

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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NEWS WATCH of the Church

"WHERE IS GOD?"

A question begging to be answered in the Church today is, "Where is God?" Far too many people would not even ponder such a question. Why? Because the Church has strayed farther away from God than many suspect.

To get a clear perspective on why we need to address this topic, it would be wise to look at some of the problems we face. The overwhelming majority of problems within the Church today are the result of sin. Sin produces confusion, and the Church is filled with confusion. This leads ultimately to the question, "Where is God?"

Later we will examine three areas of confusion within the Church that will help us answer this question about God's presence. Our aim is to provide the kind of help that so many brethren desperately need to be able to righteously discern and try the spirits.

God tells the Church to be trying the spirits to be certain they are of Him. But our actions indicate that we aren't really taking God's instruction seriously. Although most of us applied this to the world's religious beliefs and practices when we were first learning God's truth, over the years we have neglected this vital key. But the admonition to try the spirits is for the Church. Do we really know where God is? It is vitally important that we be able to discern!

GROPING IN THE DARK

Confusion and uneasiness continue to grow within the scattered Church of God. Many have returned from the Feast with conflicting reports and perceptions, even when they have attended the same sites and heard the same messages. Why such confusion?

Sensitivities seem to be increasing, not decreasing. Deep wounds are not healing. Some ministers, becoming frustrated by the growing sensitivities of brethren, have reacted with

impatience, criticism, control, and compromise.

Rather than speak from deeply-held spiritual convictions of what is right according to God's Word, scores of ministers have been attempting to keep peace by trying to appease opposing groups and beliefs within the Church. They work to maintain a pseudo peace.

This situation has led many ministers to recoil into a shell of self-protection, self-preservation and self-enhancement, while distancing themselves from genuine care and concern for the brethren. Rather than standing firm in preaching sound truth from God, some have resorted to carnal administrations in a feeble attempt to keep the Church "under control."

Instead of standing firm in God's Word, many ministers have grown weary of dealing with opposition and difficult questions. But they often fail to grasp that their own practices have spawned a great deal of the adverse reaction and heightened sensitivities among the brethren. The easy way out is to just feed the brethren pabulum in hopes that the pseudo peace can be maintained. Sadly, that is actually what most brethren seem to prefer. Many have become so weary in the Christian fight that they aren't willing to face the hard truth, preferring instead to hear smooth things.

Many brethren and ministers alike want to run from the fight that is before them. This is usually manifested by "burying one's head in the sand." This naturally produces a sort of spiritual sterility. Unfaithful and controlling methods by the ministry have led to their own spiritual emasculation. Instead of being zealous in serving God's people, standing firm and boldly speaking the Word of God, ministers are resorting to false ways that lead to spiritual stupor. The result is that they finally fall back into the sleep from which they had been shaken not too long ago. Isaiah aptly describes this situation:

"His watchmen are blind, they are all ignorant; they are all dumb dogs,

they cannot bark [they fail to cry out to His people about real danger that threatens them]; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber [it is easier to ignore danger coming upon others by turning inward and pampering the self]" (Isaiah 56:10, NKJ). The Living Bible says, "For the leaders of my people--the Lord's watchmen, his shepherds--are all blind to every danger. They are featherbrained and give no warning when danger comes. They love to lie there, love to sleep, to dream." (NIV--"they lie around and dream, they love to sleep.")

Rather than protecting and warning God's people, these ministers focus on themselves and all the work they are doing to build up themselves and the organization they serve. They make great plans for the future and try to get others to focus on those dreams. Turning away from reality and the battle before us, people begin to focus on dreams (all in the name of God and doing His work) of better times and restoring the good old days. This can easily become intoxicating, causing blurred spiritual vision and impaired judgment.

Continuing, *"Yes, they are greedy dogs which never have enough. And they are shepherds who cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his own gain, from his own territory. 'Come,' one says, 'I will bring wine, and we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; tomorrow will be as today, and much more abundant'" (Is. 56:11-12, NKJ).*

Yes, the ministry has been turning inward. Many are concerned about job security and retirement. As a result, compromise subtly encroaches on sound standards of shepherding, integrity, moral leadership, faithful administration, and sound-mindedness. Self-preservation, control, compromise, and other sins become the norm and cannot be recognized nor admitted because sin leaves one groping in the dark. Ministers get caught up in petty jealousies, worrying that brethren listen to other ministers (even within their

own organizations). They become territory conscious and numbers conscious, all out of selfish gain.

To live in such a lie, ministers must work to convince brethren to believe the same lies. They try to get brethren to focus on corporate dreams of adding to the Church (using numbers to validate their approach), instead of faithfully caring for the Church by preparing brethren for the battles ahead and warning of true dangers that surround them now. Isaiah described the situation very well. Many falsely claim that their organization is doing quite well and future planning will insure that things will become even better.

SORROW, WARNINGS & WOE

But God's message to the Church at the end of this age does not show things getting better once scattering begins. Few ministers and brethren recognize the relevance of prophecies concerning the Israel of God, spiritual Israel, the Church. Much of what is pertinent to our time and current condition is found in Ezekiel. The message for today is not a lie about how things are going to get better for the Church before Jesus Christ returns. Instead it is like the message for the Church found in Ezekiel. God tells us to hear what He says and heed His warnings.

"Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe" (Ez. 2:9-10, NKJ). The word of God that follows in the book of Ezekiel does not proclaim peace and prosperity for the Church, but devastation, sorrow, and doom. The reason for such stern warnings is because of sin and rebellion in the Church and a refusal to repent!

Pride and rebellion have become so entrenched in the Church that the resulting lethargy and complacency toward God's warnings is shocking! Brethren seemingly find it impossible to be moved by God's stern pronounce-

ments. How many are truly shocked by the devastation of nearly 85 percent of the Church as we have known it? Thousands are no longer holding faithful to the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Not only are people unmoved, many even refuse to believe it has really happened. The sobering truth is that more devastation is on the way. Where will it strike next? Perhaps a little closer to you?

SUPPORTING LIES

A large number of brethren are in such a spiritual stupor that they continue to support and follow ministers who lie to them. Where is the spiritual insight to righteously discern between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and lies? Brethren choose to follow men who preach peace and safety, and that tomorrow will be better yet!

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The Lord says: You will have peace.' And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you'" (Jeremiah 23:16-17, NIV).

To refuse to hear God's words is to despise Him. Brethren are encouraged by the ministry to support their fanciful plans for the future that are designed to lead them out of all their hard times. They are told that by their unified support God will bless their efforts. On the contrary, they will suffer greater trouble for following and supporting such false hopes.

"For these evil men deceive my people by saying, 'God will send peace,' when that is not my plan at all! My people build a flimsy wall and these prophets praise them for it--and cover it with whitewash!" (Ezekiel 13:10, TLB).

"Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," says the Lord, 'and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall

not profit this people at all,' says the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:32, NKJ). The Living Bible makes it plain: *"Their made-up dreams are flagrant lies that lead my people into sin."*

"Hear this word which I take up against you, this lamentation, O house of Israel: The virgin of Israel has fallen: she will rise no more. She lies forsaken on her land; there is no one to raise her up. [This will be fulfilled for physical Israel and is now being fulfilled in spiritual Israel. Because of pride and sin, the Church will not be able to return to her former days of old, in size, strength, nor function.] For thus says the Lord God: 'The city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel.' [This is speaking of the last third that is scattered as spoken of in Ezekiel 5 and 20. Only a tithe of the last third will come through the devastation.] For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: 'Seek Me and live; but do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing'" (Amos 5:1-5, NKJ).

God warns against looking to the established religious places for deliverance. Who would have ever believed so many in the Worldwide Church of God would return to the captivity from which they had once been delivered? We are warned not to look to religious places for our deliverance, because in some cases they will go into captivity or simply come to nothing. We are to look first and foremost to God, being loyal to Him above anyone or anything else. The environment in some church corporations makes that almost impossible to achieve because their structures require a kind of allegiance that is actually spiritual idolatry. When economic collapse hits this nation, people will be tried and tested as to where their true allegiance is.

As God says through Amos, *"Seek Me and live"* (Amos 5:4). Most of the Church has been overcome by the devastation we have been experiencing.

And yet there are still many more who will hold out in pride and be overcome by continuing devastation. But it does not have to be that way, brethren, because we can make a choice to survive! This will require true humility and repentance on our part.

God promises to clean up the Church. Of the last third scattered He says, *"I will make you pass under the rod [a tithe of those scattered], and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me"* (Ezekiel 20:37-38, NKJ).

"Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:14-15, NKJ). Those who will humble themselves through the refining process that has come upon the last third of the scattered Church can be a part of the prophesied remnant, the small remainder that is left of the present-day Church.

SCATTERED CONFUSION

We don't have to look far to see great confusion within the Church. Confusion is not of God; it is the result of pride and sin. So we must ask, "Where is God?" Do you know? Are you able to readily discern what is of God and what is not? Your ability to survive depends on your ability to discern where God is and where He is not. Too many in the Church today lack such spiritual discernment!

The first of three areas we are going to examine is that of "scattered confusion." Such exists because some actually deny that there is a scattering of God's people; they are looking to some future event that will fulfill such a prophecy. On the other hand, some say it has already occurred and is still going on. Both cannot be right. So where is God in this matter of scattering?

Do you have the ability to discern the scattered condition of the Church or do you deny it has happened? Do you know others, including ministers, who

deny that the Church has been scattered? If your discernment is correct and you recognize the true condition of the Church as being scattered, then can you also discern the spirit of one who denies such a condition?

Denying that a scattering has occurred is serious business! To deny a scattering is to deny other members of the Body of Christ. And that is exactly what many ministers are doing. There are those who will only give lip service to the possibility of brethren being scattered or being in organizations other than their own. Many believe these other brethren must be with them, in their organization, or they are not true brethren. Some are quite vocal about this and will not have anything to do with others who are not a part of their organization. *"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments"* (1 John 5:1-2, NKJ). *"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates [fails to love] 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?"* (1 John 4:20, NKJ).

Where is God in such a matter? Can you tell? Are you able to discern the spirit of those who turn their backs on other scattered brethren?

Some brethren and ministers are still foolishly looking forward to a time when there will be a great falling away (the apostasy). *"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away [apostasy] comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition"* (2 Thes. 2:2, NKJ). If some are waiting for a greater falling away than what we have experienced, then they are putting the return of Christ a long way off!

Do a little rough calculating on your own. If our attendance in Worldwide reached a high of about 150,000 people, where have all those people gone? The overwhelming majority are no longer associated with Worldwide

nor with those who fled from her. How big is the organization you support? How big is Worldwide? Even of what still remains, how many in Worldwide are actually holding onto the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ? How big is the largest organization of those who fled the apostasy? Even if you put all the scattered groups together (which will not happen), it would take a long, long time before the totals surpassed 150,000 so there could be a future fulfillment of a greater apostasy and scattering of God's people. As an aside, it should be noted that in general, organizations are not growing but decreasing in numbers. When most "growth" does occur it is attributable to migration, as disgruntled and confused brethren go from one group to another.

Every organization, which is no longer part of the Worldwide Church of God, is the product of those who have been scattered out from her. Other groups have emerged and been scattered even more as a result of coming out of some of the first to be scattered. And many have wandered from group to group. The scattering should not be so hard to acknowledge, yet some are still in denial.

Scattering is not the result of obedience or of our ways being pleasing to God. Who is to blame for all this scattering? We all hold a share of the blame and must repent! That is God's message to the Church. However, greater judgment does fall on those who have caused the most damage. Certainly the greatest condemnation of sin falls on the man who was most responsible for making the decision to change the thrust, major doctrines and beliefs of the Church. Most will not even acknowledge this reality, but seem shocked to think someone would suggest such a thing. Many hold fond memories of this man. There are many who think far more kindly of Joseph Tkach, Sr. than they do of Herbert W. Armstrong. As a matter of fact, a number of brethren in various scattered groups speak of Herbert Armstrong as though he were the man of sin who turned the Church

against God. Where is God? Can you discern the spirits?

At this juncture we should not fail to give honorable mention to the ministers who have selflessly served God's people. But then again, where are all of them? One would surely think it could not be all that hard to find ministers who have remained faithful as sacrificing shepherds who are willing to put their necks on the line for God's people. But the sad reality is that too many ministers abuse their power, control and manipulate brethren, compromise for the sake of pseudo peace, or are quick to switch allegiance in order to insure a continuing paycheck. Where is God? Are you able to discern between true ministers and false ministers or at least unrepentant ministers?

God is not pleased with self-serving and pride-filled leaders of His people: *"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord. Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: 'Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,' declares the Lord"* (Jer. 23:1-2, NIV).

"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 'as I live,' says the Lord God, 'surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock'--therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them'" (Ezekiel 34:7-10, NKJ).

Isaiah speaks of an attitude and spirit which reflects so much of today's Church and its willingness to follow

ministers who are self-serving and oppressive: *"This is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord; Who say to the seers, 'Do not see,' and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. [NIV--"Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions."] Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.' [TLB--"Forget all this gloom; we've heard more than enough about your 'Holy One of Israel' and all he says."] Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: 'Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perversity, and rely on them [TLB--"Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in frauds and lies and won't repent"], therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, a bulge in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant"* (Isaiah 30:9-13, NKJ). The Living Bible says, *"Therefore calamity will come upon you suddenly, as upon a bulging wall that bursts and falls; in one moment it comes crashing down."*

DOCTRINAL CONFUSION

Brethren are being bombarded with an astonishing array of conflicting doctrines and teachings. Some of the larger groups have held closer to our common doctrines of the past, but even there we see problems. Some hold on to basic doctrines but fail to build upon them and grow in spiritual understanding. They become virtually stagnant. One holds to the basic doctrines but tends to water them down and take a liberal approach, leaning heavily toward the way Worldwide was back in the late 1980s. Another large group claims to hold on to the truth, but has a strong leaning toward prophecy that oftentimes borders on the eccentric. This group has turned inward to the point of taking on some cult-like tendencies.

Is it any wonder brethren become confused when they see such divergence? And to make matters worse, among the larger groups the

administration or teaching of individual ministers may vary dramatically from one part of the country to another within the same organization. Is all this of God? Where is God? Are you able to discern which ministers are sound-minded and which must repent of the direction they are going? And if they must repent of the way they are going, should you follow or support them? Where is God? You need to know!

Among the smaller groups, there is even greater turmoil when it comes to doctrinal confusion. It seems no one is immune to such attacks.

This kind of confusion in the Church is like a smorgasbord. Pick your date with postponements, various calendar calculations, Pentecost, Passover (13, 14, 14/15, or 15). Of course there is much more on the menu, like conflicting arguments about government, ministers (need, no need, or we are all priests, or if you are over 50 you are an elder), multiples of 666 to count when great events are going to occur (and add any discretionary number to the mix to make it fit), our calling (whether the Father is really involved in drawing us or salvation is open to anyone who will hear), God is working in all Sabbatarian groups (because of having the Sabbath in common, there must be Christians in all such groups, or perhaps we can at least be better friends with such things in common), a need to go back to our "roots" in Judaism to become more spiritual (looking especially to Messianic Jews, because they have not only the Sabbath, but also some of the same holy day observances and, of course, they accept Jesus Christ), and on and on goes the menu.

With so many conflicting ideas circulating through the scattered Church, is it any wonder brethren are confused? Indeed, where is God? How sharp is your spiritual discernment? Have you fallen prey to some of the deceptions that make up the great smorgasbord of doctrinal confusion?

ORGANIZATIONAL CONFUSION

In this edition of *News Watch* we are addressing three areas of confusion to

stress the importance of our need to truly know where God is and turn from where He is not. These are especially dangerous times for God's people. Overall, the tendency is for brethren to become weaker, not stronger. This certainly applies with regard to "organizational confusion."

In this section we will not delve as deeply into the subject as we could. If you would like to study the subject more thoroughly, we invite you to request a Feast sermon titled "The Government of God on Earth."

Brethren can become quite confused when they begin listening to all the different ideas about government put forth by competing organizations. Who is right? Where is God? Is God as divided as it would appear when listening to so many conflicting views on the subject? And after all, doesn't each organization believe it has the best structure, or even the only correct structure?

Some believe organization or government is all about the proper structure. The pendulum swings far and wide on this subject. On one end we are told that only one man can be at the top in a kind of hierarchy, while at the other end it is claimed that such structure is of Satan, of the gentiles, or the way of the Nicolaitans. And between these two is another great smorgasbord. Where is God in all this?

We just observed the Feast of Tabernacles which pictures the government of God coming to this earth. Is that government based on structure? Is that what the gospel message is all about? Have people forgotten what the gospel truly is?

We know the words, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come." That Kingdom is one of government, but it is not based on structure. Structure is a function of any organization or government. God's Kingdom and the good news about it is not a message about structure and organization, but about God's family and *how His family functions!*

Is God's government established upon rank, administrative structure or

control? Some seem to think so. Do such things produce the fruits of unity and closeness God desires in His family? Obviously not!

God's government, like all governments, is based on law. Even corporations have laws (bylaws). The reason governments fail is because of the nature of man. Man uses law for selfish motives. Some church organizations do the same. What is unique about God's government is that His law is based on His love (*agape*), which is genuine outgoing concern. This concept is completely alien to human nature and it is difficult for brethren to practice it within the Church. Any government or organization (corporation) is only as good as the integrity and morality of those who administer it and submit to it. In the Church, the exercising of God's kind of love is the only thing that will produce godly results.

God's kind of love has been dissipating in the Church. It has been waxing cold. Therefore ideas and concepts about organization and government have become confused as well. The understanding of how God's kind of love functions has become dim in the hearts of many brethren.

As a case in point, it might be good to comment on the obsession with the name *Philadelphia*. Many want to see themselves as Philadelphian, because they believe it sounds so good. But God's Kingdom is not based on *philia*. That is a selfish human love that can't even be compared to the magnificent love of God. *Philia* can produce humanly unified fraternities, lodges, clubs, social organizations, and even worldly churches, but it is not God's kind of love. Bearing the name of a Philadelphian is not nearly as high a commendation as what God said to some in Thyatira: "*I know your works, love [agape], service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first*" (Revelation 2:19, NKJ).

If ministers and brethren use biblical terminology to jockey for position, despising those whom they see as inferior, is it any wonder people have

strayed so far from understanding what the gospel message is all about? If all we desire to attain to is the best form of human love, then what was the purpose of the death of Jesus Christ? Was it so we could be forgiven of sin and then seek to achieve the highest levels of human love, a kind of love that is still selfish by nature? Too many failed to grasp Mr. Herbert Armstrong's analogy of the love of a mother for her child as an example of the greatest human love. But as he also explained, that is not God's kind of love, for that mother is incapable of loving other children in the same manner. Where is God? Brethren, are we able to discern the most basic of spiritual matters?

True unity and harmony of spirit is possible only when we have the mind of God, which is built upon and motivated by His way of love (*agape*). This kind of love cannot be worked up by human beings. For that kind of love to exist in a person's life, God must be dwelling in him or her! Then and only then can any structure, organization, government or family function and prosper as God intends.

It is all really quite basic: "*In this was manifested the love [agape] of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him . . . If we love [agape] one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. . . . And we have known and believed the love [agape] that God hath to us. God is love [agape]; and he that dwelleth in love [agape] dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love [Gk. for "our love" is "agape with us"] made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world"* (1 Jn. 4:9, 12-13, 16-17, KJV).

Those are powerful words! Do you understand the depth and beauty of what they say? Can you discern such love? To do so demands a close relationship with God, being truly yielded to Him in genuine humility--by God living in us. Too many people in God's Church have allowed His love to

wax cold in their lives. The result is the growing confusion over organization and government that we see today.

WHERE IS GOD?

Do you know where God is? If you do, are you living by faith and obeying what He says? Are you seeking Him and drawing closer to Him? Are you fleeing idolatry? Are you exercising spiritual discernment? You are the only one who can honestly answer such questions before your God.

Are you practicing 1 John 4:1 which tells us to "try the spirits" whether they are of God or not? If you try those spirits, do you then act upon the answer that is revealed?

The areas of confusion gripping the Church that we have covered in this issue of *News Watch* are the results of people yielding themselves to spirits other than God. In some cases it might be a matter of yielding to a demonic or satanic spirit. Most often it is simply a matter of yielding to a selfish human spirit rather than the glorious power of God's Spirit. If Christ is dwelling in us, it will be evident by how we live. As we saw in the verses quoted above, when this experience is true *in us*, then the result will be God's love actively bearing fruit in and through us.

On the other hand, if we yield ourselves to some other spirit, our actions will reveal that Jesus Christ is not presently coming into and living through us (our flesh). *"And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come [Gk. "is coming"--neither past nor future tense, but perfect participle active in Gk.] in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world"* (1 Jn. 4:3, NKJ). John continues to speak to the Church, not about the world, but about those who are not yielding themselves to the power of God's Spirit which is supposed to be living in and through us. He said, *"For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming [again, neither past nor future tense, but present passive, middle participle] in the flesh. This is a*

deceiver and an antichrist" (2 Jn. 7, NKJ). To live this way is to deny Christ and be without the Father, without God's Spirit working in us. *"Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the son does not have the Father either..."* (1 Jn. 2:22-23).

Is it any wonder the Church is in such a state of confusion and scattered to the four winds? What a shame! We have much to repent of and much to change. Are we willing to exercise spiritual discernment? Our willingness to do so has everything to do with our future spiritual welfare. Are we going to allow ourselves to drift into a spiritual stupor by refusing to address or admit where God is working and where He is not working? You can know and have confidence in your decisions. These are life-and-death decisions! Some will feel this is sensationalism or being too dramatic. Be careful, sleep has already overcome the overwhelming majority of the brethren.

It is time for each of us to come to grips with the question, "Where is God?" **NW**

BE ON GUARD!

In this issue of *News Watch*, we are introducing a new segment called "Be On Guard!" It will appear from time to time to point out new doctrinal views and other spiritual issues of which brethren need to beware.

In this issue, we will focus our attention on part of a letter sent out by Les McCullough of the UCGIA. Please keep in mind that since this letter is not to a specific individual, but to all elders and wives, it falls into a public realm and therefore is not of a private nature, but is open to the Church. Such is the case with this letter sent out as an update on UCGIA Feast attendance, income levels, and other information.

After giving total attendance figures for this year's Feast, Les went on to say, *"These figures basically mean that the attendance is down from 1997 by roughly 18 percent. That is most unfortunate, but it is the way things*

stand. I am of the opinion that the current membership represents a core group who are generally committed to fulfilling the mission given to the Church and to supporting the efforts of the United Church of God."

This edition of *News Watch* has dealt with the need for spiritual discernment. Are many of those who have left membership in UCGIA also committed to fulfilling the mission given to the Church? Are other parts of the scattered body seeking to please God and serve Him faithfully? Can this only be accomplished in UCGIA?

The letter continues by discussing the annual income as it continues in a downward trend. In like manner the recent holy day offerings are discussed giving the percentages they have fallen short of budget. This paragraph of explanation ends by saying, *"These figures are actually not too bad when you look at the loss in attendance."* Such reporting is becoming all too common by some. It becomes very apparent that too many are lamenting over a loss of income more than the loss of brethren in a common fellowship.

The paragraph following this financial update speaks for itself. *"A substantial number of those not in attendance this year are scattering their support among a number of nonaligned or independent individuals. I am not sure where they feel that support is going, since there isn't any organized product being produced by most of these individuals. I guess that is their concern and not mine."*

There are brethren in UCGIA who become turned off by such comments and attitudes toward their scattered brethren. Such a spirit continues to drive brethren away, causing even more division and scattering.

The first focus of any group or organization should be upon reaching out to help fellow brethren in the Body of Christ. We should all strive to give scattered brethren a real home for healing, void of struggles for financial gain, competition, politics, and corporate aggrandizement. **NW**