

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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FAMINE! WHAT FAMINE?

Dysfunctional Denial - A succinct way to describe the condition of an increasing number of people in the Church of God is "*dysfunctional denial*." This term illustrates just how frail we are and attests to our true spiritual condition.

The principal reaction to troubles the church has experienced over the past several years has been a natural response due to human nature. Sad to say, this has often been the only reaction, even among the ministry. There has been a natural psychological response, rather than a spiritual one, to most of our trials. The reason for that is the basis for this article.

The church today is highly dysfunctional and the problem is only getting worse. We should be alert to such a trend and understand why this is happening. If we fail to grasp the realities of what we are experiencing, we are likely to become victims. But with the help of God, this does not have to happen.

Because we have tended to react carnally to our problems, we have become highly dysfunctional. Many brethren, including ministers, will not acknowledge that we are a scattered Church. Those who deny such a scattering are themselves the product of a scattering. We have also tended to treat others in the Body of Christ in a dysfunctional manner, showing little or no love toward those who are Christ's. Yet God says, "*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. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments*" (I John 5:1-2, KJV).

We have not done well in this regard, often failing to love others in the scattered Body as we should. This simply reflects the state of dysfunction

in many spiritual lives, which means we really are not as spiritual as we think we are. A major part of the problem is that we do not tend to see ourselves realistically. Therein comes the "*denial*."

The ability to see oneself realistically --as God sees us-- is a matter of the spirit, His spirit. It is only natural or carnal for us to deny our true spiritual state. It is a normal consequence of man's selfish nature to "pass the buck" concerning personal responsibility and to also deny ones own culpability.

Whether brethren will acknowledge it or not, we are suffering from *dysfunctional denial*. Let's be alert and understand *why* this is true.

FAMINE?

One way to grasp our state of *dysfunctional denial* is by better understanding a common problem being experienced within today's church. This takes us back to the title of this article: "Famine! What Famine?" Many brethren do not acknowledge the Church is scattered, and even more fail to recognize the factors that have led to a scattering.

The conditions that have led to the scattering of God's people can be likened to a *famine*. God's word declares, "*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord:*" (Amos 8:11, KJV). Perhaps these words do not specifically refer to what we have been experiencing as a church. But then again, perhaps they do! Regardless, the *condition* described in those words does apply to what we have been enduring.

What occurred in the late 80s and early 90s under the Tkach administration certainly can be

described as conditions of famine for God's people. It was a famine that became stronger with each passing year. By the time 1995 rolled around, two thirds of the Church had gone by the wayside. People either returned to the religious beliefs out of which they had been called or they simply abandoned all religious convictions. True spiritual food was becoming scarce; brethren were being starved.

The church has been living through a devastating time of spiritual famine and drought. Barely a third of the Church, as we knew it, can still be accounted for and about half of those are still in WCG. In the scattered groups and organizations, growing numbers of brethren are experiencing spiritual malnourishment. One of the most common comments made by brethren who are searching for spiritual food is that they are starving where they are presently attending. The spiritual health of a congregation is generally a reflection of the spiritual stability, or instability, of its pastor or organization.

There are many examples of the worsening famine that is affecting so many of God's people. The ability to see and understand what is happening is a spiritual one. A host of ministers and members alike will deny that there is a famine now or that there has ever been one. Yet the evidence cries out in volumes for those willing to see and hear. Pride leads to denial. Denial leads to dysfunction.

By simply considering the numbers of people still remaining in WCG we should be able to understand there are few who are likely to shake free from what that organization has become. The August issue of *The Worldwide News* makes it clear the WCG is now an integral part of mainstream evangelical Protestantism. Half of the remaining third of the Church is in

WCG. There will be few who survive the drought that has overcome her.

A rough calculation indicates that barely 18 percent of the Church as we have known it has retained the fundamental truths of the Bible. *Famine?* Can we liken this condition to a famine? Haven't people been spiritually starved? How many more must waste away and fall by the wayside before we come to grips with the reality of the situation?

Just how healthy is this remaining 18 percent which still has some ties to our basic foundational teachings? It isn't healthy! Many seem to be slipping deeper and deeper into lethargy and complacency. As with Matthew 25, in the parable of the virgins, all 10 virgins had to be shaken out of drowsiness or sleep. Both the wise and foolish had opportunity to repent. But it is so easy to fall asleep again. That is what is happening to much of the Church today! (For a deeper understanding of this condition, you may wish to request the taped sermon series on "Exercising God's Spirit," Parts 1-3.) Among those who are scattered into smaller groups, there is no lack of false doctrines and strange teachings. What is the real percentage of the Church that still remains faithful? How large is the real remnant, *"which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ?"* (Revelation 12:17). Is it possible the actual figure is approaching 10 percent, 7 percent, or even less?

The stark reality of the situation should move us to deeper personal repentance, followed by a renewed zeal to recapture what has been lost!

It would be good for us to be reminded of what was written in the February 1998 issue of *News Watch*. The following section, titled "Lamentations," is taken from that issue. It is important for us to rehearse some key passages of the book of Lamentations, because famine-like conditions can affect all of us.

LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations prophesies well of our attitude. We have become hardened and dull of hearing. As God's people, we have much for which we must repent. But who really believes that? Not many!

Let's look at what Lamentations has to say. *"How the gold has lost its luster, the fine gold become dull! The sacred gems are scattered at the head of every street. How the precious sons of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter's hands!"* (Lamentations 4:1-2, NIV). The church has become dull in every way, especially dull of hearing. We are no longer bright lights reflecting the ways of our God to the sick world around us. Indeed, the *"sacred gems"* (NIV), or as *The Living Bible* states it, *"the inlaid Temple walls"* are scattered. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states, *"the precious sons of Zion... have been thrown out like broken pottery and lie scattered..."* In Daniel 12:7, the Hebrew word for "scattering" means *"to beat in pieces"* or *"to shatter"* like a piece of pottery (Psalms 2:9). God's people are NOT what they used to be. Our condition is deteriorating rapidly!

"Even the jackals feed their young, but not my people, Israel. They are like cruel desert ostriches, heedless of their babies' cries. The children's tongues stick to the roofs of their mouths for thirst, for there is not a drop of water left. Babies cry for bread but no one can give them any" (Lamentations 4:3-4, TLB).

There are a very few ministers who are genuinely feeding the church as shepherds should. Too many are busy painting false pictures of "peace and safety." Instead of openly helping brethren deal realistically and soberly with the trials before them, many focus on the facade of how much is being accomplished in "the work." Circulation numbers and membership rolls seem to carry greater importance.

Some ministers are becoming so complacent that there is no zeal and excitement for preaching the Word of God. Sermons become stale and stagnant. Still others are trying to strengthen their hold on the congregations they are supposed to be "serving and leading," instead of "ruling and controlling!"

Brethren starve while many of the shepherds, like the ostrich, are sticking their head in the sand and not hearing the cries of the flock. They are not tuned into the real needs of the brethren.

"Those who used to eat fastidiously are begging in the streets for anything at all. Those brought up in palaces now scratch in garbage pits for food. For the sin of my people is greater than that of Sodom, where utter disaster struck in a moment without the hand of man" (Lamentations 4:5-6, TLB).

We have passed the time of feasting on an overabundance of spiritual food. Most of the church now suffers famine because of the condition of the ministry. When God's people are hungry and not being fed, they will go out in search of food. Unfortunately, unsound doctrines abound and too many are unwittingly feeding in "garbage pits" (some translations, more graphically, call them "dung hills").

Brethren are becoming easy prey to charlatans, false ministers, and crackpots who are only making merchandise of them. One of the primary purposes of *News Watch* is to warn brethren and expose these kinds of dangers to God's scattered flock.

BLIND TO FAMINE

The inability to see oneself or the Church realistically is the result of a particular spiritual condition. That condition is addressed by Jesus Christ in the message to the last of the seven Churches in Revelation. This is a body of people whose primary problem is

the inability to see themselves realistically.

Instead of acknowledging the reality of their weakened state, these brethren see themselves as spiritually rich and increasing in goods, and certainly not suffering from conditions of famine.

The Church has been spiritually devastated and the devastation continues. Some hold onto the basics of knowledge and understanding God has given, but fail to grow and build upon that foundation. In such an environment, brethren become stagnate and complacent; of course, this only contributes to the downward spiral.

An attitude failing to recognize its real needs reflects a spirit of pride produced by self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency. This lukewarm spirit leads to more complacency and deeper lethargy. Such attitudes within the church, especially the ministry, cause the famine to continue spreading.

Jesus Christ says He knows our "works." Today, people become more concerned with what they call "the work" rather than striving to grow and improve their own works. We are judged by our own works, by how we use and develop what God has given us.

We are judged by how we live God's way of life, how we apply godly principles in our dealings and attitudes toward one another. Yet how many are concerned with brethren who are scattered? It appears as though it must be rather easy to *turn away* from scattered brethren while *trying to attract* others who are more removed from our conscience. There seems to be a great rush to reach out to others with magazines and television programs, rather than focus concern on those who are already a part of the Body of Christ. Magazines and TV have their place . . . if the rest of our house is in order. But which comes first? What does God say?

"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his

household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (I Timothy 5:8, NKJ). Doesn't this scripture also apply to our spiritual household? Are we only to be concerned with those who become a part of our physical corporation? Or in such times of distress, especially in famine, shouldn't we be exerting greater effort and committing more resources to reach out to our own scattered spiritual family with food and nourishment? Paul makes it very clear in Galatians 6:10: *"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."*

Remember, there is no middle ground in loving our brethren. According to the apostle John, we either love our brother or we hate him. It is that simple! If we fail to love our brother, then we actually express hate. *"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"* (I John 3:14-15, NKJ). Verse 14 is captured well in the Phillips translation saying, *"The man without love for his brother is still living in death."*

Understanding this, we should not act as though we have a true relationship with God while ignoring the needs of the scattered Body of Christ! *"If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also"* (I John 4:20-21, NKJ).

In times of such specific distress upon the Body of Christ, shouldn't far greater resources be used for the household of faith, to feed the flock with nourishing food, to help strengthen that which has been weakened, to help heal those we have

wounded, to help search out our brothers and sisters who have been lost or driven away? Such a "work" cannot be accomplished by those in *dysfunctional denial*. The prophetic warning of Ezekiel 34:3-4 applies to everyone in the Body of Christ.

Is it "the work" or "our works" by which God will judge us? Do we understand what God's Word has to say about this subject? There is a good Bible Study on the subject we would like to make available to you. It is titled "The Work" and is given by Dave Havir of the United Church of God, Big Sandy.

Today's church is faltering from *dysfunctional denial*. There is a cure. It is what Jesus Christ told the Laodicean church, *"be zealous therefore, and repent"* (Revelation 3:19, KJV). NW

NEWS WATCH of the WORLD

FAMINE! WHAT FAMINE?

Whether it is in the church or in this world, people tend to be oblivious to the realities which surround them. Not only is this true, but many of these same people choose *not* to know. People are choosing to live in denial in order to sustain their image of "peace and safety."

Spiritual famine has been real for the church. Over the ages, physical famine has been oscillating through it's natural cycles on this earth. Prophecies about famine, which the church has been experiencing spiritually, may be entering a new phase of *physical* fulfillment for this world.

This may prove to be an incredible paradox at a time when grain prices are sinking to record-breaking lows. In addition, countries are dumping last

year's reserves onto world markets. In the publication *Prairie Grains*, the Executive Vice President of the Montana Grain Growers Association, Randy Johnson, said the world has about a 75 day reserve of wheat. Referring to these figures, Johnson stated, *"In historic terms, the world supply of wheat is still very short."*

At the same time, weather around the globe is producing record setting conditions. These are not the normal record-breaking cycles experienced periodically in regional areas of the globe, but these are now occurring simultaneously throughout the world.

Here in the U.S., large areas are experiencing intense heat and little rain. This has led to some devastating fires like those in Florida and has also produced severe crop damage. At the same time, the worst heat wave in half a century has been sweeping across much of Europe and the Middle East. Raging fires are being battled in Portugal and Greece, especially around the area of Athens, where hundreds of homes have been destroyed. What often goes unreported in these areas of the world is the subsequent loss to crops.

The United Nations has reported that in the Sudan alone, 2.5 million people are facing starvation. However at the same time, Brazil is reporting 10 million people there are facing conditions of starvation. North Korea has been experiencing several years of drought, along with many other regions of Asia. In an article about Vietnam devaluing its currency again, the Associated Press (8/7/98) reports, *"Vietnam has been under simultaneous pressure to open its markets to attract more foreign investment and to devalue its currency to give a boost to export-dependent industries, especially after nine months of bad weather hit crops hard."*

Crops need rain in due season. However, on a worldwide scale, crops are taking a beating by either too much or too little rain.

"More than 2,000 people have died in China's long season of summer flooding. Floods caused by rains that fell earlier and heavier than usual have lifted the Yangtze River to its highest level since 1954, when catastrophic flooding killed 30,000 people. After weeks of rain, dikes along the Yangtze were saturated and threatened to give way at any time in thousands of places. Millions of residents and soldiers patrolled around the clock, on the lookout for cracks or signs of weakness" (Associated Press, 8/6/98).

The AP (8/7/98) further reports, *"China began evacuating more than 30,000 people today from land along the raging Yangtze River that could be deliberately flooded in a desperate bid to safeguard areas down-stream. With the Yangtze at record levels and threatening to rise higher, officials were preparing to divert floodwaters along a section of the 3,900-mile-long river described as the most treacherous. The death toll continues to rise as reports are received from flooded areas."*

Heavy rains and flooding produce the same results as drought, which is the destruction of crops. Consider the level of destruction to crops in a report from the Boston Globe (8/7/98). *"Despite a series of dikes along the Yangtze, the overflow of the world's third-longest river has affected 240 million people - one in five Chinese citizens, or a population the size of the United States. About 14 million people have been left homeless by landslides, mudslides, and toppled buildings, and an estimated 65 million acres of crops -- or one-sixth of China's farmland -- have been damaged or destroyed, according to Fan Bojun, vice minister of Civil Affairs."*

Those figures have changed dramatically in only three days as shown by a report today from Reuters (8/10/98). *"With no end in sight to flooding along China's Yangtze river, an official said on Monday that the*

devastation has far exceeded that caused by floods in 1954, still remembered as the worst in the country's modern history. Whereas 18.88 million people were affected by the 1954 floods, 240 million have been directly affected by this summer's high waters. In addition, farmland covering 21.53 million hectares (83,100 square miles)--the combined areas of England and Ireland--is currently underwater, versus 3.17 million hectares (12,200 square miles) in 1954. This year's floods have so far damaged or destroyed 17.63 million houses, compared with 4.28 million in 1954, according to ministry figures."

Reuters (8/10/98) reports, *"Heavy rains returned to South Korea on Monday, hampering search and recovery work after some of the worst flooding on record had left 234 people dead and 91 missing. The disaster had also left more than 121,000 people homeless."*

Another article by Reuters (8/8/98) says, *"France, after suffering one of the wettest summers on record, has been hit by an unexpected heatwave."*

Article after article, reports of record-breaking rains or lack thereof continue to pour in from around the world. The past few months have witnessed crop devastation on levels that are going to have a powerful impact on the world's food supply. We may be witnessing the beginning of conditions for famine with unprecedented proportions in human history.