

God's Church Has Purpose

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There was a sermon series titled *Herbert W. Armstrong* in 2016, and it had seven parts. The series involved Ron reading a bible study transcript that Mr. Armstrong gave in July of 1978 about Zerubbabel's temple. I want to quote from the first part of that series, and this is what Mr. Armstrong said.

I'm a little disappointed that there are so few people out tonight. Someone told me they didn't know that I would be here. And that is very discouraging and very disheartening. I tell you, brethren, I'm going to write an article on the purpose of the Church. I don't think many of our people know it, or else most of our people just want to finally become ashes under the soles of the feet of the few of us some day, in the Lake of Fire.

Well, I tell you, the day is coming; and Christ needs the Church all prepared and ready.

Mr. Armstrong, God's end-time apostle to the Philadelphia era of His Church, was expressing how discouraged he was at how few members had turned out for a bible study. He was starting to see a lukewarm spirit emerge in the Church. He was so discouraged that he felt it might do the Church some good to be reminded of what the purpose of the Church was. When you say "the purpose of the Church" in this manner, it is being said the Church as a whole, but always remembering the whole is made up by individuals.

Mr. Armstrong reminded the Church then, and we need to hear it now, the Church must be prepared and ready for the return of Christ. Our very name as the end-time Church has "Preparing for the Kingdom of God" in it. That means Christ will return to a clean Body. If we are preparing, we are working on self and cleaning self up, which in turn means being prepared and ready.

The statement that Mr. Armstrong made, "I'm going to write an article on the purpose of the Church" caught my attention when listening to the sermon series a while back. The statement was made because, again, he was concerned that the Church did not remember or know its purpose, or why the Church existed. It made me wonder if he did write an article, and I discovered that Mr. Armstrong recorded a telecast titled, *The Church and Its Purpose*, following that bible study. I want to quote from that telecast.

Well, greetings everybody!

And for those who would listen to the telecast, you can hear Mr. Armstrong in your head right now. And then he went on to say:

Why should there be such a thing as the Church? Why did [Joshua] say, "I will build my Church, and the gates of the grave will never prevail against it?"

Mr. Armstrong was referring to Matthew 16:17. He went on to say:

God doesn't do things without a purpose, without a meaning, without a reason. But he did found this Church. Why? What is its function? What is its meaning? I think that's probably been more misunderstood than ever before.

God is perfect and everything He does is perfect. Everything God has done since His revelation of Himself to mankind has had a purpose, a meaning, a reason. The reason why this is so misunderstood by the majority of mankind is because they have cut themselves off from God. God's Church is different. We are not cut off from God, and we should be able to understand.

Today we will look at the different eras of God's Church and the remnant Church and review some of their purposes, some of their functions. The purpose of God's Church is a subject that can cover many things depending on when you are talking about it. Today, we are going to cover this topic in part. So today, the title of the sermon is *God's Church Has Purpose*.

Before we start to talk about the eras of the Church, let's talk about what the Church is. The Church of God is often referred to as the Body of Christ. The Church was given specific structure to follow as Paul explained to the Ephesians.

Let's turn over to **Ephesians 4:4—There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all**. Paul is explaining that there is one Body of Christ, one Church. The Church is unified in one spirit, God's holy spirit. All were called by God, and we share the same hope. All partake in the same baptism unto repentance and the receiving of God's holy spirit. We all believe in the one and only true God that has eternally existed.

Dropping down to **verse 11—And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ**. God gives the outline of His government that is to be followed within His Church. We, the Body of Christ, the Church of God, are taught by God's ministry. God reveals or instructs Christ what we need as a Body and then Christ gives it to his ministry. In today's structure of the church, that is mainly through God's apostle. It is the responsibility of God's apostle to instruct or guide His Church.

Now **verse 13—till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**. We are all one in all we believe. There can be no division or confusion in this.

Satan is the author of confusion, not God. Just look at the churches in the world today. Look at the several hundred scattered churches that have come into existence since the Apostasy. All are confused because they lack God and His holy spirit.

In all of God's laws and in all of God's truths we must be in agreement. You cannot be in agreement with a couple of things and then disagree with another. Because we are in complete agreement, we are as it tells us in **verse 14—that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro, carried away with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.**

We are grounded in the truth and cannot be deceived if we are repenting of our sins and allowing the flow of God's holy spirit to come into us. We are no longer deceived like those whom God has not called. God gives our mind clarity of who we are. We recognize our elder brother, Joshua, and we follow him.

Verse 15—but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole Body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the Body for the edifying of itself in love.

We move forward in complete confidence because we have been equipped with the truth, all of God's truth. We have been equipped with God's plan of salvation as outlined by the Holy Days. We are to work together in unity all doing our part. When we are in unity and oneness with God then the Body can grow because God can share more of His truth.

Let's turn over now to **1 Corinthians 12:12—For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.** We are many individuals being at one making up the Body of Christ. We become a part of the Body of Christ. And how?

Verse 13—For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one spirit. For in fact the Body is not one member but many. We are all one because we were baptized into the Body of Christ, into the Church of God. We received the holy spirit at the time of baptism if we repent of our sins and we go down into our watery grave. We are no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, man or woman; we are now one equally that makes up the Body of Christ. The many become one in complete agreement.

Dropping down to **verse 27—Now you are the Body of Christ, and members individually.** We each are held responsible for ourselves and to keep the Body of Christ clean, the Church of God clean. We accomplish this when we make right choices, choices that are in agreement with God. We must continue our commitment we made with God on the day we were baptized. We were paid for with a price, and that was the life of Joshua, our Passover. Do not take that lightly.

You made a commitment with God. You gave God your word and you told Him you chose His way of life. One thing we need to remember is God called us to the Body, to the Church. We did nothing of ourselves.

Let's turn over to John 6:44. This is a scripture that we are very familiar with and one we should remind ourselves of often. **John 6:44—No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.**

Mankind is cut off from God because of sin. Regardless of when an individual is in the Church of God, or what era of the Church of God, there is only one way and that is the Father, God Almighty, draws them, calls them to a purpose. Once called by God, it is then up to us to do our part. God will not make us do anything; we have been given free moral agency. By choosing God, we tell God He is right, and we are wrong, and we want to change.

I want to turn over now to Acts 20:25. In Acts 20 we start to see the reference to the name of the Church. It is called the Church of God. **Acts 20:25—And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the holy spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God which he purchased with his own blood.**

At the time Mr. Armstrong came out of the Sardis era of God's Church, there were only three truths that remained. One of the three truths that remained was the name of what God's Church should be; it was to be called the Church of God. The Church should bear the name to the one it belongs. The Church, the Body of Christ, belongs to God Almighty, and therefore, called the Church of God.

The world would have us believe that there are many churches with many names all with the same cause, but that is not the case at all. The world of false Christianity is filled with chaos and confusion just like its father, Satan.

Again, the Church belongs to God, and therefore, bears His name. The Church is never referred to as any other name in scripture. It has always been the Church of God and nothing else. This is a major distinction between God's true Church and other false churches in the world. It is God's Church, and the head of His Church is Joshua. This is the Church that began on Pentecost 31 AD.

We know that prior to the birth of Christ that God worked with individuals for specific reasons. Names should be popping into your head – Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, King David, and many more.

After Christ was born and died as the Passover Lamb for all mankind, God's Church was established. The Church could not be established until the role of the Passover Lamb was fulfilled because we were not to receive God's holy spirit until Christ was resurrected and returned to the Father.

We know that throughout history there were specifically seven eras of the Church that expanded to our time with the last era mentioned in the book of Revelation of Laodicea. Each era of the Church had a purpose, a function to perform. I want to review the seven eras of God's Church so let's turn over to

Revelation, and we'll start with chapter 1. The book of Revelation was given to John by Christ who received it from God.

Revelation 1:1—The revelation of Joshua the Christ, which God gave him to show His servants — things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John. God gave to Joshua what he was to reveal to John at this time that was to be recorded for the future. This was not for the time of John that he was living in but for the future of God's Church up to and including this moment in time. God gave to Joshua what we were to know. And brethren, again, the only way you know it is because God called you and gave you His holy spirit. That is why we understand.

When the world reads of the seven eras of God's Church, they have no idea exactly what they are or what they mean. Those not called by God at this time are deceived. All they know is the false churches that exist today.

Dropping down to **verse 9—I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Joshua the Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Joshua the Christ.** John was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos when he wrote the book of Revelation, as he was told to record all that was given to him. John was one of the original disciples and was both apostle and prophet. Part of what was revealed to John were the eras of God's Church.

Dropping down to verse 11 we will now see the names of the eras of the Church. **Verse 11—saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and, What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven Churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.**

While John was imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos, Joshua gave him many prophecies that pertained to the Church and the end-time. Each era of the Church had a specific characteristic that was portrayed during that era more so than any of the other eras. These characteristics may be partially present in other eras, but they are not the predominant characteristic. One example is that of Laodicea having a lukewarm spirit. We know that we must fight that now, but it will never be as prevailing as it was during the era of Laodicea, and we'll talk about that a little bit later.

So, now let's continue in the book of Revelation and review a few scriptures about the eras of the Church and what their works were.

Ephesus. Dropping down to chapter 2 in the book of Revelation we will read about the era of Ephesus. **Revelation 2:2—I know your works, your labor, your patience, that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name's sake and have not become weary.**

The era of Ephesus was during the time the Church was established after the death of Christ. The early Church worked tirelessly to establish the churches throughout the regions the apostles went into. We know from our history that the Church was established on Pentecost 31 AD, based on events that took place that day.

Let's turn over to Acts 1 and we will start to set the stage of when the Church was first established. So, we're going to go to **Acts 1:1—The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Joshua began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he through the holy spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen, to whom he also presented himself alive after his suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.**

After Joshua was resurrected, he spent forty days with the disciples who became apostles teaching them about the Kingdom of God and of the things to come, and what they were to do. Christ spoke to them what he was given in regard to the coming Kingdom of God.

Verse 4—And being assembled together with them, he commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, you have heard from me. Joshua instructed the disciples that they were to remain in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father, which we know to be the holy spirit. God was going to give the gift of the holy spirit at a specific time, which we know was on Pentecost 31 AD, all part of the fulfillment of the plan of God that was being delivered in God's timing.

The disciples, much like us, were hopeful that the Kingdom of God was going to be restored in their lifetime. Reading verse 5 we note that Joshua told the disciples it was in God's timing, which of course means it is in perfect timing. They were to be patient, and we are to be patient; we are to wait on God.

Verse 5—for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the holy spirit not many days from now. Therefore, when they had come together, they asked him, saying, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the holy spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witness to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

The disciples were told it was not for them to know when the Kingdom of God would be restored, but God was sending them the help of the holy spirit to help them to be able to do their job, the purpose that was being given to them to do. The early Church was told to be a witness of Joshua. They did not completely understand they had work to do but they would quickly learn.

Verse 9—Now, when he had spoken these things, while they watched he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. Christ's work as God had given him to do was now complete and Christ

returned to the right hand of God until God is ready for him to return to the earth to establish His government. After Christ was taken up, on Pentecost 31 AD, we start to see reference to the Church of God.

Let's turn over to **Acts 2:46—So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved.** We see evidence the Church was established, and individuals were being added to it daily, but also notice they were in one accord. That means they were of one mind and in complete agreement.

After Pentecost 31 AD, the Church began. The Church was not to just be a church of the Jews, but it was God's purpose the gentiles too were to be a part. God had a purpose for the early Church. God revealed to Peter through a vision that gentiles were to be included and not to be considered unclean.

We know that God called and used Paul specifically to take the message of Joshua the Christ and God's coming Kingdom to this earth to the gentiles. They too were to be given the opportunity of a calling by God, being baptized by water, forgiven of their sins, and receiving the help of the holy spirit. God's message of repentance and being able to be born into the Family of God is for all mankind. The Passover died for all men.

I want to read now about Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira briefly. We do not know much about these three eras. So, if we go back to **Revelation 2:9—I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of these things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and that you have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.**

Dropping down to **verse 13** we read of the era of Pergamos. **I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to my name, and did not deny my faith even in the days in which Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was killed among you where Satan dwells.**

And then **verse 19** we read of Thyatira. **I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; as for your works, the last are more than the first.**

We will now drop down to Revelation 3:1 and read of the era of Sardis. This is the era that Mr. Armstrong came out of with the three remaining truths of God. **Revelation 3:1—I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.**

The statement made to Sardis, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die," was an incredible warning to the Sardis era, and is also something we should be aware of today.

Just as Sardis was warned, we too should be watchful, be alert, be on guard, and strengthen the things that we have.

It was the establishment of the Protestant churches and advancing technology, specifically the printing press, that began to emerge, and that led to greater religious confusion. People were able to distribute their false ideas quicker and to greater numbers, and as time progressed God's truths were lost in the Church.

By the time we get to the Sardis era, there are only three truths that still remain in the Church of God. The seventh day Sabbath, the name of the Church, Church of God, and first tithe belongs to God. Mr. Armstrong was called out of the Sardis era and became God's apostle to the era of Philadelphia. Mr. Armstrong brought the three truths that remained forward with him into the era of Philadelphia. It bears repeating we need to understand, that even in God's Church we can lose truths.

Those of us who went from the era of Philadelphia to Laodicea should be able to understand how truth can be lost. When the ministry is no longer faithful to God and stops teaching God's truths, you start to experience a famine of the word. God's truths start to be watered down or completely not taught at all.

After Mr. Armstrong left the Sardis era, God started to restore truths to His Church through him. A lot of us were called into the era of Philadelphia and were blessed to live to see the restoration of all 18 truths God restored to His Church during this time.

Let's drop down to verse 8 now of chapter 3 and we will read of the era of Philadelphia. This is, again, the era that some of us were called into. This is the era Mr. Armstrong, through God's inspiration, restored 18 truths back to His Church.

Revelation 3:8—I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, but have kept my word, and have not denied my name. Those in the scattered Churches would do well to understand that statement. Mr. Armstrong was given an open door by God so that he could fulfill a job that God gave to him in the Philadelphia era to do.

Verse 9—Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept my command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

For some of us, the statement, "that no man takes your crown," hits hard. We, unfortunately, witnessed several lose their crowns. We as a whole, in the Philadelphia era, were lifted up in our own self pride; we did not heed God's warning. That includes those of us sitting here that came out of the Philadelphia era.

But God raised up an end-time apostle to begin to restore His truth back to the Church. This was the beginning of preparing His Church for the return of Joshua. Mr. Armstrong, who God worked with and through to do this, God inspired Mr. Armstrong, and He restored the 18 Truths.

The restoration of the 18 Truths was a purpose for the Philadelphia era of God's Church. God, who is in charge of everything, including the time it takes place, because of a perfect plan, and that was why He began to restore truth to His Church and to begin to prepare for His Son's second coming. The Church was to record what these truths were as they were given to Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Armstrong described himself as one "crying in the wilderness." I want to quote from a sermon Mr. Armstrong gave in December of 1983 called *Mission Of The Philadelphia Church*:

The world had lost the gospel. They didn't know what the gospel was. I came among the true Church of God of the Sardis era. They didn't know what the gospel was. They thought it was what they called a "third angel's message." God revealed it to me, and through me to the Church, that the gospel is the Kingdom of God. That is the gospel Joshua preached. That's the gospel Paul preached to the gentiles. That's the gospel that Peter and John preached. And you'll find when [Joshua] sent them out, and sent out seventy, He said: "Preach the Kingdom of God." That is the only gospel! It is the gospel OF [Joshua the] Christ. The world has a gospel about Christ. Now the first thing to be restored to the Church is the true gospel.

Mr. Armstrong is saying that the true gospel was restored to the Church during the Philadelphia era. It was not by accident or time and chance that the first truth that was restored to God's Church was God's government. Without understanding the government of God, the Church could not be led to understand and agree with the rest of the truths that were to follow starting with the next one, "the gospel of the Kingdom of God."

Here is what Mr. Armstrong stated in that same sermon in regard to the government of God:

The government of God has been restored to the Church. And the government of God has been placed in the Church! You read that in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12. Christ is the Head of the Church; and under Christ in the administration of the government are an apostle or apostles; then evangelists; then pastors. Then all are called elders, all ministers all the way up and clear down to the lowest. So then there are teachers and elders (both speaking elders and preaching elders), deacons and deaconesses. And the Church is restored in that form of government. Sardis Church, even, didn't have the right form of government.

Today, God's government is structured a little differently, but by title only. We no longer have the role of elders or preaching elders. The term is just elders. The Church of God no longer has the roles of deacons and deaconess. However, the function is exactly as God restored it through Mr. Armstrong, starting with God's apostle, and prophets, down to an elder.

Going on with what Mr. Armstrong said...

The purpose of God—that we can be born into the Kingdom of God and the Family of God and become God—that knowledge has been restored to the Church.

We know that God restored 18 truths. Each one builds upon the other. We know that Mr. Armstrong had a specific calling to do this as one of God's end-time apostles, and if not for Mr. Armstrong, not one of us would be here today. And that is a fact.

In the sermon Mr. Armstrong delivered in December of 1983, he covered the mission of the Philadelphia era. One definition for "mission" is "a specific task with which a person or a group is charged." I like that definition because that describes the mission of the Philadelphia era and Mr. Armstrong's commission.

Quoting more from that sermon:

Most prophecy in the Bible refers to our time now, and is concerned with our time—not with the time back in the First Century, not in the Middle Ages. How many times do you find in the Bible "in that day"? Such-and-such will happen "in that day." "In that day" again and again, especially in the Old Testament prophecies. And it is referring to the time now and leading on into the Second Coming of Christ—the Coming of Christ the Messiah, and these events and these days just preceding—when there is the greatest mission of the Church. And that is the mission that has devolved down on us. Today's mission of the Church you will find in Matthew 24 and in verse 14.

Joshua gave prophecies about the Church recorded in Matthew 24. These prophecies are about the Church in the end-time, and we understand that they have spiritual meaning. Verses 1 through 14 were about the era of Philadelphia. Let's turn over to Matthew 24:1. Let's read about the events that were to take place in the Church. These events took place before the era of Laodicea could begin.

So, that's **Matthew 24:1—Then Joshua went out and departed from the temple, and his disciples came up to show him the buildings of the temple. And Joshua said to them, Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, that not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.** This prophecy was about what would happen to the Church. The spiritual Temple of God was thrown down and scattered immediately after the Apostasy.

Verse 3—Now, as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?

As we continue with verse 4 Joshua begins to explain what will happen prior to his return. These things would take place just before the countdown of his return would start. Mr. Armstrong himself warned the Church that they were falling asleep and that the Church needed to be on guard and alert, but we did not listen.

Verse 4—And Joshua answered and said to them, Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many. We never would have believed that the false ministers that we were to be watchful for were those in the Church of God. Hindsight is 20/20. Looking back, we can see how this happened slowly over time. It had begun to a certain degree prior to Mr. Armstrong's death, but after his death, it spread quickly. Those who had an agenda started on it immediately.

Verse 6—And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. I think about that word "sorrow." That is a word used to describe "a feeling of deep distress caused by loss." We would come to understand that word quite well by the end of the Philadelphia era.

Verse 9—Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. There was incredible warring in the church. If you lived at the end of the Philadelphia era you can share many war stories.

There was a famine of God's word within the Church we had never experienced. The most basic truths were being glossed over by the ministry so bent on betraying Mr. Armstrong and the Church. The ministry as a whole no longer used the term "Family of God." No one at that time could have imagined that this would take place from within. It is only having lived it we can see these scriptures so clearly now.

Verse 12—And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. As people turned from God and God's laws and unrepented sin increased, the love of God started to diminish. The further individuals were cut off from God, the more that they sinned, and the more sin became tolerated within our midst, even within the ministry. God's love stopped working in people's lives.

Now, as we read verse 14 I want to repeat what Mr. Armstrong stated, "...and that mission that has devolved down on us. Today's mission of the Church you will find in Matthew 24:14, the mission, a purpose for the Philadelphia Church of God."

Matthew 24:14—And the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. This commission was accomplished by Mr. Armstrong and the Church. At the death of Mr. Armstrong, the door was shut, and no matter how many try to duplicate it, that is in vain. This is no longer God's purpose for His Church. When Mr. Armstrong died, not only was the door shut but the era of Philadelphia ended and Laodicea began.

Mr. Armstrong knew and believed with his whole heart that the Church was to take the good news of the coming Kingdom of God to the world. This was the door that was open and no one would shut until God was ready for it to be shut. Taking the good news of the coming Kingdom of God to the world did not mean that every person on the earth was to be told of the coming Kingdom of God, but those that God intended to hear would hear.

Mr. Armstrong fully completed Matthew 24:14, and he was alone in doing so. This was completed by the time of his death. Many of the scattered churches today think this is still their commission to do, but it is not. They do not acknowledge that he fulfilled this prophecy that was about the Church of God.

Just as it was stated to John on the Isle of Patmos, "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it." As long as Mr. Armstrong was alive, God opened doors in ways it was never done before or after. Mr. Armstrong delivered the message of the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. He went into areas that no one has ever gone to, including behind the wall of China. We all know the stories of Mr. Armstrong's accomplishments to do his commission because God opened the doors. Again, after his death, the door was shut.

I want to quote Mr. Armstrong from the bible study of *Zerubbabel's Temple*:

Now you're going to see pretty soon that the house it is speaking of is the Church of God and the Work of the Church of getting this Gospel out.

Mr. Armstrong continually made it clear the work of the Church, a purpose of the Church, was to get the gospel, the good news of the coming Kingdom of God out to the world, out to those God wanted to hear it. He went on to say...

And we are growing weary, and we don't want to work on building this Temple—THIS CHURCH, WHICH IS THE TEMPLE!

And then a little later he states:

And He says to us today to BE STRONG, AND WORK!

Mr. Armstrong is referring to the Church, that it is the Philadelphia era that needs to be strong and work, and then he says...

GET BACK OF THIS THING!

"This thing" was the work that Mr. Armstrong knew he was commissioned, by God through the instructions and inspiration of Christ to fulfill, Matthew 24:14 and to take the message of the coming Kingdom of God to the earth. After that, the return of Joshua to take the reins from Satan and to administer God's government with the 144,000.

Going on, Mr. Armstrong said:

Now I tell you, if you look into the New Testament, you will see that Christ did NOT train all of the people. And there were, oh within a few days after the Day of Pentecost (it might have been the very next day) the Church had grown up to a total of 5000 people. But [Joshua the] Christ had NOT taught them to go out and carry the gospel message. It was only those that became His apostles.

Later, He taught (and apparently appeared, after He had gone to heaven, and yet came down) and appeared to Paul the apostle, in Arabia. And taught him just as He had taught the other apostles. GOD SENT THEM! "Apostle" is a word that means one sent forth. ONE SENT FORTH.

He went on to say:

I AM SENT FORTH! And if I go forth, and leave here, some people will say, "Well, why isn't Mr. Armstrong staying here in Pasadena and taking care of the Church?" I'll tell you why! The Church is supposed to HELP ME—not me take care of you! I am one sent forth with the gospel message! That's what God has laid on ME!

Mr. Armstrong clearly knew the responsibility to teach was given to the apostles right after the death of Christ. The responsibility of taking the message of the soon coming Kingdom of God was given to him by God. The responsibility to teach is given to an apostle, and that continues to today. God's end-time apostle has been given a commission too, and we will discuss that a little later.

It is the responsibility of God's end-time apostles to teach His Church. God uses His ministry to teach but only as they have been taught. All truth and new inspiration only comes from God to Christ to God's apostle. There is no other way.

So how was the Church to help and "get back of this thing"? It was up to the members to do as they were instructed and to pray, fast, obeying God, and give God His tithe and offerings. It was to financially support the work to get the message out and to physically participate when possible. It was through the faithful tithes and offerings of the members of the Philadelphia era that so much was accomplished. Not only did God call members but there were also those we called co-workers, individuals God inspired to give funds to the Church who never became baptized members of the Body of Christ.

During the Philadelphia era, there was *The Plain Truth Magazine*, *The Good News Magazine*, books, the *Bible Correspondence Course*, the weekly telecast, and radio telecast of *The World Tomorrow*, countless booklets and articles, and sermons to just name a few of what was fulfilled by the Philadelphia era of God's Church. Each one of them has a purpose within itself.

Now, before moving on to the last era of God's Church mentioned in the book of Revelation, let's talk about one more thing Mr. Armstrong was able to do so while guiding and teaching God's Church during the Philadelphia era. Mr. Armstrong taught the message of the two trees in the Garden of Eden that was given to him to teach by Christ. The era of Philadelphia was to hear and understand what these two trees

represented. Some welcomed the instruction and some did not. Those that did were able to build on the foundation God had started in them.

From the sermon that Mr. Armstrong gave, *Mission of the Philadelphia Church Era*, he states:

Now the Two Trees were merely a test of character.

Now, here is a cold, hard fact. The second Mr. Armstrong said, "the two trees," some people shut down or shut off. They stopped listening. Yet the very next comment that followed the "two trees," was "merely a test of character." So, without knowing it, they failed the test of character, showing they had none because they shut down, they shut off. They failed to listen to God's apostle. They failed to understand that this is how God was working through Mr. Armstrong. He went on to say:

The Tree of Life simply meant obeying God; letting God reveal knowledge to you; letting God reveal His law. The law is merely the Way of LIVING.

Do we not all want the knowledge of God and how to live life? To know the law of God? Knowing how to live a life that will fulfill us completely and exactly the best way possible for each of us individually? He went on to say:

And, if Adam had taken the Tree of Life, God would have revealed His Way of Living—His LAW—to Adam. Now I have never put it quite that way before. Get that firmly in your mind. But what he did, he took to himself the knowledge of good and evil. In other words, he took to himself the way of life. HE MADE HIS OWN LAW of how he would live, but he was influenced by Satan and Satan's way.

We see the product of Satan and his influence everywhere. The world is absent of the law of God, and it is quite apparent. The world is filled with disgusting selfishness. The world is consumed with "the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life," human nature; Satan's nature abounds.

Mr. Armstrong went on to say:

Well, what did Satan say to Eve when she came? He didn't say, "Worship me." He didn't say, "Disobey God, Eve." He said, "Just go do your own thing! Do your own way. Use your own head. Use your own mind. Do what you think is right!" And that is the way that Adam took as the law of his life, the way that seemed right to him.

Eve had a choice, and she made it. It was a horrible choice. Then she went to Adam, and he had a choice to make, and he made a horrible choice. Mankind has suffered ever since Eve and Adam both individually made horrible choices. We can thank God He gave us a way for those He calls to be able to understand that living outside the law of God is a horrible choice. God Almighty gave us a Passover, and through Joshua the Christ, we can see and live the law of God.

Mr. Armstrong then quoted Proverbs 14:12, so let's turn over there. **Proverbs 14:12—There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.** If we live a way we think is right apart from God, we die; we will die a spiritual death.

Going on with what Mr. Armstrong said:

You see, it is the law of God that tells us which is the right way. That was in the Tree of Life, which Adam rejected. Now God's purpose was to reproduce Himself: to reproduce Himself. But God is, first of all, perfect, spiritual, righteous character. And man could not be made God until the very CHARACTER of God had been implanted within him. And it wouldn't be character unless the man himself made the choice to receive it, and unless it came with the man's not only consent but by his own will even. And yet it had to come from God, and God would give it to him; but a man had to make the decision and want it.

And that same thing faces all of us today. You see, all of us have found that the Tree of Life has been opened to us.

The Philadelphia era was to understand the law of God, the way to God, the opportunity to make right choices because God used Mr. Armstrong in such a profound way. Because God restored 18 truths to His Church through Mr. Armstrong, we have the ability to understand. It was during this era that God revealed the plan of salvation for mankind. He revealed through Mr. Armstrong all His Holy Days.

Let's now turn back over to Revelation 3:15. We will now cover the Laodicean era of God's Church.

Revelation 3:15—I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

Since Laodicea, how many times have we been warned of lukewarm? We know what lukewarm causes; it causes us to sleep. We fell asleep and God had to vomit His entire Church out of His presence. He no longer could dwell in us. We lost God's holy spirit. Lukewarm is the perfect temperature for an apostasy.

As stated earlier, the death of Mr. Armstrong brought an end to the era of Philadelphia and the beginning of the era of Laodicea. It is during the era of Laodicea that the prophesied apostasy happened and then we could turn to the anticipation of the second coming of Joshua the Christ. We know that the era of Laodicea ended on Pentecost of 1998.

During Laodicea, no new truths were revealed. In fact, during Laodicea, truths were not taught and those in charge were trying to do away with them. God will not reveal His truth to a group of individuals who are asleep. The Church became lukewarm and no longer sought after God and His way of life. The Church became very selfish and as we know the love of many became cold. We were cut off from God's holy

spirit and became like those never called by God. Our human nature, “lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life” was no longer being fought. We were giving in.

God wanted the Church, and in the future, to understand this, the result of what no longer fighting self can cause. We became Laodiceans. All in God’s Church after Mr. Armstrong died in January of 1986 until Pentecost of 1998 were Laodiceans. All who move forward must admit they were Laodicean.

Those who did not live through the era of Philadelphia and Laodicea may not completely understand how hard this is for those that did. During the era of Philadelphia, the era of Laodicea was a very ugly thing. To admit you were Laodicea was a crazy thought. To admit you were Laodicea meant that you were admitting that you cut yourself off from God and He vomited you out of His Body. It takes an awakening from the deep sleep that we were in to see this. And we’ll come out of this when God is ready.

There is one scattered group today that still hangs on to the era of Philadelphia with everything they have. It is even part of their name. They believe the era of Philadelphia and Laodicea will coexist at the same time. They believe that those who are Laodiceans, and that is everyone else but them, have to die. This is not true. God made this quite clear in Matthew 25 and the story of the ten virgins.

The entire Church fell asleep, and it was because of this the Church became lukewarm. And that is how Laodicea is described. The wise and foolish fell asleep because they were cut off from God. All of those in the Philadelphia era became Laodicea, and thankfully, God gave some the opportunity to repent and return to Him.

Knowing what we know, ask yourself what was the purpose of God’s Church during the era of Laodicea? The era of Laodicea serves as the greatest example of what happens to God’s Church – and that is a physical human being can become lukewarm even with God’s spirit. It shows that even individuals who are impregnated with the holy spirit of God that gives power and strength to help build God’s character within them and deliver them from a spiritual death can still turn their backs on God. The example of Laodicea will be taught throughout the Millennium as a warning to everyone.

Those who were in the Philadelphia era became so lifted up with their self-pride and they became so weakened they did not see what was coming. God’s truth was watered down from within, and we did not see it. We shamed our God that we moved into Laodicea after Mr. Armstrong's death. With each passing day, it only got worse to the point that God said, “No more” and separated us from the Body of Christ. But God had a plan, and that started with the Passover. God’s plan would not fail.

After Laodicea, God started to wake individuals up and it was up to them to choose to move forward or not. Only those who repented of their sins, their weakened condition, could do this. Only God can awaken someone out of a spiritual sleep, and those in the scattered churches continue to remain that way today. They are not able to admit as the result of being lukewarm an apostasy happened.

The Church of God—PKG is different. We know the era of Laodicea ended, and we know God's Church did not end there. We moved from the eras of God's Church to a remnant pulled out of Laodicea. A small group of individuals that God woke up and those that He gave a calling to. God's Church went from the Worldwide Church of God to Church of God—PKG, Church of God, Preparing for the Kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, the majority of the Church refuses to repent of being Laodicea because they are still filled with pride and still lukewarm. God tells us over and over He will not dwell in sin, and He will not accept that which is lukewarm. We must be zealous for God's way of life.

Today we have another apostle with a commission, Ron Weinland. Today we are part of God's remnant Church made up of those He called out of Laodicea and those He called after the establishment of Church of God—PKG. All sharing the same purpose – preparing for the Kingdom of God. Today, there is a new commission "of getting back of this thing."

God's remnant Church was established on Pentecost 1998. It was after the establishment of the Church again He began to restore the truths and then added additional truths, thirty-six additional truths, to prepare for His return of His son, Joshua. The very name given to the Church shows this, "Preparing for the Kingdom of God." Joshua will return with the 144,000 and rule over God's Kingdom on this earth.

Let's turn over to **John 17:17—Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.** We are set apart for God's use by His truths. It is God's truth that sets us apart from the world and its false teachings, and from the scattered churches that followed the Apostasy.

I'm going to quote now from *Time Is Running Out*, and I want us to see the difference between the Philadelphia era and the remnant Church. So, quoting from *Time is Running Out*.

Too many today do not believe that Mr. Armstrong and the Philadelphian Church finished the work God gave them to do.

That is in reference to Matthew 24:14. Mr. Armstrong and the Philadelphia Church fulfilled the purpose of taking the good news of the coming Kingdom to the world as God designated it to be.

Going on:

Our work today is to endure and hold fast to the foundational truths God gave us during Philadelphia and to be preparing ourselves for the soon coming Kingdom of God.

When that was written we had no idea God was going to give us additional truths. So our purpose as the remnant Church is not only to hold onto the foundational truths but the thirty-six additional truths that God has given us since 1998 and to prepare ourselves for the return of Joshua the Christ.

Just as Mr. Armstrong and the Philadelphia era got the message of the good news of the coming Kingdom of God out to the world, we are to endure and hold fast to the three truths surviving the Sardis

era, the eighteen truths that were restored during Philadelphia, and the additional thirty-six truths given to God's Church by God's end-time apostle. We are to be preparing for the Kingdom of God. I cannot stress that enough!

Joshua is to return to the Church of God on a Pentecost. This was one of the additional truths revealed to the Church after the Apostasy. We are told and reminded a lot that Christ will return to a clean Body. This is part of our purpose in Preparing for the Kingdom of God. If Christ is to return to a clean Body, then the prod is on self. And how is the Church a part of this? The Church is where we are taught and admonished by God's ministry. The ministry, mainly God's end-time apostle, gives us instructions on how to prepare for the Kingdom of God.

We are fed weekly on the Sabbath with sermons and on God's Holy Days. God's church has many publications that we can use to fine-tune our lives. We have recorded sermons we can go back to and learn more. We all know that depending on where we are spiritually and what circumstances are going on in our lives, we will always learn something new.

As we read things that are available to us on the church website, and we listen to sermons, we are cleaning up our own lives, and the result is a clean Body for Christ to return to. The weekly Sabbaths will show us areas of weakness that we need to work on, or in some cases repent of sin that we can now see. Again, all resulting in a clean Body for Christ to return to.

In January 1998, in the first *NewsWatch* written by God's apostle, Ron Weinland, he stated:

This is not a time to let down. This is not a time to straddle the fence.

We can live by those words today. That was stated in 1998, so dig in, you have a purpose to fulfill. If you have not reviewed the Church website in a while, pay it a visit. Pick something up and read it. I can promise you, you will find something new, and you will grow from reading it. There will be something that will help you to prepare for the Kingdom of God.

Let's turn over now to **1 Corinthians 15:50—Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery, We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.**

And so, when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? O hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Joshua the Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

We are to be preparing for the Kingdom of God. That needs to start with self. We need to clean up our lives so that we can be a part of the Kingdom of God. We need to be supporting God's end-time remnant Church, Church of God—PKG. Our journey has not finished yet and we do not know what God will ask of us.

Just as Mr. Armstrong and the Philadelphia era finished their commission and fulfilled Matthew 24:14, so will we if we stay faithful to our calling. Each era of God's Church has a purpose and those called to that era is to support that purpose. That is what we are called to do – support God's purpose whatever and whenever it is.

I want to again quote from the *Zerubbabel's Temple* Bible study given by Mr. Armstrong.

And let me tell you, THE HEAD OF THIS CHURCH IS ALIVE! Do you believe it? [Joshua the] Christ! DO WE BELIEVE HE LIVES? Do we believe He's on the job? Do we believe, if I am in need of correction, that He is able to see to it and give it? Let me tell you, I BELIEVE IT! I believe it through and through. And I FEAR IT! And I TREMBLE AT IT!

Those familiar with Mr. Armstrong's speaking can hear that clearly. The words "THE HEAD OF THIS CHURCH IS ALIVE!" is capitalized with an exclamation point. So, hear it that way. Joshua the Christ is alive, and he is doing His Father's will. He is guiding God's apostle, Ron Weinland, every step of the way. We can have confidence like we have never felt it before because this is true. We are in God's hands, and there is no better place to be.

I want to quote from the telecast, *The Church and Its Purpose*. Mr. Armstrong gives two purposes for the Church. These two purposes are for us today, too. He said:

So finally, let's get our bearings, and let me show you what is the real purpose of the Church. Number one — to get back of the apostles as the church's part in getting the gospel to the world, and to back up the apostles with their encouragement, with their prayers, with their tithes and offerings, to make it possible for the apostles to go into all the world with this message.

As already stated, getting the gospel to the world was Mr. Armstrong and the Philadelphia era Church's commission. Ours is different. Ours is to Prepare for the Kingdom of God, to do our part to ensure the Body is clean when Christ returns, to be ready to do our part in the Millennium.

"To back up the apostles with their encouragement, with their prayers, with their tithes and offering," is very much to us too. We should have God's apostle and two prophets very much in our prayers, and we know that we are to tithe and give offerings to support the work, to get behind this thing, especially with prayer.

And then, going on Mr. Armstrong said:

Second — the Church overcoming Satan, developing this character through the holy spirit, to qualify them to sit on Christ's throne.

Is there any other way to do this than to prepare for the Kingdom of God? We must overcome Satan and his influence in our lives and there is only one way to do that and that is with the help of God's holy spirit. We cannot cut ourselves off from God! That message was given to the era of Philadelphia, and it is a message for us today. The era of Philadelphia did not hear the instruction. We cannot afford to do what they did. We know what that spirit leads to, and that leads to a lukewarm spirit. We cannot let anything take our crown.

As we wrap up today, I want to recap some of what we have discussed. What were some of the purposes of the eras of God's Church?

First, Ephesus. The first era of God's Church received the help of God's holy spirit and became known as the Body of Christ. God used the first era of His Church to be the first to preach the good news of the coming Kingdom of God and who Joshua the Christ is. He is the Messiah, and he is the Passover. God's plan of salvation is for all mankind.

The Sardis era is the era God prepared and moved forward His apostle, Herbert Armstrong Armstrong, to the next era where much was to be done. God reserved three of His truths in Sardis, the seventh day Sabbath, first tithe belongs to God, and the name of His Church, Church of God. Mr. Armstrong moved forward from this era to the next era, and the next era of God's work began.

The Philadelphia era of God's Church was busy. God inspired and restored eighteen truths to be added to the three remaining from Sardis. The 18 truths revealed much about God and His plan for mankind starting with the establishment of God's government. During Philadelphia, God used Mr. Armstrong in a very profound way. Mr. Armstrong taught the era of God's Church with zeal. He led God's Church with truth and set the Church apart from the false churches in the world. God gave to Mr. Armstrong the truth about the two trees in the Garden of Eden, and Mr. Armstrong faithfully taught that meaning to the Church.

Mr. Armstrong's commission, with the help of the members of the Philadelphia era, was clear. He was to take the message of the coming Kingdom of God to the world. Those God intended to hear heard, and then that door was shut and Mr. Armstrong died, and the next era of God's Church began.

The era of Laodicea started when Mr. Armstrong died. Once God's apostle was dead, the Church became lukewarm and went to sleep. The 21 truths started to be watered down or not taught at all. A group with God's holy spirit became starved for God's word and God had no choice but to vomit everyone out of the Church, out of the Body of Christ, because God will not be around sin.

The Church was the perfect environment for an apostasy to happen, and there was a great falling away from God. This era will serve as an example during the Millennium and beyond, of what happens to the Church without an apostle, even with God's spirit.

Then, on Pentecost of 1998, God started His remnant Church that was to move forward, and took on a new name to describe their commission. It was to Prepare for the Kingdom of God. God raised up another apostle, Ron Weiland, to do that. God inspired and gave him thirty-six additional truths that sets us apart from the hundreds of scattered churches since the Apostasy.

As I end, I want to quote from *2008-God's Final Witness*. It is imperative you remember this is us and our job is not done yet.

As God foretold for the end-time, a great apostasy did occur in His true Church, and, as a result, God separated the Church from His presence because of their disobedience. However, God has awakened a remnant of all who were scattered, just as He said He would do, and He has brought them back into a true relationship with Him. All others who were scattered have now reorganized into over five hundred different groups. All have fallen asleep spiritually or have completely abandoned the truth (apostatized). They no longer have a genuine relationship with God.

So, brethren, how can we have a genuine relationship with God? We have a genuine relationship with God if we are repenting of our sins daily and communication with God in prayer, if we are obeying His commands, observing the Sabbath and the Holy Days, learning of His plan for us and how we are to prepare for the return of Christ, if we are supporting His purpose for us, overcoming our stinking, rotten human nature, if we are getting behind this thing as He guides and directs us.

The remnant Church must finish the purpose and prepare for the Kingdom of God. Brethren, it will be here sooner than we think.