

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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HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?

Have you forgotten who you are? Do you know where the Church of God is? Do you know *what* the Church is? These may sound like easy questions to answer, but don't be so sure. The fact is, large numbers of God's people have forgotten!

A real cause for lamentation within the church is the loss of our unique identity as God's chosen people. What follows such loss of identity is a loss of vision. With loss of vision, our very purpose becomes unclear. Is there any wonder there is such confusion of purpose and direction within God's scattered Church today?

Brethren argue over what we should be doing as God's people. Misguided brethren follow the whims of ministers who reflect by their actions they have no clue of God's will. What a shame! We should prayerfully become increasingly ashamed of such a condition and repent more fully of its cause.

Most ministers today are leading brethren in directions that reveal they themselves no longer understand our unique calling. When a person understands our calling it will be reflected by the fruits they produce. But because the ministry is losing this understanding, their vision for doing God's will is also disappearing.

YOUR MINISTER'S VISION

What is your minister's vision? Where is he leading you? Are you being fed strong, meaty sermons? Is there excitement and enthusiasm in your minister's voice because he is moved by what he sees in the Word of God? Are you being admonished and warned about the worsening times for this world and the church? Does your minister boldly inform you about God's will for the church at this present time?

Does he tell you God's focus is upon the people He has called, who are now scattered? Or does he direct your attention away from scattered brethren toward "busy" work within the organization or toward what he is accomplishing and doing? Does he believe the organization is where the Church of God is gathered and therefore not scattered? Are you being told how well organized and settled the church is becoming? If we understand who we are and we know where the church is, we will know the church is scattered and far from being settled!

Is God's will directed toward His church, the whole church, wherever His people are? God the Father draws us by the power of His spirit and calls us by His name. We are the Church of God, the called out ones of God. Is God's will directed to those He has called and chosen to bear His name? Ministers who lose the true sense of our unique calling lead brethren away from God's will for His church.

Are ministers who turn the attention of brethren away from other scattered brethren really ministers of God? Misleading by ministers is reflected in a recent answer given by one of the counsel members in UCG,aIA. The question was asked, "What is the work of God?" His answer was, "Whatever UCG,aIA is focusing on." This does not reflect a focus on the scattered church, but on exercising greater control over the brethren and ministry in their organization. God condemns the exercise of control over His people. Anyone who supports such tactics by silence or complacent yieldedness are themselves guilty before God.

What are you hearing? What is your minister's vision of doing God's will? Is the most important effort of the organization to reach out to scattered brethren or is it to bring new members into the organization? It is one thing to

warn the church and world about the times in which we live, but it is entirely another matter to try to "get" new people into the church.

Do you truly believe our loving God, the supreme parent of this universe, would bring new babes into a dysfunctional family? He would not! His focus and concern is toward His scattered people. That is first in importance. Anyone without such a vision should be questioned as to whether they are truly serving God, themselves, someone or something else.

Ask your minister where he stands. Does he boldly and clearly state his stand? Is he following Jesus Christ? You are to follow him only to the extent he is following Jesus Christ. Is his focus on the *called out ones*, the church, the Body of Christ which is currently scattered and devastated by the events of the past many years? Or is his focus narrow and restricted?

The devastation of the church (called out ones) over the past two decades has been caused by misguided ministers. Ministers have lacked integrity and have failed to stand on principle. Ministers have often compromised integrity by straddling the fence. They try to please people who have opposing views with each other rather than pleasing God by faithfully preaching His word in straightforward, uncompromising ways.

Many ministers have become corrupt over a struggle for political power within the church. Too many want unquestioned obedience from the members. Some want their own following or are more concerned about numbers than truth. And far too many just want to keep their job. God has been cleaning house and will continue to do so. Ministers should look at WCG, then learn and remember.

Ministers without integrity don't belong in the ministry.

A common lie of many ministers today is their proclamation of how good things are getting for the church and that the church is finding peace. Some within the church are repenting and finding peace, but overall the church itself is not at peace and most seem to be going back to sleep; this time by choice! Brethren must begin to exercise judgement in discerning between true and false ministers. False ministers within the church are the greatest threat to the church at the end of this age.

"The word of the Lord came unto me saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts. Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord" (Ezekiel 13:1-5, KJV).

Such prophecies have a dual fulfillment. One is for the nation of Israel and one is for the Israel of God, His church. Verse 5 makes it clear ministers have failed to stand in the gap for His people in time of battle. In our modern times within the church, there has never been a greater battle than what we have been living through for the past many years. Already over two thirds of the church, as we have known it, has gone by the wayside.

"Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The Lord saith it; albeit I have not spoken? Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God. And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see

vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the Lord God. Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace;..."(Ezekiel 13:7-10, KJV).

God's words are strong against ministers who lose the vision that comes from Him. One of the main reasons ministers have lost such vision is because they have forgotten who we are. They have forgotten how God works in our lives and for what purpose.

OUR SPECIAL CALLING

Far too many have lost the sense of a special calling we have been given by God the Father. The Worldwide Church of God began diluting and tearing down the simplicity of that basic process and truth toward the end of the 1980's.

People began to lose understanding and confidence in the basic tenets of how truth comes into our mind and how God works with us from the very beginning. We are *drawn* into a special relationship with God and Jesus Christ. *"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:"(John 6:44, KJV).* We are drawn by the personal involvement of our Father into a special relationship with Him and His son, Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note His love and patience with us from the outset, because even as the word "draw" reveals, there is resistance from our human nature from the very beginning. The Greek word for "draw" also means "to drag."

God has a plan and purpose He is working out which He predetermined before man was put on this earth. Being called to the first phase of His

plan is a calling to become firstfruits, in preparation for the first resurrection.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose [His predetermined plan for firstfruits]. For whom he did foreknow [He would later call people to become a part of His plan for firstfruits], he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son [predetermined firstfruits would be changed or transformed into a new creation], that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate [predetermined people would become the first in His plan of salvation], them he also called [to be a part of that plan]: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:28-30, KJV). The purpose of our calling is for us to become a part of the greatest work on earth. We become coworkers together with God as He builds the beginning of a very special family, His Family, the God Family!

"For through him [Jesus Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints [called out ones], and of the household [family] of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are [Gk.--are being] builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:18-22, KJV).

Does everyone see our special calling? We are asked that very question in I Corinthians 1:26. And because He has called us at this time we are able to be a part of a plan He ordained before man was ever put on this earth. We are firstfruits in that

plan, called to be part of the first resurrection. Because of His calling, we can understand His purpose for our lives. We can know things others cannot possibly know without themselves being called.

"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:" (I Corinthians 2:7, KJV). "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Corinthians 2:12-14, KJV).

Why do brethren forget how and why God called us and how He has worked with us? The only reason we understand any of God's plan and purpose is because He opened our minds by the power of His Spirit to freely give us what we have. We didn't figure it out on our own! When we heard the truth being preached we couldn't have understood it without God drawing us and giving us a special calling to become firstfruits. This is not hard to understand! But the actions of brethren and ministers alike reflect many have lost such understanding.

BRETHREN MISLED

In the scattered church today, ministers from different quarters are blatantly or unwittingly continuing the process WCG started of tearing down our calling. Ministers have failed to help brethren return to a strong confidence and excitement for their part in this special calling. Instead, some poke fun at, mislead, twist, or totally pervert the beauty of this truth.

One minister who has a large sermon tape program and extensive radio program, totally discredits the reality of how God works in our lives. His perception of a calling is that God is allowing His truth to be preached in this world and all who hear it can then choose to respond and come into the church. This is false! Just because someone hears the truth does not mean they can choose to respond at this time. The Father has to draw them with His Spirit before they can make such a choice. This ministers' subtlety mixed with an intellectual approach sways listeners into the deception that WCG practiced for so many years. If you would like a copy of that sermon to judge for yourself, just request it by asking for *the sermon that tears down our calling*. Ministers who teach such things generally have a vision of building up *their church* by means other than what God gives.

Another minister who has an extensive tape program stated in a sermon there are 100,000 Messianic Jews who have now come under the grace of Jesus Christ. Such statements cause confusion or lead people off course concerning the truth of God's calling. Brethren can begin believing Messianic Jews are called of God to be firstfruits for the purpose of the first resurrection. People will listen to ministers make such declarations and by doing so begin to veer off course. Do people bother looking at the beliefs of such groups to see if their minds have indeed been opened? It doesn't take much work to reach sound conclusions. One of the largest of these groups states they "believe in one God as declared in the Sh'ma who is eternally existent in three persons: God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit."

Other ministers also, unwittingly or ignorantly, lead brethren down the same path by their foolish or distracting methods. They point

brethren in directions that lead away from what should be sound understanding. Examples include those such has been mentions, which promote closer relationships with Messianic Jews or the kinds of Sabbath keeping groups that end up leading people away from truth and deeper understanding. Just because someone keeps the weekly Sabbath does not mean God is using them to call others. Nor does it mean God is using them to bring truth to those He has already called. Actually, such actions can be very dangerous and work against God's will and His instruction. It can amount to spiritual fornication.

It is indeed sad when people forget how God raised up the church in our time. Forgetting such realities often leads to being able to be easily deceived. The disciples were able to come to great understanding when they first began to witness the reality of what God was doing with the gentiles. God began to call gentiles and work in their lives, which was contrary to Jewish thinking. The disciples and many church leaders came together to hear about this great event. God had made it clear by what these men had witnessed that He was indeed working with the gentiles.

Can brethren today stand back and witness to the truth of how God has been working in the church in our time? The scattered people in God's church received what they have through one man. By what they witnessed, the early church had to admit God the Father was working with gentiles. Herbert W. Armstrong was used by God in a very powerful way! The witness of this is every member of the Body of Christ whose roots trace back to what God raised up through Herbert W. Armstrong. This is not said to glorify Herbert Armstrong any more than what God did for the gentiles in the early church is a matter

of trying to glorify them. It is simply a reality.

Today there are those who continue with their attacks and bitter attitudes against Herbert Armstrong, just as WCG began doing shortly after his death. Many do not grasp the subtlety in how that very thing begins to tear down some of the most basic understanding and appreciation of a special calling we have been given by God for the purpose of the first resurrection.

God did not raise up the modern day church by the Messianic Jews, nor many of the Sabbath keeping churches that so many seem to want to befriend these days. It is good to be friendly to others, but to what purpose and for what motive? Is it for the purpose of bringing them into the church? If so, then somewhere along the line, someone has forgotten how God works and that He is the one who does the calling. If the purpose of these closer relationships is to help bring such people into the church, then how do you know you are putting your effort where you are supposed to? Should not the same kind of effort be put on befriending the Catholic church, the Moonies, or some other body we may be overlooking? Is God now showing partiality by only calling those who have some affiliation with the Sabbath day? If that is the case, when did God begin changing the method He used for so many years previous?

On the other hand, if the purpose is not one of helping people come into God's church, then do some ministers suddenly believe these people are a part of the Church of God, called to the first resurrection, and are now a source of truth that we have overlooked in the past?

There are other misleading or misguided practices that sway the hearts of brethren, but can also be areas of distraction and watering down of a clear understanding of *our special*

calling. Should we be putting great effort and expense into reaching out to obscure Sabbath keeping groups in other parts of the world? Is the fact they live in another part of the world somehow a sign they need more help in order to come into the Church? Or are those people already considered part of those who are called to the first resurrection and themselves already in the Body of Christ? If that is the case, why do some of those people refuse to change from their Pentecostal beliefs? How long does it take someone who has the spirit of God working in them to repent of this practice and gladly embrace what is true? Those whom I have known in the United States who had a Pentecostal background, upon receiving the truth, repented and changed very quickly. And how long does it take someone, who has God's Spirit working in them, to embrace the Holy Days and the beautiful plan they reveal? My experience with people who have God's Spirit working in them is it doesn't take long at all.

What a shame brethren and especially ministers have forgotten how powerful God's Spirit is in leading us and converting us when the Father has called us. What a shame ministers have forgotten the basic tenets of the working of the Holy Spirit to lead us into such basic truth once we are called. Many seem to have forgotten why Herbert W. Armstrong had to leave the fellowship of a group of people who kept the Sabbath, but refused the clear truth contained in the Holy Days. Are some brethren flirting with fire by going back and picking up a relationship that ceased many years ago? Has the fruit of their ways changed and are they now embracing what they once refused?

This doesn't mean anyone should turn their back on others. But scriptural admonition cautions and leads us to what is sound in relationships. Ignoring such instruction can be tantamount to

spiritual adultery. If others are yielding to God's Spirit working in their lives, because they have been called by Him, they will repent of error and embrace truth when it is placed before them.

Nor should our calling be looked upon as a matter of pride. Because we have received a special calling, do we look down upon others who don't have what we have been given? Of course not! Our calling is not a matter of pride, but of humility and sobriety for what God has mercifully extended to us at this time. We don't look down on others for what they have not been given to see. But we must be *faithful* in using what we *have been given* to see. We do not expect those who have not been called to understand what we do. We are not to look down on them for what they can not help nor control.

The church today is made up of people who have been called out of many different religions and beliefs. But receiving such a rich calling from God should not make us feel guilty either. We must simply be responsible to respond to God's calling so that one day *we will be able* to help all these other people when God does begin to call them.

The subject of our calling is of deep and timely importance to God's scattered people. We need to be thoroughly grounded in how God's calling works in our lives. Otherwise we can be easily misguided and begin to envision serving God in ways He does not want. You need to be sure of your calling and what it means for your life.