

NEWS WATCH FOR *the* CHURCH OF GOD

News in the world and church — to give warning and help for God's people — by Ron Weinland

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THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI

We as God's Church could glean some good lessons from the old World War II movie, "The Bridge On the River Kwai." The story is about a prisoner of war camp in Burma whose plot centers around the task the Japanese gave to their prisoners of building a railroad bridge over the River Kwai. The downtrodden prisoners eventually rallied around a new found purpose for direction and unity by setting out to build the best bridge they could. They were determined to prove British superiority in engineering capability over that of the Japanese.

There is a growing number of brethren who are motivated by a sincere desire to build bridges between the scattered people of God. However, there are far many others who simply have no motivation nor desire to reach out to other scattered brethren. Although some may give lip service by acknowledging there are scattered brethren, they are lacking in constructive purpose or practical application to help bring brethren together.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

Does God reveal how to bring brethren together in these turbulent times? What will work and what will not? What should we avoid and what should we be doing? What is the solution to our scattering? Are there answers? We must go to the source for answers and seek what God has to say.

God's instruction is simple and very much to the point for those in God's Church who will not acknowledge our scattered brethren or who only give lip service to them. This has been addressed in part in past issues of *News Watch*.

Failure to actively pursue the unification of the scattered Church is a grievous sin. What are you doing? What is being done by the organization you support? Giving lip service to the fact that scattered brethren exist is sadly lacking in action

and fails to produce genuine results. A failure to act is a failure to love God, obey God, or even believe God. Brethren who practice or support such denial of the Body of Christ are denying Jesus Christ. (Perhaps some need to study last month's *News Watch*.) God has some very strong things to say about denying Jesus Christ. To do so is to cheapen the very purpose for why Jesus Christ sacrificed His life for the sake of the Church.

If we understand the seriousness of all that God has to say on this subject, we will look at this matter far more closely. We will be much more concerned with not being a part of nor contributing to any denial of the scattered body of Jesus Christ. Are you a part of what "*enables*" brethren to remain separated?

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar:" (1 John 4:20, NKJ). Do people in God's Church profess to have a relationship with God and claim to be doing His work, but fail to love their spirit begotten brethren? Yes! Such people are lying to themselves and lying to God! If anyone fails to actively love the brethren, then they fail to love God. The last part of this same verse goes on to say, *"for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"*

We as God's people are not to turn our backs on other brethren who are scattered and suffering. As God gives us the true reasons for fasting, He asks a question about the real purpose of our humbling ourselves before Him. *"Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?"* (Isaiah 58:7, NKJ). Do we understand that the Temple of God (the Church of God) is the household of which we are a part? (Ephesians 2:19-22). Jesus Christ told his

disciples that they were to eat of His flesh and drink of His blood. When we partake of the bread at Passover and consider its symbolism, do we grasp the spiritual picture of the Body of Christ that we are to discern and of which we are a part?

In these troubled times, the very fiber of our Christianity is being tried and tested to reveal the depth of love we have for God and His people. *"And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him"* (1 John 4:21-5:1, NKJ). Constructive effort and action are required because lip service is not enough.

The only answer, for individuals who support the kind of organization that fails to actively help bring brethren together in the Body of Christ, is to repent! Such failure is sin. You are turning your back on the scattered Body of Christ if you are satisfied with giving help and support only to those in your own organization. Not only that, but if you would consider your actions, you would come to understand you are robbing God.

As we approach Passover season, many are going to fall under greater condemnation and curses from God for failing to discern the Lord's body. These are not small things in God's sight.

BUILDING BRIDGES

There are some who are going beyond corporate boundaries in an attempt to reach out to help other scattered brethren. Different expressions are being used to convey this deep desire to see the scattered body unified once again. In the latter part of 1995, "building bridges" was becoming a common expression being used to describe an effort to reach out to other scattered brethren with an open hand of fellowship that extended beyond corporate boundaries. Building

bridges and other similar expressions of sentiment are being used more widely today.

People who desire to build bridges with others often reflect a genuine and heartfelt desire to see brethren escape the scattering and begin to be unified in a common fellowship once again. Such people are disillusioned by those who only give lip service toward scattered brethren. They are frustrated with the continuing movement toward corporate elitism and attitudes of superiority.

This noble desire to build bridges between scattered brethren is somewhat like the movie, "The Bridge On The River Kwai." Building bridges has helped serve as a rallying point for a common effort to unify and give new found purpose to downtrodden brethren, but the bridge that is being built is usually producing a structure of strength for the enemy. Some may react adversely to such a statement, but please stop to consider the danger in attempting to build bridges. Many of us have already attempted to implement some of these same plans, only to learn why such efforts are futile.

You may ask, "Why are such efforts futile?" First, let's make sure we understand that anyone's heart being turned to other scattered brethren is movement in a right direction and is obedience to God. If one's heart is not turned toward the scattered brethren by actions of love beyond one's own corporate boundaries, then one cannot even begin to discern or judge the Lord's body, as we are instructed to do, before partaking of the Passover. Such actions are absolutely necessary if we are to take the Passover in a worthy manner. So the attitude of heart that motivates so many, who are breaking free of corporate blinders and being turned toward others who are scattered, is proper and good.

The futility and error enter when those efforts lead us to being silent about our differences, or when it leads to being tolerant of differences for the sake of unity, numbers or fellowship. We may sincerely feel this is the best way to reach out and help others who are going in different directions, but how far can one go in mixing

fellowship with those who hold to strong doctrinal differences?

The Worldwide Church of God believes everyone should be able to have fellowship together if they refrain from judging their brother in their different beliefs. They have gone so far to teach they can have a common fellowship whether some observe the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week or on the first day of the week. They also teach that even the observance of a Holy Day can be changed from midweek to a weekend if it better suits the congregation. All such fellowship is to be tolerated and allowed in other brethren without judgment because this is supposed to be what God allows. But anyone who is seeking to hold to the commandments knows that such practices are against the Word of God.

Such practices are being done in the name of being Christian toward one another, but is this what Christ taught? Is this the kind of tolerance God said we should practice toward one another? If not, then where do you draw the line for what you can and cannot mix in a common fellowship?

BEGIN WITH PASSOVER

The Passover is a good place to begin learning how to judge and discern where balance and sound mindedness rest. Unlike what WCG teaches, partaking of the symbols of the Passover at various times of the year is sin. Calling this ceremony by other names, so it can be observed more than once a year, is contrary to the Word of God. Observing the Passover on any day other than the 14th day of the first month is being disobedient to the Word of God.

God's instruction regarding this day is quite simple and should not be difficult to understand regardless of some of the arguments to the contrary! *"In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover"* (Leviticus 23:5, KJV). This does not say it can begin in any other day than the 14th of the first month. *"And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month"* (Ezra 6:19, KJV). It does not say that part of the Passover was kept on the 13th or part on the 15th,

but that all of it was kept on the 14th day.

"Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season. In the fourteenth day of this month, at even [Heb., between the evenings], ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it" (Numbers 9:2-3, KJV). These verses about the timing of Passover are not complicated. God instructs that it was to be observed "between the evenings" that are on the 14th and not "between the evenings of any other day!"

If we cannot be in agreement with God on such basic matters, how can we ever be in agreement and unity with one another? The answer is that it is impossible, no matter how many bridges we build. If we hope to ever have true agreement and unity with one another, we must first be obedient to God in basic doctrines and teachings.

The Passover is a good place to begin examining ourselves (I Corinthians 11:28). If we are not in agreement with something so basic, how can we continue with further examination? Passover is the very first observance that launches God's called people into the full meaning and purpose He has for mankind. We must begin with Passover before we enter into unity and agreement with God on a course toward salvation. Passover has always been a focus of attack against God's Church. Some of the greatest heresy leading into false Christianity has had to do with controversy over this subject, so is it any wonder, that in these trying times, it has been attacked again?

Some will quickly agree that what the WCG is doing regarding Passover is contrary to God's clear instructions. To partake of the cup of wine on any day other than the day God says is to be in rebellion of or in ignorance to God's Word.

Practicing or teaching anything other than what God commands is to disobey God. Be reminded of very pointed and clearly spoken words about such matters. Although Paul was addressing a different situation relating to Passover, the principle is the same.

"For we, being many, are one bread and one body: for we all partake of that one bread"(1 Corinthians 10:17, NKJ). *"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?"*(verse 21-22). These are direct and stinging words to anyone who would try to mix true fellowship in the Body of Christ with doctrines from sources other than God. In God's Church we will have differences, but they should not exist in basic doctrines that are sure and steadfast!

Some will acknowledge that what WCG allows for a mixture in fellowship is in error, but some of these same people may not acknowledge that being half a day off or a full day off the 14th is all that bad. Where do you draw the line? Is any observance beyond the clear instruction of the 14th permissible? Does it matter to God? If a half day off doesn't matter, what about a full day? If that doesn't matter, how many days from the 14th can you go before it becomes a sin or a doctrinal conflict with the Word of God?

If we asked the same question about the Sabbath, we would come to a quicker conclusion. Why do people have trouble discerning God's instruction regarding one day out of the entire year? Perhaps this is far more important than some are willing to admit. Yet there is a spirit and attitude that is growing amongst some brethren that this is being too picky or that God's instruction is too vague on the subject. Some people, who have been in our fellowship, do not seem to fear changing the observance of Passover to late on the 14th in the late afternoon or into the 15th at even. Paul was quite clear about what was to be passed on to the Church. *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;"*(1 Corinthians 11:23, NKJ). Did those Corinthians observe the Passover on the night following Christ's betrayal or on the same night?

Jesus Christ was betrayed on the night of the 14th. The Corinthians observed Passover on that same night. Anyone should fear to change that time to any other occasion than what scripture makes clear. Some don't fear! Others don't fear mixing fellowships together that are not in agreement about Passover, and this is usually done in the name of being Christian toward a nonbeliever (doesn't believe in the observance for the night of the 14th).

The unity of fellowship concerning the 14th Passover is a good place to begin examining ourselves. As we approach another Passover, we have all the more reason to examine ourselves to see if we are properly discerning the Lord's body as instructed in 1 Corinthians 11.

TRUE FELLOWSHIP

What is the best way to seek true fellowship with one another and to truly reach out to give help and aid to other scattered brethren? It is not accomplished by building bridges that allow greater ease for false doctrine to find its way in among brethren. Mixing differing doctrines and beliefs into a common fellowship is not how God's Spirit functions. On the contrary, God's Spirit leads us to greater unity in doctrine and belief as it leads to unity with Him.

God's Spirit will actually lead to exposing false doctrines in order to help lead brethren to repentance so they can come to a closer unity with God. We are either moving toward the light or we are moving away from it toward darkness. There is no middle ground.

If we fail to stand fast in sound, basic doctrine, we will not be able to lend help to brethren who have become deceived or who are being swayed by unsound teaching. Our fellowship must first be right with God if we hope to have good and right fellowship with one another. Brethren can not successfully mix or bind together fellowships that oppose each other doctrinally. When basic beliefs are not the same, no amount of bridge building will make them compatible and bring about unity of fellowship. It only creates confusion.

God makes clear His instruction regarding such efforts. It is basic, and it is sure! *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?"*(2 Corinthians 6:14, NKJ).

Someone might say, "But if they are scattered brethren, isn't it right to bring them together in fellowship?" Yes, *if* they are desirous of coming together in fellowship in order to draw closer to God in unity of spirit and oneness of mind. If brethren are willing to examine their own ideas and beliefs against the Word of God, and change where they are wrong, then it is clear that such a brother is seeking to move toward the light. If, on the other hand, brethren are close minded and insist on holding onto their false beliefs, and/or only want others to believe their doctrines, then the answer is a resounding NO! We must learn to judge such matters. Please reread this paragraph and seek to understand the distinction.

We have a common fellowship with one another and with God when we are first and foremost in agreement with God. Doctrines about the Sabbath and Holy Days reflect much about our relationship with Him. Even Passover reflects our true relationship with God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Not only is the timing of Passover critical to that relationship, but so is our acknowledgment of (confession, i.e. the wording in the KJV) and active love for the whole Body of Christ. If we fail to have fellowship with God in these basic doctrines, then we will certainly not be able to have true fellowship with one another.

We should not work with vain attempts to create something God forbids by walking contrary to basic truths. *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them"* (Ephesians 5:11, NKJ). *"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one*

another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"(1 John 1:5-7, NKJ).

We can not create or build something that God refuses to build. As we hold true to God, others who are drawn to God in true fellowship with Him will automatically be drawn together in fellowship with one another. Then, and only then, can we have true fellowship. We can reach out to help scattered brethren, but it is their choice to be drawn together in a common fellowship with believers who are seeking to obey their God. True unity comes only *in spirit and in truth*, otherwise it is a false unity which will not produce Godly fruit.

We need to examine the fruit of our past. What is it that has always bound us together with others in the Body of Christ? It is God's Spirit that has led us to the same common beliefs. When people choose to believe something different from what God has revealed to us, then our fellowship changes. All of us have lost either family or close friends to different beliefs, and, as these things happened, we learned that what we shared and what drew us together in the first place was what we had in common with God. Hence, our unity and oneness with God always comes first if we are to have true fellowship and unity with one another.

Some today are trying to build a common fellowship with people who have only the seventh day Sabbath in common, but not the Holy Days. Just because someone has this day in common does not mean God has called them to a special fellowship with Him as firstfruits. Brethren who try to construct such a fellowship with people who have not received a calling from God, and therefore do not have access to His Spirit, are working in vain against God's purpose. We have found Sabbatarians in various parts of the world, but this does not mean they are called of God at this time. If they are called of God, they will leave their false ideas such as speaking in tongues and will be drawn to the truth of the Holy Days and will embrace them. Such people have been found in Russia in recent years. Are they leaving their practice of speaking in tongues or accepting the Holy Days?

Are these people truly called to the first resurrection? We must be able to judge such matters, or we will begin to cheapen our special calling because we are not able to grasp just how great it is.

SEEKING BALANCE

The Church is being attacked by apathy and complacency on the one hand and false doctrines on the other. Seeking true balance by righteously judging matters with the Word of God is more challenging than ever. Yet this is what we must do. We are being tried, tested, and sifted according to this very process. Will we seek to do things God's way or try to do them our way?

Ignoring scattered parts of the Body of Christ is sin. Too many brethren in the larger organizations are settling into a comfortable zone of denial, complacency, satisfaction and/or superiority over others, while some are trying to resurrect the "Work" of the past, seeking to rebuild what has mostly been destroyed, seeking to recapture the "glory" of days gone by. Such focus is generally on "growth and good news about numbers," usually in publications or programs. Brethren are further misled to focus inwardly on a narrower part of the Body by being told lies about peace and safety in their midst. These are not the times of peace and safety, but of destruction, tribulation, lamentation and war. We should be told the truth that this is the time to fight for our very survival!

Others, who have broken away from such hypocrisy and are beginning to be turned toward care and concern for others in the scattered Body, are discovering new obstacles in their path. They are learning that these are turbulent times for God's people and not a time of peace and safety. They are learning that building bridges with doctrinally mixed groups of brethren is not bringing true unity nor producing a common purpose. Such efforts will consistently remain unsettled, unfulfilled, fractious and spiritually delinquent.

Everyone will learn that common purpose and true unity have a basic foundation. That foundation is found

in the first four commandments, and only when our lives are coming into greater unity, reconciliation and harmony with God can they begin to produce a true fellowship of spirit among brethren. Seeking balance in our fellowships begins with seeking to be close to God and obedient to Him. When we come into greater unity and oneness with God, we will begin to experience greater harmony and unity of fellowship in the Church. The inability to love (agape) one another is one of the most obvious signs that relationships are not right with God. Our treatment of one another has caused some of the deepest scarring among brethren, especially from the ministry and corporate administrators. When we first address our greater differences with God, then we can grow in our ability to address our deep differences with one another and the smaller differences of belief.

God is a family! We are to learn what a true family is and what produces a true family. It is so worth the fight. How much are you willing to fight for it to be built the right way? The Temple of God needs no bridges. The Temple of God is a single structure of which we are all to be a part. *"In whom [Jesus Christ] all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"* (Ephesians 2:21-22, KJV).

We are warned to be careful how we build. *"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon"* (1 Corinthians 3:9-10, KJV).

Building God's way produces pleasant fruit. It gets rid of confusion and division and produces what we all desire. We want unity and harmony of spirit in a family consumed with love. Do you remember the words we heard so often in the past? *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* (Psalms 133:1, KJV). NW