

Importance Of The True Gospel

How the True Gospel Promotes Unity

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Good afternoon to all of you. We hope you are getting out of this Feast the things that God wants you to, as well as fellowshiping with all the brethren.

I am going to take you back about 15 years which should be within the memory of most of us. I can remember back in the mid-80s there was a very popular television show here in the United States called "The A-Team."

This crack commando unit was on the run from the United States military for a crime they did not commit. And once they escaped from prison, they decided to go into the underground of Los Angeles and act as a unit of mercenaries for those who did not have the money, or had exhausted all of their governmental or other options that they may have had—those who did not have anyplace to turn. This crack commando unit was available to them.

Usually, it all built up to a climax at the end where they all had to band together, everybody pitched in. And because there was a crisis coming with the bad guys usually, they would have to build some kind of tank, or whatever out of this piece of junk that they found on the side of the road. Everything would get done at just the right time when the bad guys would be coming in with their whatever, and the A-Team would save the day! Do you remember that? It happened every week!

At this point in the story, the main character—who was Hannibal Smith (George Peppard for those of you who did not watch the show)—would smile his toothy smile, light up his big cigar, and say one of the more memorable lines from the show, "I just love it when a plan comes together!"

Now the A-Team was a unit of misfits really. How they got together, how they worked together, how they stayed together, and how they succeeded in all these cockamamie scenarios that Stephen J. Canell put them through was only something that TV could concoct.

Hannibal was an unconventional, but brilliant tactician (according to Stephen J. Canell). He loved fine cigars, and other fine things; and firefights. All these things go together real well.

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Templeton "Face Man" Peck was the master of disguise. He was the good looking one that all the women swooned over. But, he was a con-artist as well, and he loved fine wines, and the highlife. He loved going to Las Vegas, and really living it up.

Of course, everybody remembers H. M. "Howling Mad" Murdock who was simply crazy. They had to keep breaking him out of insane asylums. He heard voices and talked back to them. But he could fly anything with wings and with rotors. You put him in the cockpit and it flew.

And then, of course, there was Mr. T.: B. A. (bad attitude) Baracus. He was a master mechanic and master sergeant of the troop. He was also a bouncer it seemed. He wore a perennial scowl. And he would say things like, "Whaddup?" and "What you doing in here?" among other things. But, he had a fear of heights, and every time they got Howling Mad to fly something, they would either have to knock him (B. A.) out, get him drunk, drug him, or whatever to get him up in the plane.

But, they always outwitted the enemy with these wonderful people with all their talents and all of their idiosyncrasies (to put it mildly).

Now, what made that A-Team such a formidable force? I could ask what makes any team, any group, any family, and any church successful at what it does?

There are probably many components that we could put in here to give an answer to this question, but maybe the single most important factor in it is **unity of purpose**. When everybody works together to reach a common goal, the chances of success just skyrocket. That is how any team works.

Think of a football team. We have the University of Missouri here (in the hotel) today. They are just about ready to go back up to Columbia right about now. What if their quarterback decided he was going to run a fly pattern? And he told everybody, "We're going to run this fly pattern, and #88, I want you to go run the numbers, and just fly. I'll throw the ball to you, and you just catch it."

Well, #88 gets out to his position and while the count is going on, he decides, "No, I think I'll run an "Out", and the running back decides, "I should get the ball, so I'll just run up behind the quarterback and take it out of his hands," and the tackle says, "Well, we were going to go up the right side, but I think I'll run a sweep to the left and do my blocking out there."

Do you see what I am getting at?

And, what if all the time the coach was saying, "No, I think we ought to down the ball right here, or maybe we should punt!"

Everybody is working at cross-purposes.

If they would all follow the lead of the quarterback, and run the fly pattern, there might be a touchdown at the end of the play. If they do not do their assignments, the chances of not scoring a touchdown are high. But, if they should have in mind that they are going to score a touchdown in the way that the quarterback has called the play, then they just might do it. Any team works like this!

But on the other hand, if you have a group of individuals, all with differing agendas, all going in different directions, they are going to get nowhere fast—nowhere together.

It is this principle of unity of purpose, or having a common goal, that we are going to look into this afternoon. It is a factor that the greater church of God—not just us, but the whole church—sadly lacks today. We are all running at cross-purposes with each other, either as groups, or as individuals. And, believe it or not, it is this unity of purpose—this having a common goal—that will play a great part in making the Millennium a glorious time to live.

Did you ever think of this that way? That the time to come that we are picturing here in the Feast of Tabernacles is a time when everybody will be looking to and doing the same thing?

When we consider vision like this—unity of purpose—probably the scripture that we think of first is in Proverbs 29. Most of you know what this scripture is already.

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no vision [or revelation], the people perish [or cast off restraint], but happy is he who keeps the law.

Among the various translations we have available, the common denominator is that they all say that when God's revelation is absent, chaos results. That is the basic idea of the first half of this scripture. When God's revelation is absent, chaos results.

The Berkley translation, for one, has not "chaos results" but "the people run wild." The New American Bible has an interesting one: "When there is no revelation, the people become demoralized."

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Now we think of that in terms of being down, or discouraged, like when the opposing team scores the touchdown, and not you. If you break it down—de-moral-ized—what that really means is (in its original meaning) that they lacked morals. The morals have been taken out.

Generally in a society where God's way is diminishing, or absent altogether, social conditions are either in disarray, or they have collapsed. That is the way it works. We have the Word of God, here, that says that is a truth. Where God's Word is not around for people to understand, or at least to know in a carnal way, society breaks down. We are seeing this in America.

As the Bible has been kicked out of the schools, as the Bible has been kicked out of the home, and has been replaced by television, video, movies, radio, and whatever else, the general moral conditions of our culture are fast plummeting downward into nothing.

And even in the church, when liberal doctrines and liberal approaches come in—and we see this especially in the children—we see things get loose. This is because events are just following this principle. When God's ways are absent, chaos results.

Let us not just take this from the standpoint of revelation as we normally think of it. Normally we think of revelation in terms of the last book of the Bible—prophecy, or prophetic revelation. But, that is not really what is being spoken of here. What does Solomon contrast the absence of revelation with? Look at the last clause here: "Happy is he who knows all the prophecies in the Bible?" No, but, "Happy is he who keeps the **law**."

Let us think about this. What does this imply? Well, it tells me that this prophetic revelation that Solomon is speaking about here is not just prophecy, but prophecy and law, and the psalms, and the history that we find in the Bible, and—we could name them all—the gospels, the Acts, the epistles, and the apocalypse. The entirety of God's Word is what Solomon is talking about here. When God's word is absent, chaos is soon to follow.

The flip side here is that if you have the entirety of God's Word, then society can be brought into a state of happiness, or more correctly, **blessedness**. That is really what that word means. "Blessed is he who keeps the law." God's way produces blessings making men content. When God's way is absent, it produces chaos which plays right into Satan's hands. And, there is sin, destruction, and death at the end of that.

Solomon's insight here is even keener than this.

He is very particular about the word he used for the term "revelation" here, or "vision" in the Authorized Version. It is the word, "kaw-zown" phonetically in English. It specifically means "mental sight." Or, we might say, "insight," or, "revelation." The meaning is that if something is revealed to you—it is suddenly there—you understand. Or, "inner vision." So, it is "mental sight," "insight," "revelation," or "inner vision."

What this does is combine three different concepts.

The first one is the one we normally think of first, "prophetic revelation." That is the first thing that comes to mind. The second is "insight." "Prophetic revelation," and "insight," are two different concepts, because "insight" has to do with understanding—the ability to understand the workings of things. And the third is what we started out with—seeing or working toward a goal.

All of these three concepts—prophetic revelation, insight, and working toward the goal—are included in this idea of revelation in Proverbs 29:18.

In a general sense, then, this vision that Solomon says we need, is the totality of God's revelation of Himself, and His plan. Is that not really what prophecy does? It reveals to us the steps that God has in His plan.

What is this specifically? What has God revealed? Let us go to I John. There is a scripture here that is not used very often, but it fits in this sermon.

I John 5:20 And we know [Ask yourself: "Do I know this?"] that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

What is John saying here? He is saying here that whatever this revelation is, Jesus brought it, and He brought it to give us an understanding of it. And, the purpose of this revelation, vision, and understanding is to allow us to have, and to grow in, a relationship with the Father. Is that not what He says? He has given us an understanding: "that we may know Him who is true, and that we are in Him who is true."

That is how intimate this relationship is.

This message that Jesus brought opened our minds to this possibility so that we might have a relationship with the Father. This message is so potent that it leads us to

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knowing the True God, and ushering us into eternal life. This is a pretty potent revelation!

What is this vision, or this revelation? Most of you probably already know. Let us go to the most famous scripture from Herbert W. Armstrong's repertoire: Mark 1:14-15. He probably quoted this about half the time in one of his radio broadcasts, or his sermons, because he always came back to this, especially toward the end.

Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put into prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel!"

This is the understanding that Jesus Christ brought that we know Him who is true, and that we are in Him who is true, and that we may know this True God, and have eternal life. That is the message! That is the revelation!

He brought the good news from His Father that to those the Father called, the way was opening to an intimate relationship that would lead into receiving God's Kingdom and eternal life. The Kingdom of God is at hand!

This Kingdom of God is not just what is coming from the standpoint of a physical government over the earth. It is all that God is, and wants us to understand, and to have as His sons and daughters.

What a vision to have that God wants to give us everything! Our lives should now be focused on that goal. So, Jesus Christ brought that vision—the revelation that we read back there in Proverbs 29:18—that leads to true happiness, or the true blessedness.

Now you should know that the gospel includes not just the prophecies that pertain to God's government on the earth at Christ's return, or just to the glorifying of His children—the news that the children of God will be glorified when Christ returned—there is more to it than that.

It also includes all the pertinent details of the journey that each individual Christian must take toward that goal. It is a huge package of information that stimulates, educates, motivates, and invigorates the called children of God. It is the whole Bible! Mr. Armstrong called it the instruction manual.

Jesus came as the Messenger of the New Covenant, which opens up all the rest for us

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to understand, and to latch onto and to inculcate, to do, and to finally be glorified in. That is an awesome goal. It is an awesome gift from God that He would give us a message that has everything in it that we need! He left nothing out. If He left some things vague, we do not need it.

The things we need to know are clear because His Son came to give us an understanding. And what He gives us to understand is enough. But, how big that "enough" is! How awesome it is to comprehend! I do not think we can! We have glimpses of it as in a glass darkly, as Paul said. We do not know all of what is ahead, but what we do see should light a fire under us!

But it does not! We get used to it. We get a little blasé about it. We need to be reinvigorated, so that we will pursue it with a laser-like vision that He wants us to have.

Please be turning to Romans 1. Now, Paul did not found the church at Rome. Paul did not march into Rome and start preaching, and have some converts, and start a church. It did not happen that way.

We do not really know who founded the church at Rome, but the best guess is back at the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was first given to the called, it says in Acts 2:10 that there were visitors from Rome. Now, probably what happened was that some of those visitors from Rome were converted, and baptized that day—heard the message, obviously—stayed around Jerusalem for a while, and then went back to Rome.

And, knowing that there were others from Rome who had been there at Jerusalem during that time, when they got home, they contacted one another, and got together and kept the Sabbaths. So, there was a church there, but probably founded more out of necessity because the people wanted fellowship, rather than anyone having been evangelized there.

At least, that is the way it seems to me. More than likely, when they went home, they found one another, and kept the Sabbaths together. They were the church who was at Rome.

Paul had not made it to Rome yet, and wanted to, because it was in his sphere. Rome was the capitol of the Gentile world in the west. That was probably one of the major places that he needed to go as the apostle to the Gentiles.

Romans 1:13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, how that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you (but was hindered). . .

Something always kept him from reaching Rome. He had had success in some places, problems in other places, and always those things—the successes, and the problems—had kept him from reaching Rome. So, he says:

Romans 1:13b . . .so that I might have some fruit among you also, . . .

Meaning, he wanted them to grow; he wanted to see their growth; he wanted to see more converted, just as among the other Gentiles.

Romans 1:13c-14 . . .even as among the other Gentiles. I am debtor both to Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

Meaning, he had learned quite a bit in his travels, even though he had been hindered from seeing them. He, at least, had learned quite a bit, and was indebted to Greeks, and Barbarians, and the wise, and unwise; it all helped prepare him for his ministry.

Romans 1:15 So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome.

Now, what does that tell you? The book of Romans was probably written in the mid-50s AD. Do the math. That is about 25 years or so after that Pentecost. Some of these people may have been church members for 25 years! And Paul said that he wanted to preach the gospel to them also! To old-timers!

The gospel is for the converted, as well as for those who are being called. Because, remember what the gospel is. It is about everything that God wants to reveal to us. It is not just the good news that the Kingdom of God is coming when Christ returns. That is the vision! But, there is a great deal more in there about how to get there. And that is why Paul wanted to impart this understanding which he had learned from Jesus Christ Himself, because it was Jesus who brought an understanding to him of knowing the true God, and knowing how to get there, and having eternal life.

Let us go to verses 16 and 17. Notice what Paul says about this gospel that he was going to bring:

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is the

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power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes: To the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Did you notice how important the gospel is, and why Paul wanted to preach it to them? To those who may have been converted for 25 years already? In it is God's power to propel us—the true and faithful believers—to salvation! It is the power! That is an astounding statement! The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. Faith—if you have faith in it, the gospel will, if followed, give you salvation. It is the power that will effect that.

The gospel is just "words." But, what powerful words they are when God strings them together into His truth!

Do you remember what Jesus said in John 6?

John 6:63 The words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are life.

When Jesus gives us an understanding, it is all the way to eternal life. That's His goal to bring us into His Kingdom.

What makes the gospel so powerful? Well, we find that here in verse 17:

Romans 1:17 For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

What makes the gospel so powerful is that God's righteousness is revealed in it. God gives us an understanding of His righteousness. Is that not interesting? Have you ever thought of righteousness as being powerful?

Normally, we think of righteousness as something that is static—that either we are righteous, or we are not righteous. We think of it in black and white terms. But, Paul here says that *the righteousness is the power!*

Now this word "power" means, "power in action." It is like a punch, like dynamite blowing up. This actually is the Greek word (phonetically spelled) 'duno-mees' from which we get "dynamite." It is an **explosive power!** This righteousness which is in the gospel is kinetic! It is dynamic! It is active! It is motivating! Moving! Doing! Energetic! Power!

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In the gospel, the power of God is shown in the righteousness that is revealed there, and by it we can be propelled into salvation. Now, that is power! That is how important this is.

God's righteousness is not static! It is not something that is stored up. It is not something that is latent. It is something that **WORKS!** It gets things done.

What does it do?

Well, the revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel moves us toward something. It says right here that it is revealed.

Romans 1:17b . . . from faith to faith. As it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'

Now this phrase "from faith to faith" seems enigmatic at first, and it has been enigmatic for me. Up until this sermon, I had some idea of what it meant, but I was not real sure. I was not really satisfied with the explanations I received before. So, I decided to do a rather extensive study, and I actually think that the intent Paul had here is very simple once you get the prepositions straight.

You know that "in" is different than "out," and "by" is different than "through." To go *by* a cloud is different than if you go *through* a cloud. We just heard in a recent message where "God has put us **IN** the cloud." That is different than being **OUT**side the cloud. That is where we want to be, and maybe we will get there.

Well, Greek has prepositions too. And, they can be tricky sometimes.

Now, "from faith" is (phonetically) 'ek peestees' or 'ek peestin'—I am not sure which, but the preposition is 'ek.' And, it usually means "out of" or "from," so they translated it as "from." This is its normal meaning.

But, in every other occurrence in the book of Romans, and even in the same verse, they translated 'ek' as "of," "by," or "through." Never (in Romans) is it translated "from," except here.

Where it says here "by faith," it is 'ek peestin'. Why did they not translate this phrase here "from faith?" Because, it does not make sense, that is why.

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So, why did they not just translate this "for in it, the righteousness of God is revealed by faith"? This is so much simpler, and it is what it means!

It means that when someone like you and me who have faith comes and reads the gospel, or has it preached to him, these things are revealed! They will not be revealed to the person who does not have faith because he will not believe them. So, the righteousness of God is revealed by faith.

Was it not by faith that the heroes of faith did their great things? It is the same thing here. It is by faith, then, that they are revealed.

Now what about "to faith"? This is another tricky Greek preposition. It is 'eis.' 'Eis' is often translated "to," or "into," or in the King James Version "unto," or "toward."

Now it is this later one, 'toward' that makes the most sense in this case.

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed *by faith toward faith.*"

Does this make sense to you? The righteousness of God is revealed by faith—or even better ***to the faithful***—toward faith.

Now in Romans 13:14, although on a different subject, the same construction is used here. Paul says:

Romans 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.

Now I do not know what kind of Bible you have, but if you have a New King James, or an old King James, when the translators felt they needed to insert words, they put them in *italics*.

Now the words 'fulfill' or 'fulfill its' in these versions are in *italics*. They supplied those words in an attempt to help us to understand. Why did not they do that back in Romans 1:17? Because this "to fulfill its lusts" is 'eis' plus the noun (whatever that Greek word for lusts is).

"To fulfill" is a very good way to put it back in Romans 1:17 also. Let us go read it that

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way.

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed *by* faith *to fulfill* faith. . . [What does Paul say next?] . . . the just shall live by faith!

God reveals His righteousness to us—the faithful—so that we will fulfill it by living by faith. That is what this means! It is very simple.

Why else would He give us this information? Because, ***He wants us to live it!*** And by living it, we prove to Him that we are worthy to be brothers and sisters of His Son, and have eternal life, and be His children.

In the gospel—in this understanding, in this vision—that Jesus Christ brought is everything that we need to know to make it. That is why the gospel is so important.

It is huge to us! It is everything to us! It is our power to have salvation! And, I do not think that I am overstating this.

Think about it! God did not entrust this message to anyone but a glorified member of His own family—His very Son—the most faithful Messenger He could find. That is how important it is! The Messenger had to be supreme.

Remember it says in Hebrews that the first covenant was brought through angels. But, this last covenant was brought by the Son who is so much more worthy than a mere angel—and I do not say "mere" in a condescending way, either. He did not send it by a mere man either!

The first covenant was delivered to Moses who was faithful in His entire house—God's house. But, God entrusted the better covenant's message to His Son who would inherit the House. That is how important the gospel is.

So we see how vital this understanding that Jesus brought is to us. It contains the power we need to be saved—if we have faith. That is always the question mark—are we going to believe God?

(Tape turns over here)

The faith is there just waiting to burst into action—to work in us, but are we going to believe it? Are we going to not just believe it, but to do it?

Normally, if you believe it you are going to do it. That is why James says, "I will show you my faith by my works." He was putting the gospel into action, and by that, he would be saved, because it was going to show the Boss just where his heart was—showing that he was submitting to that word.

Let us go back to Titus 2 and this will succinctly (I hope) sum this up.

Do you remember earlier how I told you that the gospel was a gift of God that He sent by His Son? Well, I was reading the commentary on this section, Titus 2:11-14, and unanimously in the ones that I looked into, they said that—this first line here, "For the grace of God" is not talking of here what we normally think of as "grace." They said that they thought it should be translated (as it is normally translated elsewhere) by the word "gifts." And do you know what they said that gift is? The gospel! Let us put that in here:

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace [gospel] of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men [And this is what it does:], teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age

Of course! It teaches us to put off sin, and evil, and wickedness, iniquity, and transgression, or however you wish to name it. And that we should then live righteously and godly like God does.

Then he says:

Titus 2:13-14 Looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from every lawless deed, and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Did you see there what the gospel does? It teaches us to put off evil, and to put on good, *and* it gives us a vision in verse 13: "Looking for the. . . glorious appearing of our great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ."

So he not only tells us what *not to do*, and what *to do*, it also tells us where *to look!* That is where we are headed—our goal. And then he says Jesus has accomplished this much so far. He has redeemed us so that we could then be zealous to do good works. So he tells us what *to do*, and what *not to do*, and gives us *the goal*. This is what the

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gospel of the Kingdom of God is to us!

Let us go to Galatians 1. Now for the "fly in the ointment." Mr. Armstrong came to this verse often as well, especially when He was trying to put things back on track there in the late 70s and early 80s.

Galatians 1:6-9 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another [This means that it really is not the gospel.]; but there are some who trouble you, and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

He pronounces a double curse on anyone who would preach a gospel different from the one that Jesus Christ brought!

I think that now we can see why Satan tries so hard to attack the gospel—to change it, to pervert it, to twist it, to divert it, to dilute it however he can. He will do anything to make that understanding that Jesus Christ brought to us less than what God intends!

This book of Galatians was only written about 20 years after that day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Only 20 years had gone by and there were people who were already listening to false gospels! They were already getting off the track.

I want to explain Paul's phrase, "to another gospel, which is not another."

What he means is that the counterfeit is really not another gospel. **THERE IS NO OTHER GOSPEL!** But, Paul did not have the words to put it into "plain 'Greek,'" which is "all Greek to me," obviously. He did not have the words to say how this other message was different. All he could say was that it is not really another gospel, because he understood that this other 'gospel' was not good news. It did not bring anything that was good at all! That word gospel means "good news." So, it could not be a 'gospel' if it brought bad news (through lacking the truth). It does not produce the vision of the Kingdom of God if it is any different from the one that Jesus Christ brought. It will not produce the fruit in us that God expects. It will not get us where God wants us to be. It is a perversion of the truth.

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Therefore, it is false! Damnable! Damaging! Destructive! And, if it is taken to its end, it is deadly—second death deadly! It leads to the Lake of Fire if believed! If you put your faith into a false gospel, that road will not (cannot) lead to the Kingdom of God, and eternal life! It is just that simple.

And Paul said in effect that he was amazed that they could turn their eyes away from that glorious vision we have to something perverted that is going to end up in ashes under the soles of the feet of the saints. So, he says that anyone who does this to you deserves the worst of curses, because it is (or has the potential of) aborting God's children. I speak using the birth analogy that Mr. Armstrong so often used.

If we do not have the true vision of the true gospel, then we could become a spiritual miscarriage. Oh how awful to think about!

Let us go back to II Thessalonians 2. This is the great apostasy that Paul prophesies of. He says in verse 1:

II Thessalonians 2:1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, . . ."

Now what is this he is talking about? The gospel of the Kingdom of God, specifically, that portion about Jesus' coming and us being made into God's image totally at that time—being changed in the twinkling of an eye.

II Thessalonians 2:1b-2 . . . we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit [a demon] or by word [by someone preaching to them] or by letter [an epistle], as if from us [meaning someone forged my name at the bottom] as though the day of Christ had come.

"Ha ha ha ha ha. You poor Thessalonians! You lost out on the kingdom! Neah!"

That is almost what it sounds like. And indeed, it was shaking the people in Thessalonica. Some pervert of the gospel had come in and told them that Christ had already come, and they had missed the boat! Now, that is perversion of the gospel! So, he says:

II Thessalonians 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means [I am going to straighten it out here. This is how it goes. This is the sequence of events.];

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for that Day will not come, unless the falling away comes first.

It is kind of interesting that he put it that way, because this was an apostasy, but he says *the apostacy!* And, evidently, Paul knew that **this** perversion of the gospel that occurred in Thessalonica **was not** *the apostacy!* This one was not big enough! It probably was not subtle enough. This one was something that he could say, "Oh don't worry about this. This is the way it is going to go." He could soothe their minds over very quickly. "You know Christ hasn't come, because you know that these are the steps that have to be gone through before that!"

But *THE APOSTASY* is going to be different!

Now, if what we have gone through the past 13 years is not *the apostacy*, then I shudder to think what lies in the future! Because, what came out of Pasadena in the late 80s and early 90s was slick! And, it was (is) destructive. Upwards of 100,000 people—baptized members of the church of God were around when Mr. Armstrong died. Today if you take the groups' figures of attendance and add them all together, it is tough to come up with half that number. Even the big groups say that they have about 7000 people, or maybe 10,000, maybe 12,000; but there are a lot of groups like what is here with 400, or 600. Some might be only 50 or 60 gathering around one minister, and who knows how many are just sitting in their living rooms not being counted at all. Half of our brethren have, in effect, fallen off the face of the earth.

I do not know if this really is *the apostacy*, but it sure has felt like it! How many church of God groups are there out there? I do not know. I have heard of upwards of 200. How many people are now hundreds of miles, even thousands of miles, away from one other person who may be of like mind?

There are brethren here from South Africa. How many thousands of miles is it between here in Jefferson City, Missouri, and that small group of 75 people keeping the Feast with us down in South Africa? Or the handful back up there in British Columbia? Then, the few scattered here and there who could not make it to our Feast. This is sad to think of that. We have gone through a time where the church has just been shattered. And the people who think like us see each other maybe once a year. Their lifeline is a little magnetic strip (cassette tape) that they get in the mail—that they run in their tape player—and the Forerunner that they get about once a month; or maybe a click of their mouse to the website.

But, it is not just us. It is the same with the other groups. Whether larger or smaller, they

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still are not meeting with 300 or 400 people like we used to. They have been decimated. We have all been decimated. And, do you know what maybe is the saddest thing about all this? It is *still continuing*.

I heard last night that Global Church of God is no more. How many people will take this as a sign not to trust the new organization and get scattered? Some will go to other existing church of God groups, but others may have had it up to here and decide that that is it. They have had it. Enough is enough. They are going to go it alone. I do not know.

Things keep happening to split us up into little bits and pieces all over this world.

Now, what happened to cause the breakup of the church? What do you think was the catalyst? I have some ideas.

What was the process that we took, to get to this point? What was the process that the whole thing went through to bring the church to the point that it went ka-blooeey, scattering everywhere?

I have a question too: Why did the church not just explode when Mr. Armstrong died? He died on the 16th. Why did the church not go all to pieces on the 17th? Or, maybe in the next few weeks or months? What changed to make the church look like a piece of shattered glass?

You know, when Mr. Armstrong died in January of 1986, the doctrinal changes occurred almost immediately. We had the seesaw thing on the makeup issue that autumn, I believe. Then, the next spring was the change in the way Passover was regarded—the way the symbols were looked at. And, people began to talk about a 15th Passover more. And then, the changes happened to pace little by little, put in one at a time, over the next several years.

I believe that the Philadelphia Church of God began in the autumn of 1990. The next church group that really began was Church of the Great God in January of 1992. What was it that occurred after this point to cause the church to break down? Have you ever thought about it that way?

Global came out in January of 1993. United came out in the spring of 1995. That was when things really blew all to pieces. But, the cracks were showing right at the beginning of 1992. It had become very much open by that point.

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There were people saying—and I heard it myself in Escondido, Southern California—that, "Oh, they can keep on changing things, but as long as they keep the Sabbath, this is still God's church." It was being talked about openly at that point that people were beginning to get a little irritated by the end of 1991.

Now, what happened in the autumn of 1991 that is so significant? I think that this was maybe the slickest bit of misinformation that we heard in the whole smear of doctrinal changes: In a little 2 and 1/2 page write-up in the Pastor General's Report, there was a letter from Joe Tkach Sr.—obviously he did not write it (I know because I worked with the man for 2 years) a two-page white paper on *the gospel*. "What is the Gospel?" could have been the title of it. I do not even know if it made it to the Worldwide News thereafter. If it was, it was one of those short ones, not one of those long doctrinal papers that we got in the Worldwide News where they went through every verse that might pertain to it, trying to explain their side of the story. This one was a little "blurb."

Do you know what that white paper said? You probably do not because it sneaked past most everybody, but it was enough to begin the process of disintegration in the church. Do you know what that said?

Basically, Joe Tkach said *the gospel of the kingdom of God is not **PRIMARILY** about the Kingdom of God. He said the gospel is about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Secondly, the gospel is about the church's outreach to the world. And thirdly, the gospel has future ramifications.*

Third place! Our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, came proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God, saying, "Repent! And believe the gospel! For the kingdom of God is at hand!" What did He call it? *The gospel of the Kingdom of Good!* "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you!" (Matthew 6:33)

What is most important? ***THE VISION! KNOWING WHERE WE ARE HEADED!***

Once this seed was planted in our minds, that the Kingdom of God was not as important as it used to be, we began asking ourselves—not right out front, but it was working there—"Well, if it is not about the Kingdom of God, then, what should I be doing? What should I be trying to accomplish? Where should I be going with my life?"

And so, you have 'Joe Schmoe' who said, "Well, I think that the gospel is mostly about grace. So, I'm going to spend all my time and energy on that! I'm going to really study into God's grace and be thankful for God's grace."

And 'Somebody Else' said, "Well, I think that the gospel is about Jesus. What a wonderful person He was. And I'm going to spend all my time thinking about Jesus, and how He was when He was on the earth, and the fact that He died, and was raised; and you know, that might have been on Easter Sunday. I was studying here, and the way Mr. Armstrong used to explain it just doesn't seem to mesh anymore. I think that it might be good to go back to a Sunday Easter."

And then, 'Someone Else' said, "Well, you know that Mr. Armstrong taught all the time that we should be looking to the gospel of the Kingdom of God, so I think I will stay the course. I'll keep living my life so that I'll be part of the Kingdom of God."

And then, 'Somebody Different' said, "Well, you know, I think Paul's letters are a bit too hard on women. So I'm just not going to talk about Paul, or think about Paul anymore, because, women's liberation is really big these days. And I think they're right; women have been trampled on in the past, and we ought to have women's clubs. And also, this thing for the women, and that thing for the women, and women in the administration, and I think I'll go talk to Joe Jr. about that, because he should know this. And, I know that Mrs. Tkach is really big into this, so why don't we get everybody behind a big women's movement in the church. This sounds great to me."

And then, 'Another Guy' said, "Well, there's just so many things to think about here. It's just so confusing. Nothing seems to work anymore. I'm going to go to the church down the street from my house, the Baptists, because they seem to have it all together. It's close. I don't have to get into my car and drive anywhere. All my friends have started to go there too. Even the guys I drink with every Friday...er, uh...so, you know, I'll just go there."

And then, 'Another Person' said, "Well, you know, this 15th Passover thing has gotten me interested. I think I'll study into that. You know, Christ was crucified on the 15th, and not on the 14th. Mr. Armstrong had it all wrong. I'm going to do the 15th Passover this year, but, if you want to come, we'll do it on the 14th for you, but we're going to do it this year on the 15th."

And then there is this calendar issue. 'Joe Schmoe's Friend' comes up, and he says, "Well, have you noticed that this is happening in the calendar? The new moon should be counted here, and not there? No one at headquarters will listen, so I'm starting my own Church of the Calendar. Feel free to come with me if you will."

And then, 'Another One' said, "Well, let's see. Everybody else has got all the other things that I was thinking about going after...so...oh I don't know...I'm confused. I'll leave."

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I'm going to go home. I will not be involved with religion at all any more."

Do you see what the change in the gospel did? It got us going into hundreds and thousands of different directions!

How can you have unity when everybody is going his or her own way? Can two walk together unless they be agreed? That is another of Mr. Armstrong's gems that he used to pop to us frequently.

When we all believe that there is a different goal, we all end up in different places. You cannot *do a work* when everybody is doing something different.

Try to make a company where you have 50 people. And you say that your mission statement is to go out and give the best product for the best price with the best service. And your manager says, "Well, that's a terrible mission statement. It doesn't say anything. I'm going to make up my own mission statement so that we go in this direction!"

Do you think that the founder of the company is going to be happy when his managers take his company off into an entirely different direction? He wanted to produce widgets, and they want to produce gizmos! It is not going to work because the factory has been tooled to produce widgets—not gizmos!

And all the instruction manuals tell the workers how to make widgets. If the managers change the factory over to produce gizmos, but use the old manuals, which explain widgets, they will have chaos throughout the process, and nothing in the end. If they do get anything in the end, it might be a wizmet—but it will be something unintended.

It is not the product God wanted, as He is the owner of the company.

Satan said to himself, "If I shatter the focus of these people—if I give them a different goal—if I insert a different vision, the church of God will be scattered, because God is faithful to do it." That perverse demon knows this book inside and out. He knows what Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 say, "That if you do not obey my voice, *I will punish*: I will send the sword. I will send famine. I will send pestilence. I will take you into captivity. I will scatter you to the ends of the earth."

And Satan said, "OK God, if that's what you said, then look at your people. You've surrounded them with a hedge. Let that Herbert W. Armstrong fellow die, and let's see what happens when I get at them. And when they go, you'll have to do what you said,

God."

And God said, "Fine, Satan, because that was part of My plan all along. I'm making a people faithful to Me, and this will show to Me the ones who are. And then, you watch out, Satan. These people, as I have prophesied in Daniel 11 and 12, they will do glorious things—the ones that come through the fire—the ones who are truly faithful—and they will shine as the brightness of the firmament."

So, how do we keep unity in the church? Check out Ephesians 4: 1-6. We will not go there now. I am sure that we will go through this later in the Feast. But, Paul says there that if we have humility and love, and forbearance, and we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, we will have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope, one God who is over all, through you all, and in you all.

See, the word that keeps popping up there is "one." Especially, I want to point out "one hope of your calling." This is the vision. We have to have one hope we are looking for. We have to have those blinders on, in a way, so that we are only looking at our goal.

Now God obviously says to be alert, and to watch and pray always. But, this is the thing we are to have our focus on, the goal—the end. And, if we really want to get there, we are going to conform to the steps that take us from here to there.

Now the same holds true for the Millennium. I need to bring in the Millennium here just a bit. Like I said, it will be a blessed peaceful time of unity because Jesus Christ our King and Savior will at that time forcibly refocus the world's attention on what is important: Him, His Kingdom, and His Father—of course, eternal life with Them. He will say, "The purpose of life is what was written there in Genesis in the first chapter: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And that will be preached around the world. That will be the focus in the Millennium.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 "'Behold! The days are coming,' says the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,' says the Lord But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' says the Lord: 'I will put my law in their minds, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord. . .

Now why? Why will we not be needing to tell each other to know the Lord?

Jeremiah 31:34b . . .because all shall know Me,. . .

It will be common knowledge! It will be our common focus. It will be the common vision of the people in the Millennium to know God.

Jeremiah 31:34c . . .from the least of them to the greatest of them,' says the Lord. [From the socially outcast, to the highest human authorities.] For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Satan will be out of the way. There will be few human beings working at cross-purposes to God's way—after the few first generations, at least. There will be times of rebellion from time to time, here and there, while men's minds are being turned to God's way. Mr. Armstrong said it would probably take a couple of generations. But, 40 or 50 years down that road that peace, that prosperity, and that blessedness that we so look forward to will begin to settle over the entire earth. People will be educated in God's way, and they will have their vision focused on God's way.

Jot down Isaiah 19:18-25. There you will find that it is not just Israel, but mentions Egypt and Assyria will know the Lord as well. This is the famous section that says that there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and they will be one-third each with Israel. There He calls Egypt, "My people," and Assyria, "The work of My hands," and Israel, "My inheritance."

Also, Isaiah 11:6-10, specifically verse 9. There you will find the passage of "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." The earth will be blanketed—inundated—with God's Word. No wonder people will not have to teach one another to know the Lord. It will be available to everyone. And all around them will be examples of people who are already pointing the way. And if one should try to step off the path, we have the promise that there will be someone there at his shoulder saying, "This is the way! Walk in it!"

So, where is our vision? What are our lives focused on? What are our goals? Where are we headed?

These are the questions whose answers are vital to us right now. This is a time of

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disunity, scattering, and confusion, and there could not be a worse time for us. That is why these answers to these questions are so vital. We are in the thick of it. We have got to figure out where we are headed.

Are our answers themselves unified? Do we all agree where the goal is? We will find that out if we find that we are unified. And if not, we will scatter more.

We need to know—we need to agree upon what the top priority is for us.

Hebrews 11:8-10 speak of the faith of Abraham. By faith, he went out to a land he did not know. He did not even know the way to get there. What kept him going?

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out into the place which he should receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise, for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

What was his vision?

Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in the faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off and were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those that say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly, if they had called to mind of that country from which they came from [let their minds become distracted], they would have had the opportunity to return [they could have wandered off the path]. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, because He has prepared for a city them.

This is the vision.