

# Who Is Doing The Work Of God?

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In this article I hope to explain a clearly established, but nonetheless confusing and dangerous, trend that is taking place in the church of God.

Many sincere people seem to think that the only activity that validates a ministry as of God is whether it is preaching the gospel to the world. The church has taught that Christ gave a dual commission to His church; that is plainly seen in Scripture. Christ commanded Peter three times between John 21:15 and 17 either to feed or tend Christ's sheep. Then, in Matthew 28:19-20, the apostles were told to preach the gospel to all the world as a witness and make disciples.

Which of these is more important? In a knee-jerk manner, most of us respond, "Preach the gospel around the world!" Some might even grant they are equally important. But we will see that the biblical record shows that God has consistently concentrated His attention on feeding the sheep. The Bible shows God working in clear patterns.

## Biblical Examples

Consider physical Israel. How many prophets—excluding Jonah and Daniel—did God send to Gentile nations? Were even Jonah and Daniel sent to proselytize? Some prophets commented or prophesied about Gentile nations, and a few other prophets like Elijah and Elisha had limited contact with Gentile personalities, but they did not actively seek them out to convert them and make disciples.

God made His covenant with Old Testament Israel, a type of the church (Galatians 6:16). God's focus and concern were overwhelmingly on them, and He dealt with other nations only as they came in contact with Israel. Though God makes provision in His law to accept non-Israelites who wanted to join Israel and worship the true God (Exodus 12:48), He nowhere commands the Israelites to go out and make disciples of other nations. Rather, His approach is to attract outsiders by the example of obedient Israel being blessed by Him.

Consider another factor. For whom is the Bible written? For whom is its message intended? Who does it feed? Certainly not the world! Christ Himself said His parables were given so they would *not* understand (Matthew 13:10-17)! Paul later wrote that the world cannot understand godly principles because they lack His Spirit (I Corinthians 2:6-16).

Ultimately, all of mankind will be instructed from the words of the Bible, but each in his own order (I Corinthians 15:23). Regarding his work, the apostle Paul makes an interesting statement in Romans 1:15: He yearned to preach the gospel to already-converted people! He said this because in a major way the *entire* Bible is the gospel. The good news encompasses far more than the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ or His return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. The Bible's instruction is about God's *whole* purpose and way of life for mankind until God the Father comes and New Jerusalem is established on earth as His headquarters.

Add to this Jesus' statement in John 8:31: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed," receiving and growing in truth from God's Word. This abiding or continuing in His Word requires

that the disciple be *continually* fed, which, according to Ephesians 4:11-16, is why Christ gave the ministry as a gift to the church. The ministry's purpose is to help perfect the *saints* "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

### **Preparing to Preach Effectively**

If any portion of Christ's ministry epitomizes His Work, it is the Sermon on the Mount, preached to His disciples and recorded in Matthew 5-7. The entire discourse expounds the attitudes we need as His disciples, our relationship with God, preparing for His Kingdom, our conduct and our witness for God by our conduct. Why these things? Because these areas make the preaching of the gospel to the world *effective*.

Preaching the gospel is an outgrowth of the preparation of God's people from His Word. Without preparation, our witness by our lives and our preaching of the gospel would be no more effective than ancient Israel's. It would be like sending a ragtag sandlot team against professional athletes.

Preparation, training and improvement never stop. By their very nature, the deep things of God require more time and attention than just preaching the gospel. Jesus spent three and a half years training His disciples. The central group was with Him night and day for concentrated instruction. In a statement immediately after Jesus' command to feed His sheep, John recalls, "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Jesus' efforts, as He also did as the God of the Old Testament, were concentrated on His disciples, not the world. Those in the world will get their concentrated teaching in their order, as they are called.

This explanation is necessary because of the current state of the church of God. At least three former WCG ministers claim to be the successors of Herbert W. Armstrong, or claim they are "reviving the Work of God." Has God chosen three men to do what one formerly did? Did He choose one? If so, which one? Doctrinally, the choice between them is moot. They essentially believe the same things.

Did we not once believe that God chose Mr. Tkach? Did God make a mistake? Has He now changed His mind? If He did change His mind, which of these other men has He chosen? If God wanted to continue His Work as He did it under Mr. Armstrong, why did He not just allow him to continue living? Why did He not replace him with someone just like him? Why did He not choose one of these other men originally?

I write this, not because it is wrong to leave the WCG to protect one's relationship with God, but because these men are actively proselytizing both the public and the WCG. Is this right in God's eyes? What has this state of affairs set up within the church?

### **God-Appointed "Spheres of Accomplishment"**

Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding his authority over them:

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. For we are not extending ourselves beyond our sphere (thus not reaching

you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. (II Corinthians 10:12-16)

By comparing this passage with what these three men are doing, we can see what is happening in the church of God. The first-century apostles divided the world into spheres, or areas, of responsibility, and did not encroach into another's sphere. In doing so, they avoided throwing the church into needless confusion about whom members should look for authority.

We often hear people say, "I think I should go with So-and-so because he is doing this." Another says, "No, I think we should go with Mr. So-and-so because he believes this and is doing that." I Corinthians 1:12-13 says, "Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" Division and confusion are the order of the day for those who are thinking about what to do with their spiritual lives. These men did not begin this trouble, but they are adding to it. Is God the author of confusion? Is God the author of what is going on?

Today, these men are competing with each other for proselytes, primarily fallout from the WCG as it continues to slide back into the world. Should brothers of the church of God be competing like this? The content of one man's messages is such that only a member of the WCG or any who have left it would relate to it. Another man sent out over twelve hundred invitations to WCG members announcing he was starting his own church! It sounds like the fox is in the hen house! He claims to be following what Mr. Armstrong did, but I do not recall from his *Autobiography* that he *ever* did anything like that when he left the Church of God, Seventh Day! Although Mr. Armstrong's primary preparation for his ministry was in advertising, and he was a master of it, he did not solicit the membership of the Church of God, Seventh Day to gain a following so he could preach the gospel. Does the end justify the means simply because of the stress of the times? Have ethics flown out the window in the name of getting a following so one can preach the gospel?

When David was "disfellowshipped" from Saul's court and sent fleeing for his life, did he try to steal the kingdom from Saul, reasoning that Saul was not doing a good job anyhow? We know better than that! The Bible gives no indication that David did anything overt or covert to attract people to him. Instead, I Chronicles 12:1 indicates people just came to him while he was a fugitive. Absalom's approach, entirely different, makes an insightful contrast (II Samuel 15:1-12, notice verse 11 especially).

## **Ministry Censured**

Concerning the preaching of the gospel to the world, from this one man's perspective, no one at this time is qualified or sufficiently prepared to represent the great God of heaven and earth in a way that will really glorify Him.

Just because we can preach is not sufficient reason. We have all left a church organization that has been in spiritual decline for a long time. Malachi, written during a similar period in Judah's history, has a powerful theme that applies to the end-time church. God charges the priests (ministry) with

giving Him disrespectful service and despising His name (Malachi 1:6). The priests ask, "How?" God replies that they consider His altar contemptible, as their poor quality offerings plainly show (verse 7). God calls their actions *evil*!

The altar represents the service they performed as ministers in behalf of God for the people, and the "food" is the Word of God. So bad is their attitude, the priests call their responsibility to offer up the best to God "a weariness" and sneer at it (verses 12-13)! In a modern context, too much time and effort are required to prepare meaty and true sermons.

God makes clear where the ministry has fallen short. "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law" (Malachi 2:7-8). This launches Him into details of a major social evil that results from a lackadaisical approach: marital problems and divorce. God's concern in Malachi is that His sheep are not being fed by a ministry careless in its duty to Him.

In measuring ourselves among ourselves, we mistakenly reach the conclusion that, based on what we see in comparison to others who themselves are part of or have come out of the same declining organization, we are sufficient to do the job. Are we as well-prepared as the early first-century church? Hardly! I feel that the times we live in will require a similar measure of spirituality, faith, love, zeal, dedication and endurance to make a witness approved by Christ. We have not reached that level by a long shot. There is still much preparation to do. At this time we need to concentrate on the ***primary*** commission, to feed or prepare the flock so the real end-time witness can be made.

Let Christ choose who will do the job without presuming that, just because we can preach, have the financial resources and get on the radio or television, we are it. It takes more than these to validate a true representative of God.