

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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DEAD, REVIVED, REJECTED!

People are turning their attention toward a new millennium. This is especially true amid Y2K concerns over potential computer malfunctions. It may not be the exact year and the timing may be several years off, but it should be a sobering thought that we also may be close to the end of 6,000 years for mankind.

Those of us who are striving to hold onto the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ know the significance of God's 7,000 year plan. We believe that Jesus Christ may be near the time for His return to reign in His Kingdom during the beginning of that final 1,000 years. Today there are many in God's Church who are putting the potential for that occurrence farther and farther away. Too many have failed to learn from our history during this past century and even this past decade.

The lesson of history for the Church over the past 100 years might best be reduced to three words: dead, revived, and rejected. Do you believe what God says to His own people? Many today don't or won't!

God described His people at the end time in terms summed up by those three words. He told the Church that it had come to the point where it needed to be revived from a condition that came to best describe His own people as "dead." After it was revived and blessed with wealth never before experienced to the same level or degree, the Church became spoiled and filled with pride. That spirit bred complacency, lethargy, and self-satisfaction, which in turn led to being rejected by God. If you haven't understood our history in that light, maybe it is time for you to consider the words of God concerning this matter.

A DEAD CHURCH?

Although there are those who have tried to change the focus of the following verse, it is one we need to

understand ever so well. *"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Mat. 16:18).

Jesus Christ was telling Peter about the Church that He was going to build. It was a Church that would not die out, but would continue until He returned to receive His Kingdom on this earth.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [Gk: "precede"] them who are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain [at His coming] shall be caught up together with them [those who died in Christ and were resurrected first] in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thes. 4:14-17).

Clearly, the Church would not die out before Jesus Christ would return to this earth to receive His Kingdom.

Today there are many who do not believe in the eras of the Church. Yet our history cries out to us concerning that truth. We can deny neither our history nor God's instruction and warnings which cover these seven specific periods of time. Yes, there are people who have carried the understanding of eras beyond their intended use, but at the other end of the pendulum there also are people who have totally rejected any understanding of them. As you think about what

God says to the last three churches mentioned in Revelation, try to give honest and truthful consideration to our history.

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things says he who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know your works, that you have a name that you live, and are dead" (Rev. 3:1). It should be a startling statement to hear God say this to His own Church. Jesus Christ told them they had a name that they lived, which is the Church of God, but He said that their overall description as a people in the Church was that they were dead! He said there were only a few who would overcome during this time. *"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy"* (vs. 4).

After nearly 1900 years, the Church was about to die out. It had lived through some very dark and suppressed periods of time in human history. If the Church was to survive, it had to be revived. It was fast coming to a spiritual end. Jesus Christ told them, *"Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God"* (vs. 2).

If we believe the uniqueness of our calling and how God has worked with us as a people, we will understand our history and be encouraged to respond to the instructions of Jesus Christ that are found in Revelation.

God's purpose for the Church was that it continue up until the very return of His Son to this earth. Only God could revive a people that were spiritually dying out. Our history testifies to the reality of these last three eras.

If we fail to believe the reality of our past and the calling God gave to us as His people, then we will make

ourselves no different from others who claim to be Christian in this world. We will begin to liberalize our thinking and come to believe that there are brethren in all kinds of divergent and conflicting groups.

There are numerous efforts underway to destroy the uniqueness of our calling and open the door to varying doctrines and beliefs. Destroying the validity of our past and undermining how God has worked with us is a primary means of introducing new doctrines and new teachers. These new doctrines seek to change the truth that God revealed to us in the beginning. Such doctrines that conflict with the truth revealed to us are promoted by false ministers, and there are far more false ministers in the environs of the Church than there are true ones. You need to be more watchful than ever, proving all that you hear.

GOD REVIVED THE CHURCH

The Church was dying out, and it was time for God to revive it and restore all that had been lost. God raised up a man to be used by Him to do that work. He sent Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong to do that job. He was His apostle for the end of this age.

There are people who hate this part of our history and seek to destroy such understanding of this era in God's Church. People who seek to destroy this understanding of our history and how God has worked with us are enemies to the Body of Christ. They are antichrist because they have set out to fight against Christ's work in the Church. The plain truth is that if God hadn't used some man to revive the Church from its dead and dying condition, none of us would be here, nor would we know the plan and ways of God as we do today.

Although there are people who seem to be repulsed by the thought that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong is the one principal person God worked through during this era, the fact remains that he is the one through whom truth was restored to the Church. Everyone in God's Church today, minister and member alike, have been drawn by God

the Father through the power of His spirit. As a part of that process, they have all been brought to knowledge and truth through the reviving and restoring that God accomplished through Mr. Armstrong. No one has come to be a part of the Body of Christ in this age as a result of God working with them as He did Mr. Armstrong. Do you know anyone who has come to such understanding by some other means? If they have come to understanding through the aid of one of the splinter groups, it is still the result of what God did in restoring truth through Mr. Armstrong!

The Church was dying during Sardis, and God was going to revive it. In order to accomplish the purpose of His Father to revive the Church, Jesus Christ said some very unique things to the Philadelphian era. He said that He had the ability to open that which no man could shut and to shut that which no man could open. He did just that through Mr. Armstrong. Understanding that had been lost to the Church would once again be restored, especially understanding about His purpose for man contained in the meaning of the Holy Days. Those in Sardis rejected that knowledge, and Mr. Armstrong had to leave that fellowship if he was going to obey God. The more he yielded himself in obedience to God, the more God continued to reveal truth to the Church. Doors of understanding and doors for preaching this knowledge of the gospel were increasingly opened up in this world.

It is just as Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong mentioned in a brethren and co-worker letter dated October 25, 1985. *"Christ's true gospel message is THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Jesus taught and proclaimed no other gospel. It sounds incredible—almost unbelievable, I know—but it's TRUE! THAT gospel had not been preached to the world for 18 1/2 centuries! Many have, as Jesus foretold, come in his name, claiming to represent him, SAYING that Jesus is the Christ (Matt.24:5)--even proclaiming his shed blood--preaching about GRACE (but turning it*

into license)--and have DECEIVED THE MANY! God's true Church has continued to exist, through every generation, until now, as a small and persecuted Church. Yet it had not proclaimed Christ's true gospel, in an organized manner to the world, until A.D. 1934."

Mr. Armstrong expounded more on this subject in a letter dated November 22, 1982. *"No one had proclaimed that Gospel to the world for nearly 1,900 years. I began proclaiming it then, but only to a small area in and around Lane County, Oregon [referring to the first Plain Truth in February of 1934]. Within 19 years I had proclaimed it by radio and the Plain Truth over the entire United States. Then, the first week of 1953--precisely 1,900 years (a century of time cycles of 19 years each), I began sending out this Gospel to all Europe over the world's most powerful radio station, Radio Luxembourg."*

This Philadelphia era of God's Church had an open door before it to accomplish a very specific work of reviving the Church and preparing a people who would be present at the return of Jesus Christ. But today there are ministers and organizations that seem to fancy themselves doing what was given to Mr. Armstrong to accomplish as an apostle. He was sent to do a very specific job. If people believed what God said to these last three churches in Revelation, they might better understand what has happened to us as a people and why we are in our present condition. And if we truly understood our present condition, we would understand what "work" was now before us. That work is not the same work that was given to Mr. Armstrong of reviving the Church and preaching the gospel as a witness to this world.

Some seem to misunderstand the statement contained in Matthew 24. *"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come"* (vs. 14). That gospel has been preached within the

Church and into whatever parts of the world God determined to call His people over the past 1900 years. But when He revived the Church, it was also time to fulfill this and other prophecies that God had determined for the end of the age, just prior to the establishing of His Kingdom on earth. At the same time the Church was to be revived, the gospel was to be preached into all the world on a scale never before done. With the advent of mass publishing, radio and then T.V., it was now possible to do this in a way never before dreamed possible.

When Mr. Armstrong died in 1986, the end did not immediately come, so some began to believe many of these kinds of prophecies were yet to be fulfilled through others. But if we could only understand our history and what these last three eras teach, we would know that the end *has come* upon us. The last era is here. There are no more to follow. This is the end. The things that have been happening to the Church agree with prophecies concerning end time events just before Jesus Christ returns.

Jesus Christ told Philadelphia there was an open door to do what had to be accomplished. The Church had to be revived and restored in truth in order to fulfill God's plan for His soon coming Kingdom. The gospel also had to be preached toward the end, in all the world, as a witness. That "work" went throughout the world in several million *Plain Truth* magazines, television, and radio broadcasts and was unique to the period of time covered by Philadelphia.

The purpose for this gospel being preached throughout the world was twofold. First, it was to revive the Church that needed to be restored in truth. People needed to be revived to be a part of this end time work, and they needed to be prepared in order to be present at the return of Jesus Christ. The witness of God dwelling in the Church, in the lives of converted brethren, was to continue throughout the whole history of the Church until Jesus Christ returned. Secondly, it was also to be a witness that even at the end of this age,

in the midst of great technological development, mankind and governments would still refuse God's good news for man.

That door which was opened during that period of time is now closed. No one can open it, yet many are trying. What a vain thing to work against the will of God! Don't we know what "work" now lies before us? Can we not be honest with our recent history and the proof of the condition of the Church that stares us in the face and cries out to us for help?

The work for the Church is about the Church! It is about reaching out to help scattered brethren who are crying out from the spiritual depths of their being. It is a time to help a people to ready themselves as the bride of Christ and to help brethren survive this time of tribulation on the Church. The Church has been going through great spiritual tribulation. Prophecy warned about this as an end-time event. The end is upon us and most of the Church has already gone by the wayside during this tribulation.

The work today is not about copying what God did through Mr. Armstrong. Those doors are closed. If you try to open what Christ has closed, you will find yourself working against your Lord and Master. Is He your Lord and Master? If He is, you will listen to Him and do His will. If not, you will probably do as so many are today.

Today, some believe they are to give a warning witness to Israel. What a puny effort we see. If and when God gives a witness to Israel, more than He already has, you will know it. Israel has already received the height of a warning witness given through the Philadelphia period of time, and they rejected it. That is a witness against them!

The next witness will be obvious. It will be when God needs no Church to help sponsor nor support it. There will be such miraculous events accomplished at that time that much free publicity will be given. The work of that witness will consist of such newsworthy events that it will be widely reported in this

world. There will be no need for an organization to sponsor such efforts.

That future witness to Israel will be one that reminds them of the earlier witness they refused during the Philadelphia era. It will tell them why they are then suffering once the physical tribulation has begun. It will also be a message to the whole world of what is soon to follow – the Kingdom of God on earth with the soon coming of Jesus Christ as King of kings. That job has been set aside for two to accomplish by the power of God. No church organization is going to do it, and no individual is going to be able to set himself up as God's apostle to do it. It is for the two who are yet to be sent by God.

Today we find that the witness some organizations believe they are doing is a witness that God already did during Philadelphia or one He will do through His two witnesses at the very end.

There are others who believe they are to raise up the Church again as in days gone by a decade or two ago. What feeble, puny attempts to do what God has not given! When God calls people to His Church, they will be there. Only God has the power and might to draw and call people into His Church. At this time God is calling only a very few, and the tools of mass media of the past no longer need to be used to accomplish what God did when He was reviving His Church. But there are far too many who haughtily go about spending God's money, stealing from Him, while trying to raise up the Church with a focus toward growing numbers of new people. The truth is slapping organizations in the face, but they refuse to pay attention. Numbers are overwhelmingly coming from people already called who are going from one organization to another or from people who have had some contact from the past. It would be good to pause and consider the warning of Malachi 3:8-10 in a spiritual context toward the Church.

There is one organization that has spent several million dollars over the

past several years on television broadcasts. Much of the desire has been to bring in new people, as well as to warn Israel. Its largest cable station has been a strong witness against them, but they refuse to listen and keep pouring millions of dollars down the drain of T.V. evangelism. That large cable station has reportedly brought in one baptized member to the Church, but he wasn't new, since he had known of the Church in the past. Did God need that super cable station to call only a few individuals, if indeed they are called?

Today there are too many who deny our history by insisting that they are Philadelphian. These do not understand our history nor the lesson contained in the last three eras. Philadelphia is over. No one now lives in that period of time, but some people insist on carrying the label of the time which they believe best embodies the vision they hold of themselves. Why hang onto a name that only describes a love that can be accomplished by man without God or God's spirit? Why not focus more on being faithful members of the Body of Christ, the Church of God, without worrying about being labeled by an era of the Church?

During the time of Philadelphia, we were blessed to be a part of a "work" that Jesus Christ had revived and opened doors to accomplish. Then, we were blessed to bind together in a kind of fraternal fellowship in one organization, the Worldwide Church of God. That work and those open doors are no longer before us, consequently that era is gone. No one belongs to that era anymore! Our desire should be to receive the warning and instruction of the era in which we now find ourselves.

Jesus Christ told the Church that while it was in the Philadelphian era, He would bless them for their part and patience in what was to be accomplished at that time. As long as doors were opened to do a specific work, He would not let the "hour of temptation, which shall come upon the world" come upon them in that time. The promise was to those who were a part of that work while the doors were

open to accomplish it. The promise was not to all individuals who were called during that time, but only for them while they lived in that time. That time is over. A new era is upon us. Those people called during the Philadelphian era, who now live in the Laodicean era, are no longer under that promise. During that time of revival and restoration, God would not let the end time tribulation come.

REJECTED

Today, the Church is living in the end time or the last era. The hour of temptation, held back during the time of Philadelphia, will come during this last period. It has already begun for the Church. We are living in the time of great spiritual tribulation for the Church. As soon as that is complete, the whole world will come under a time of great physical tribulation, of the likes this earth has never seen nor ever will again.

Our recent history testifies to the reality of the time in which we live. The best description for the Church, for well over a decade now, is found in the description of Laodicea. But because of pride, people cannot humble themselves to accept that this is what best describes us as a people. Instead, many stubbornly hold on to the descriptive title of Philadelphia, because they choose to see themselves as being much better than what God has described for us now living in the time of Laodicea.

Pride is the principal error and attitude that blinds the eyes of those living at the end, just before Jesus Christ returns. People are lifted up with pride and envision themselves as doing great works. Today the thrust of many organizations is to duplicate what God did through Mr. Armstrong, but they fail to accept the obvious, that those doors have been closed and the work for that time has been finished.

Today's work should be different and it should be obvious to people who love God and those who have been called by Him. *"And this commandment have we from him, That he who*

loveth God love his brother also. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him" (1 John 4:21-5:1, KJV). Those who were revived during the Philadelphian era and are living on into the Laodicean era, including their children, should be the principal concern, care and work for the Church today. What a shame that most organizations are not focused first and foremost upon seeking to serve and help heal a people who have been so brutally attacked and so widely devastated.

So today we see a Church that had earlier been revived, but is now scattered. The real work of God today should focus first and foremost on the Body of Christ, the scattered Church of God that He has called as the firstfruit of His plan of salvation. Those who are working against that plan and purpose are working against God. You need to be careful of whom you listen to and support. *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world"* (1 Jn. 4:1). This is truer today than at any other time in our history. Jesus Christ warned us of such things in the Church. Too many act as though those warnings are about false ministers who are in the world, who have no relationship to the Church. You should be able to easily spot those false teachers in the world, but you must be close to God to discern false ministers within the environs of the Church.

For most of the others, who have not taken part with those focused on doing the "works" of Philadelphia, the focus seems to be on new teachings and doctrines that they believe have not been correctly understood during the Philadelphian era. The sad truth is that almost every doctrine and foundational truth restored to the Church by God is being attacked more vigorously than what the Worldwide Church of God did in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

People seem to think that if they can focus on the man, Herbert W. Armstrong, and tear him down along with some of the doctrines that came through him, then they can teach their newly revealed, intellectual understanding. They envision others having need to come to this same new understanding. Such foolish people are unwittingly attacking God and what He did to revive the Church and restore truth in it.

Yes, Laodicea describes both groups of people quite well. It describes the stubbornness and haughtiness of those who envision themselves doing what God did through the Philadelphian era, with Mr. Armstrong as apostle. It also describes quite well the haughtiness of those who seek to tear down what was restored to the Church during Philadelphia, through Mr. Armstrong, by the power of the Almighty God.

Foundational understanding about things like Passover and Pentecost, or how God works through the ministry as a part of Church structure, or other matters like tithing, postponements, our calling, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong being God's apostle at the end of this age and the one God used to restore truth in the Church, etc., are a few of the examples of the kinds of things being attacked and changed by people who see themselves as new restorers of truth. They fail to understand our history or how God called us and worked with us. They fail to grasp that truth had to be restored to the Church by God and that what they are actually doing now is tearing down the very work that He Himself did.

God cannot and will not work with the haughtiness of such people or organizations who seek to duplicate what He has already done or who seek to tear down what He did. The answer for such attitudes is given to Laodicea. Repent! Such people who see themselves doing such great works are chided by God. Jesus Christ tells them their works are useless, that they are neither cold nor hot. Such people fail to see their wretched condition because they believe they are enriched by doing ever increasing, greater works. They see

themselves as being blessed in their great efforts and preach the good news of their growing riches. They so fail to see the wretched condition of the Church that they preach we are growing in "peace and safety."

God rejects this spirit of pride and that is the very reason He spewed the Church out of His mouth in the first place. That persisting spirit of pride and complacency is why so many remain spewed out of God's mouth. We have been rejected by the master potter. We have been devastated as a people. Most of the Church as we have known it has gone by the wayside. We are scattered because of God's rejection and correction, but the haughtiness remains. Most who see themselves as having escaped the first wave of destruction are filled with the same Laodicean attitude that led to our initial scattering and rejection. That haughtiness has actually increased. To return to God and be accepted by Him requires deep repentance and genuine change from such attitudes.

A sobering word is used that is translated as "scatter" in Daniel 12. It is a word that means to shatter as a potter who rejects a piece of pottery and casts it to the floor to shatter it.

God cannot work with pride and haughtiness. Our answer and hope to be restored to the grace of God is for us to deeply repent of such a spirit and seek to become zealous for those things God worked to restore in the Church during Philadelphia. (Rev. 3:19).

We must seek to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and admit our wretched condition. Humility will accept the truth and admit the reality of our history, but pride will refuse and become more blinded and naked and of no use to God. Again, our choice is to repent!

"I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee. When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee; but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take them: but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain; And shall say, Cast ye

up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people. For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Is. 57:12-15).

If we have ears that will hear, Jesus Christ tells us we do not have to be separated from God during Laodicea, but we can overcome. He instructs us to repent and be zealous.

We must repent of the pride of our own works that oppose God. Most don't see themselves in such light and will not repent.

If we will repent and humble ourselves before God, we can begin to receive His help to once again be zealous to His calling and purpose in our lives. We can begin to rebuild on the Temple and the walls that surround it. We must rebuild on the Temple in our own personal lives and reach out to give aid to other scattered brethren who want help rebuilding on the Temple.

We must also be willing to stand and fight at the breaches in the wall. The walls that protect the Temple are being attacked by false or deceived ministers and brethren. We must be zealous to hold on to those things that God worked to restore in the Church during Philadelphia, not only holding to them, but building spiritually upon them. We must fight the good fight of faith!

Keep your eyes focused on the purpose of your calling, as the bride who is making herself ready. Seek God's help so you can one day speak these words of Paul. *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).*