had to deal with some of it, but it has had a very great impact on the Church of God as a whole. We usually refer to it as "the greater church." It has had a greater impact on Global and on United than it has had on us, but I want to tell you something. This phenomenon is not restricted to the true church. It is not restricted to the church of God. In fact it is not restricted even to

the United States. It is happening all over the world, but especially intense in the Western World where pseudo-Christianity reigns as the religion of choice of most people. In fact it is happening to the Catholic Church as reported many times by Malachi Martin.

I was given a tape that he did for the Art Bell Show, which was five hours long in which he talked a great deal about what is happening within the Catholic Church. I do not know whether you are familiar with Malachi Martin. He is a Jesuit, and he was stationed in the Vatican for at least twenty-five years. He now lives in New York City and he devotes his time entirely to writing. He writes both fiction and non-fiction. Almost every subject involves the Catholic Church and what is happening within it.

His most recent book on the Catholic Church is titled, *Wind Swept House*, which is very interesting. It ought to give you pause to think of that title in relation to the true church. Is it possible that the true church can be metaphorically described as being hit by a tornado, and shattering and scattering occurs? Did you ever see any pictures on television of a tornado coming through town and hitting a house? What happens? BOOM! It bursts into a million pieces and they are scattered all over the place. That is what he is saying is happening to the Catholic Church. It is just like the Catholic Church, for about the past twenty-five or thirty years, was hit by a tornado. It is wind swept, and it is blowing apart, just like the true church. It is so bad that Malachi Martin feels that unless something is done, it cannot be rescued.

You are seeing the end of the Catholic Church. It is going to break up into nothing more than national churches having a form of Catholicism. I think the name is quite apt, *Wind Swept House*. Guess where the pressure is coming from that is blowing the Catholic Church apart. Guess where it is coming from. Internally—just like happened to us. It is exploding from the inside out, with the introduction of all kinds of false doctrines blowing it into a great deal of divisiveness as arguments erupt between the cardinals, the bishops, the church pastors, the deacons, the deaconesses, and right on down the line.

I have here an article that was clipped from the Los Angeles Times, Monday, June 2, 1997, when the pope was in Poland. Here are a couple of excerpts.

Pope John Paul II, struggling to boost the Roman Catholic Church's declining authority in his native Poland warned his compatriots Sunday that they cannot build a free post-communist order without Christ, or against Christ. [These are the pope's own words]: 'Attempts are being made to convince man and whole societies that God is an obstacle on the path to full freedom, that the church is the enemy of freedom, that she does not understand freedom, that she is afraid of it. This is an unprecedented falsification,' he said, raising his voice to a shout and drawing applause from the rain-soaked crowd, 'especially in this country, on this land where the church has proved many times to be a guardian of freedom.'

The writer of the article says a little bit later:

Perhaps because he is ailing and may not be able to return again, or perhaps because the church has lost so much ground during his absence this trip home is also the longest of his papacy, with stops in twelve cities over eleven days.

The church has long been a pillar in mostly Catholic Poland, helping the Solidarity Movement to rise in its power, but church influence has waned in recent years and many Poles grew resentful of clerical politicking, especially in the country's bitter debate over abortion.

John Paul hoped that after Communism fell, newly-freed East Europe countries would be a spiritual counterweight to the West. Instead, he has watched in dismay as Poles and others have forsaken Catholic teaching in favor of what he considered loose morals and vacuous Western consumerism."

[Pope John Paul II speaking]: 'What kind of order are we talking about here...' [He demanded in his homily] '...when there is a void in the area of values, when chaos and confusion reign in the moral sphere? Freedom dies, man is reduced from freedom to slavery, becoming a slave to passions and pseudo values.'

Now whatever is happening, it is so strong that I have read in other sources that Pope John Paul fears it may destroy the church. We are going to expand our thinking out here. I have introduced the Catholic Church, and you can see that the same things basically are happening to them as is happening to us. My point in this, brethren, is to help us to understand that we are caught in events that are global in scope, that what happened to the true Church was not unique.

I cut another article, this time from The Charlotte Observer, July 26, 1997, and it is titled, "Who Is Really Running America?" I will give something on that in tomorrow's sermon.

Brethren, something is happening. There is a huge and pervasive spiritual movement which I believe began to bud forth about 1850 or so, along with the advent of the Industrial Age. It began to assert itself by the end of the 19th century with the rise or the advent of German rationalism. It has bloomed and come into full flower in our generation, and it is producing its evil fruit in this age of industrialization, technology, and globalism.

In regard to religion and churches, it is both destroying and creating at one and the same time. The true church cannot help but be afflicted and affected by it mightily. Now we may not be of the world, but we certainly are in the world, and it is affecting us.

I have another article from The Charlotte Observer, August 25, 1997. This article is titled "The Whole World's Culture is Changing." This article is a book review written by a man named Bill Bishop, and it is concerning a book titled, *Modernization and Post-Modernization*, written by political scientist Ronald Englehart. As I read this from this article, think about these things in relation to the true church.

Thirty years ago the Episcopal Church was frayed by a discussion of race and poverty. Just recently the same church elected a new leader, and a defining issue was the ordination of homosexuals. What has changed?

The answer according to the reviewer who read the book:

"EVERYTHING!" Says the new book by University of Michigan Political Scientist Ronald Englehart: "It has changed everywhere."

If you pare away the social science mumbo book [meaning the lingo that they use within this book], Englehart's book tells us why the Episcopalians are more consumed with gay priests than with poverty, and he shows that the changes that societies blame on national characteristics are actually part of a worldwide transformation. Englehart's book grows out of a huge literature about what happens to societies after their economies industrialize. His theory is . . .

Listen to this. This fits right into Deuteronomy 8.

. . . that as people are born into and grow up within societies where survival is assured, their religions, political and cultural views change.

Think of that in relation to Laodiceanism. "I am rich and increased with goods. My survival is assured. I'm comfortable. I'm secure. I'm in the church. I'm going to walk right behind Mr. Armstrong right into the Kingdom of God, but first we have to get to the Place of Safety. But we'll follow him there too."

So then he tells a little bit about how Englehart arrived at these conclusions, and he says:

What he found is that a new world view is replacing the one that controlled society since the Industrial Revolution.

Now he gives a number of areas in which things are changing.

[Authority:] There is a growing distrust of all kinds of traditional authority: government, police, the military. People are dissatisfied with all hierarchical institutions.

That is a bad word to many people. Do you think it only happened in the true church?

Worldwide, people are dissatisfied with all hierarchical institutions, including the corporate workplace.

Then he goes into politics and a short blurb on religion.

Support of traditional religion is declining. There is a drop in the number of those who say that God is important in their lives. Interest in individual spirituality is increasing, however.

Notice the word individual, getting away from the group, scattering, being on one's own. I do not need a church anymore. It is just You and me, God.

The rise of fundamentalism is a reaction to this turning away from traditional religion, but this reflects the rear-guard action of a dwindling segment of the population, not the wave of the future.

Now we would be considered fundamentalists, so this man is predicting that we are going to continue to decline.

[Attitudes:] People are more tolerant of and comfortable with divorce, abortion, homosexuality. What Englehart detects is a shift in what people want out of life. The once all-consuming concern for economic and physical security has been replaced with post-modern priorities emphasizing self-expression and quality of life.

Englehart shows us that the change that we thought has been so intense is really just beginning.

According to this modern prophet, things are going to get worse. We may yet be scattered into a thousand pieces until not one stone is upon another.

In both the church and the world, what is happening is creating a huge skepticism about God, about His Word, about the ministry, about God's purpose, and His way as shown by His doctrines. This is a part of what is scattering the church, and in both the church and the world, it is destroying old beliefs and virtues. In the world it is creating a religion that is a polyglot blend of concepts from all over the world.

I am going to quote from another article that I got from The Charlotte Observer, August 4, 1997, and it is titled, "Religious Diversity Changing." The sub-heading is: "Will incorporating parts of other religions enrich lives, or just muddy the faith?"

Historically religious diversity met clearly defined beliefs that distinguish one group from another. At best it meant contending for those beliefs while respecting those of different faiths.

Is that not interesting. There is a verse that says that we have to "contend for the faith once delivered." Well, this man says that at one time that is what it meant.

The new definition of diversity however focuses more on incorporating another's belief in yours.

This has always been Israel's problem! You can see it all through the Bible. From the time that Israel became a nation, Israel always wanted to syncretize their religion with the people of the land. God gave them a pure religion, but they wanted to pull into their worship of God the religions of the Canaanites, the Hivites, the Perazites, and so forth, and blend them.

The new definition of diversity however focuses more on incorporating other beliefs in yours. In [the] post-ecumenical age, Christians in particular pick and choose from different religions, even though they may choose what may be at odds with church teachings.

This is what the pope's message was about there in Poland. When Pope John Paul was installed in office in 1978, the first article that Evelyn and I ever saw in our life written by Malachi Martin was a very long article. It appeared in the Richmond, Virginia newspaper. I cannot remember the name of it, but in that article, Malachi Martin said that Pope John Paul, a brand new pope, has already written off Catholicism in the United States. He said basically, "They aren't Catholics. They're Protestants."

This was already in 1978. And so he decided to focus his attention on saving what he could of Europe, especially eastern Europe, because there he felt true Catholicism was being worshipped. But as we see now, 1997, nineteen years later, he goes to the Poles and reads them the riot act because they are going away from the faith.

In the past, diversity meant each group stressing what was primary for its faith, and what separated it from others. Now the lines that separate different religions are blurred. [Did you see what the major first-page story, the picture story, the title story was in the latest Time magazine? It was "Buddhism."] Today people seek personal fulfillment in a manner with which they feel comfortable, even if it means going against specific religious teachings.

What is increasingly clear is that diversity doesn't mean maintaining the integrity of a faith as it has been historically defined. The danger is that a faith may be recreated in the image of the believer.

That is a possible definition of Laodiceanism, because when what is happening happens, the danger is that the person will re-create his religion, and it will be *his* religion.

Let us look at some very familiar Scriptures. I have just strung them together so that you will understand at the end of this sermon what we have to do.

It is very clear in God's Word that we are in a time in which we are being encompassed by cultural changes that are taking place over the entire world. The pressure is being brought to bear upon the whole world in order to destroy religions as they formerly were, in order to create the religion that is going to be put together by the False Prophet.

It had to be this way brethren, because Satan could not keep things the way they were, because people felt too strongly about what they believed. As long as people felt strongly about what they believed, they would hang onto what they believe, and he could never get the world to accept one religion dominant over all others. Now we are caught in that, and it is affecting us. This is that phenomenon, as I said earlier, that is taking place in the world and in the church. You yourself know people who are drifting off (I just call them "independents,"), and they are creating their own religion.

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

The General Epistles were written within the context of a period of time as very similar as to what we are going through right now, and the advice from God is, "Get back to the faith once delivered to the saints."

Jude 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed who 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.

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

Get back to your first love.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

HOLD FAST!

Hebrews 6:9-12 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have showed toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 10:37-39 For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Our warfare is a wrestling against spiritual wickedness in high places. That spiritual wickedness motivates men. We always have to remember that the real problem is demonic. God makes it very clear what He expects His children to do at a time like this. We have to rally around the things that He revealed, that we might keep His law, keep His instruction.

God's instruction to us is that we return to what we were converted to—that which worked to produce faith in us in the first place. We are to give our wholehearted devotion to Him who loved us so much that He emptied Himself of His glory. He lived His life sinlessly and gave it for us, and now sits at the right hand of the Father, mediating for us.

Brethren, we are caught in events over which we have very little control. They are global in scope, and the enemies of God are massing their forces for yet another attempt to stave off the prophesied establishment of the Kingdom of God and the restitution of all things under Jesus Christ.

The handwriting is on the wall, and now our job is to not lose sight of the faith that was once delivered, and to use it as a guide to prepare for Christ's coming.

