

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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TRUE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD – Pt. 1

"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn. 1:3, KJV).

These words of John reflect a confidence we all want in our relationship with God. But today there is growing confusion over the subject of true fellowship within the Body of Christ. What is the basis of your fellowship?

In an age of corporate downsizing, the Church has been experiencing the same. Our circle of fellowship, in most cases, has been downsized by 90 percent and more.

Consider your local fellowship. How many are there now? How many were in that fellowship five or ten years ago? How many are in the organization with which you associate? What is that percentage compared to the 150,000 we experienced at our peak? Take the time to do the math, because the results should be sobering and revealing.

The numbers can be discouraging, especially when we are confronted with losses in family and close friends. Experiencing this process of downsizing over the past several years has been rather traumatic for young and old alike. Becoming smaller has been devastating to many and certainly a trial to all.

So what is the basis of your fellowship? Have you thought about it? Do you know? You need to know and you need to understand! It should be quite basic. It should be plain for us to see.

Due to this painful process we have been experiencing for many years, people have a stronger desire than ever to hold onto any remaining fellowship. This can be a very good thing if we treasure fellowship more fully than we did in the past, but this longing to maintain or increase the size of our fellowship can also be very dangerous.

Becoming Smaller?

With the ongoing threat of continual scattering that seems to plague the Church, who wants to become smaller? Consequently, the desire to maintain or hold onto fellowship has become much

greater in our hearts and minds. But, there can be strong temptation and even danger with such feelings that can too easily lead to compromise. That is exactly what is happening, not only in larger organizations, but in smaller, scattered-fellowships as well.

When repeatedly confronted with issues and decisions that require we address ethical and doctrinal matters which might lead to more downsizing, our minds can go through some horrifying battles. We may struggle with thoughts of further loss of relationships with family and friends. But salvation with God is not about numbers. Numbers are not the criteria. Righteousness, with the continuous development of holy righteous character, is the criteria for that which we are being prepared to inherit.

Brethren are still being confronted with these difficult decisions concerning their fellowship. Oftentimes when this occurs, a great deal of the basis for this decision can tend to hinge upon a scripture in Hebrews that says we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Are brethren making correct decisions based on this verse?

As a result of what some see as their personal conviction to God, there are brethren who have severed fellowship to the point of having only one or two others with whom they now meet. Others have made the decision to be totally on their own, by them-selves, rather than continue with a particular fellowship. Is that acceptable with God? Are such people following the admonition of Paul? *"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)* And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:23-25).

Too many brethren have misunderstood and misused these verses. You may be surprised by what they actually instruct, but before we examine these

verses, we need to look at some practical examples and ask some basic questions that beg to be addressed.

Is it more important to have fellowship with others who have doctrinally strayed off course than it is to be by oneself on the Sabbath in order to seek worship of God in spirit and in truth? Does God desire that we have patience and tolerance of those who are moving away from the truth once delivered, in the hope that they might return as a result of our right example? Are we to seek peace and fellowship with those who have made a choice to "move away from" God until the time they are able to be brought back into oneness and unity with God? Have we really learned the lessons we needed to when we chose to leave the fellowship of the Worldwide Church of God? Or have we disobeyed God by not remaining in that fellowship? What is the will of God in this matter of fellowship?

Righteous Judgment

Before we continue with this article and answer such questions, there is another matter we must first consider. Some readers may be uncomfortable with addressing examples we are going to use in this two-part article. Therefore, it is expedient that we first clarify some concepts within the Church regarding the subject of "judgment."

Are you still uncomfortable with addressing what happened to us in the WCG? Do you believe you have a "judgmental attitude" simply because you are willing to address such things openly and truthfully? Are you trying to "get at" or "hurt" anyone by such conversation that realistically looks at the lessons and dangers that exist with such a fellowship? Are you trying to lift up yourself or put down others by such examination? Are you being judgmental of leaders or members by judging what they are doing that is contradictory to God's clear instruction? —Neither does this article seek to be judgmental of others, but it will address and judge matters that are contradicting that which God has revealed to us. We are to judge what

we hear. We are to judge what is being taught within the Body of Christ and then act upon that judgment. We are to judge what is in agreement with God's word and what is in disagreement with it. We are not only to judge, but in many cases today, we have an additional responsibility to warn! If we truly love our brother and can see his spiritual nakedness, we will seek to live by the kinds of scriptures mentioned in the insert box below.

We are charged by God to judge, but in the way He has shown us. We are to judge righteous judgment. As we judge what a brother might do or say, we are not the judge of our brother - only God is. Can we understand the difference? Do we grasp what the difference in attitude should be?

If you judged that Joe Tkach was teaching false doctrine and you warned brethren about what he was teaching, does that mean you are judgmental or that you have judged Mr. Tkach? Each must judge his own heart in such matters. Some may speak of such things and be guilty before God, but others may speak of such things and be obedient and even reflect a deep love for brethren by a willingness to warn them. Do you know the difference? The motivation behind warning others or disclosing such matters will depend upon one's heart. God is the judge of one's motivations. And individually, we should be judging what comes out of our own hearts.

For those who do go off course spiritually, our desire should be that they repent and return to a right fellowship with God and with one another within the Body of Christ. If someone tells you that Joe Tkach, Jr. is teaching brethren that they can worship God on any day of the week and that there is no specific day set apart by commandment of God in which He is to be worshiped, has that person sinned or been judgmental by such a disclosure or warning? Has such a person judged Joe Tkach, Jr. simply because he mentioned his name or because he has been a true witness of what Joe Tkach, Jr. teaches about the Sabbath command?

Was Paul guilty of slander or false witness when he wrote about Peter's wrong actions concerning the gentiles? Was Paul a false witness? Do you believe Paul was trying to esteem himself and defame Peter, or was Paul carrying out a responsibility he had, doing so in love to Peter and to the Church? Was this a private issue in which Paul should have gone to Peter alone, or was this a public matter that, of necessity, needed to be addressed publicly?

Did Paul sin or did he judge improper judgment when he made other statements about people, as in these examples? *"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessa-lonica; (2 Tim. 4:10). "This charge I commit unto*

thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim. 1:18-20). "But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Timothy 2:16-18).

You know the answer to these questions, or at least you should! But often times we are very uncomfortable when such matters affect us personally. Too often this discomfort is the result of never having fully addressed this subject. It should be clear to us that there are times to publicly inform the Church and warn brethren of dangers.

Our discomfort with addressing matters that involve people we know, including ministers, has often been the result of our having witnessed the misuse of scriptures regarding the subject of judgment. Such bad examples within the Church have led to a lot of confusion.

When people bring wrong practices or false teachings to the attention of others, they are often accused of not

Galatians 6:1-2 *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."*

Ezekiel 3:17-21 *"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul."*

Ezekiel 33:7-11 *"So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"*

James 5:19-20 *"Brethren, if any of you do err [Gk. - become deceived] from the truth, and one convert [Gk. - turn] him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."*

going to their brother alone and are therefore viewed as being disobedient to God. Such accusers tend to slander the messenger rather than address the wrong actions or false teachings contained in the message (warning).

There are matters involving the ministry that are not of a private nature, but of a public one. This is especially the case regarding such things as false teachings, because they usually involve things being taught to an entire congregation, several congregations or even the entire Church. Issues of a public nature are quite different from those that are private and must be addressed accordingly.

Confusion about judgment has also resulted when false accusers have claimed someone has slandered another or has been a false witness, when that person has simply reported on the wrong actions or the false teachings of another. In public matters however, when someone accurately reports a wrong action or false teaching, with the hope of warning another, they are actually fulfilling the biblical description of a true witness. Paul was a true witness of Peter's wrong actions. He also spoke of others who went astray doctrinally. Certainly, Paul did not slander nor bear false witness in any such examples found in scripture.

Can you discern the difference between judging what a person says or does with that of passing judgment on the individual or of being in a judgmental attitude? These are totally separate matters and the distinction should be clear in our minds. We need to clear our minds of false concepts about judgment.

UCG-Big Sandy

God gives us sound instruction about how we are to judge. God also gives us clear instruction about what the basis of our fellowship should be. To answer some of the questions that were asked earlier in this article about fellowship, we are going to examine some current examples that will help us better understand a common battle brethren face within the Church.

There are important lessons we can learn from some examples found in UCG-Big Sandy (no longer associated with UCG,IA). As you consider these examples, it is important that you

judge what is being done and what is being taught, but refrain from passing judgment on any individual.

Those things we are going to focus on are not said to hurt nor tear down any organization or individual. That which is being falsely taught, whether directly or by example, which we will examine, is not a private matter within the Body of Christ, because this influence reaches into several parts of the world. It is therefore a public matter. Everything that will be addressed here is with the intent of warning, of giving admonition, and of encouraging individuals to repentance.

Out of a growing number of scattered groups, UCG-Big Sandy has taken a more prominent lead among those who are becoming increasingly deceived over what constitutes Godly fellowship. Many of these groups are seeking to build bridges with individuals and scattered fellowships who have conflicting beliefs and doctrines. This in itself is causing great confusion in the Church. In the March/April 1999 issue of *News Watch* we warned about the dangers of building bridges in the article, *"The Bridge On The River Kwai."* This current article will delve more deeply into the subject of right fellowship with God, in the hope of helping some brethren come to grips with these matters.

UCG-Big Sandy, under the leadership of Dave Havir, has conflicting ideas about what constitutes right fellowship with God. Recently, more brethren have had to make choices regarding this issue because of some of Dave Havir's teachings and actions. These examples should be very meaningful and helpful for those who are confronted with similar decisions. We must learn from the examples of our recent history and from those things that continue to threaten God's Church.

What Would You Do?

As we investigate some of these examples, ask yourself what you would do if you were confronted with having to make a decision about whether or not you could or should continue to fellowship with anyone who has chosen to move away from sound doctrine. What if such a decision meant that you would not have anyone with which to meet on the

Sabbath? Should we rather be patient with them? Should we try to win them over by our right example and thereby seek to hold onto that fellowship? How does Hebrews' instruction regarding "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" fit into this? What does God require?

There has been a strong attack within the environs of the Church regarding the subject of tithing. Around the beginning of the year an elder in UCG,IA, Garry Pifer, conducted a Bible Study in his church area on the subject of tithing. He basically came out against such a teaching for the New Testament. *Deja vu!* That which the WCG could not accomplish, others have seemingly stepped in to finish. *The Journal* began to run articles and "letters to the editor" on the subject, as others jumped on the bandwagon of bashing the subject of tithing.

One article however, ridiculed by some, gave an excellent accounting on the subject of tithing as we have always believed. The article was written by Leon Walker who is on the counsel of UCG,IA. It would also be fair to note that UCG,IA acted in a responsible way by reprimanding and removing the ministerial credentials of Garry Pifer.

God's instruction regarding the actions of such people who distort and twist doctrine is clear. Such instruction should leave no misunderstanding about fellowship. There is a time to obey God and avoid certain fellowship. *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them"* (Rom. 16:17). Certainly this does not instruct us to be patient with such people and keep them in our fellowship until they repent. It does not say we are to keep them in our fellowship and hope that our right example will win them over, and that, in the meantime, we are to tolerate their continued voicing of their false ideas.

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother who walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thes. 3:6). There are clear instances when we are to sever fellowship. We are to judge what such people do and what they say, but we are not to

judge them. On the contrary, we should hope that they come to repentance so we can once again be in fellowship together. *"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"* (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

God is quite specific regarding matters about the kind of fellowship that is not permissible. Regarding the subject of tithing, there seems to be a growing number of people who do not believe in it at all. Some have evidently decided, on their own, that tithing is no longer a doctrine of Christ. Such thinking has very dangerous consequences.

"Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought [worked for], but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, has not God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he who bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 Jn. 1:8-11). These verses reveal that if someone moves away from the doctrines that came to us through Jesus Christ, then we are not only to have no fellowship with them, but they have also severed themselves from a relationship and fellowship with God. We must obey God in such matters, or we become just as guilty as the person who has been separated from God.

Too many do not realize the seriousness of conflicting choices for fellowship. Those who continue building bridges with conflicting fellowships are promoting a protestant type of "do good" Christianity. The false concept of receiving others into fellowship, despite conflicting doctrinal beliefs on basic foundational matters, is often promoted as being Christian toward our brother, yet it ignores the clear instructions of Jesus Christ and God the Father in such matters.

This false doctrine about tithing not only caused problems in UCG,IA, but it also caused difficulty with some in fellowship with UCG-Big Sandy. About a year ago, Dave Havir began to

teach that people needed only save as much money as was needed to attend the Feast of Tabernacles. He did not teach that one should save a full tithe for that purpose, as God instructs. He addressed this first, before Garry Pifer's false doctrine surfaced.

These incidents were only the beginning of troubles concerning the subject of tithing. And some brethren were experiencing pressure as to whether they could continue in fellowship with those who espoused such things.

When I addressed some of these issues with Dave Havir via telephone, concerning tithing, he stated his current belief to me regarding it. He said he believes in "one tithe" that can be used in three different ways, rather than in three distinct tithes.

Such a concept opens the door for brethren to use most of this "single tithe" to finance their ability to attend the Feast of Tabernacles. Whatever is left of this "single tithe" can then be given to the Church to finance its needs. Then every third year that "single tithe" can be used fully in three different ways, leaving little, if any, for the Church to take care of its needs. - What an incredible heresy this is! Such a concept lacks practicality and should cry out to us as foolish and absurd!

In that same telephone conversation, Dave told me of a mutual friend, along with his wife, who confronted him about his first public disclosure about how he believed brethren only needed to save what portion was needed in order to attend the Feast of Tabernacles. Dave relayed the account of this confrontation and explained how that now, only a few months later, this same couple believes as Garry Pifer does - that there is no command for tithing in today's Church.

This account struck me quite hard, as I grieved for this couple who had gone from challenging Dave about his comments regarding second tithe to believing no tithe is required upon God's people. It is a horrible thing when people continue to be deceived over the most basic of doctrines. Should we ignore such accounts when they happen to other scattered brethren, or should we cry out to warn those whom we love, that they should be careful not to fall into such traps?

Not only did a false teaching about second tithe begin to enter into the Big

Sandy congregation, but some began to move away from a belief in tithing altogether. Then, in disobedience to what God says regarding true fellowship, Dave Havir invited Garry Pifer to be a guest speaker at the Feast of Tabernacles site UCG-Big Sandy was hosting. The question begging to be answered is, "How can someone who is proclaiming a false doctrine against tithing be invited to speak at a feast site?" What message do brethren receive, when a teacher of false doctrine is given such recognition?

These are reasons enough to question whether one can continue fellowship with an organization that promotes false teaching. Some came to the correct conclusion that they had to sever fellowship in order to obey God. Such decisions never come easy. Because of close friendships and family that are sometimes involved, such decisions about fellowship can be painful.

The actions and teachings we have just reviewed are being done publicly. They are not private matters. Ministers actions and teachings can have a far reaching impact upon a scattered Church, especially considering today's widespread use of audio tapes.

Because of the actions of Dave Havir and Garry Pifer, there were brethren who once again were confronted with questions about fellowship. What would you do if confronted with that decision? Sadly, these actions and false teachings have not shocked the local fellowship in Big Sandy, nor those who follow Dave's teaching via their tape program. Only a very few have chosen to leave that fellowship.

You might believe that a decision to sever such fellowship is easy to make. If you were confronted with this same decision about tithing, perhaps it might be an easy decision for you. But what about other false doctrines? What about choices that have to do with integrity, financial stewardship, truthfulness, or spiritual idolatry of a minister or an organization? The decisions of fellowship are not always easy. Rest assured, we will all be tested and retested in this. We were tested in this matter when each of us chose to leave the WCG. But have we learned all that we needed when we made that first choice?