

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF GOD

I greet you today in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, and we must do everything in this wonderful name of Jesus.

The Church of God (7th Day) has a respected place in human history, and it has come down through the ages to us, a live and vital creation of God. On Calvary's Hill the beloved Saviour, Jesus, shed His precious blood, and as He hung there on that evil cross with His blood running out, with that blood He purchased the Church of God. (1)

God, the Father, set into this church which was bought with His Son's blood, governments, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, pastors, evangelists, and other workers along with governments. (2) Jesus Christ is the head of this church and established principles which have come down through the ages to us today. And these principles of the Church of God are just as real today as they were instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ. (3) Our Saviour gave the most ample authority to the apostles to teach in his name, commanding them to preach the gospel to every creature and directing all to hear and obey them. Jesus said, "He that heareth you, heareth me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth me, and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." Unless we should be mistaken in distinguishing between the true Church of God and the many false sects, which our Lord predicted would arise, Jesus was pleased to stamp upon His true church, shining marks by which every sincere inquirer of all ages could easily recognize His church as the true and pure one.

The principal marks of the characteristics of the true Church of God are that its people are one. One in purpose, one in sincerity, one in action, because there is only one Father in heaven and one God over all and this creates a unity. And this unity of Children of God belonging to the body of Christ, the Church of God, has come down through the ages to us today. That by unity one member for another we inculcate the truth of keeping the commandments of God and professing the testimony of Jesus Christ. By unity is meant that the members of the Church of God are united in belief in keeping the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. (5) We acknowledge the authority of Jesus and His word and the Bible as the only real truth and authority.

Jesus said in His admirable prayer - "I pray for them also who through their word should believe in me that they all may be one as thou Father in me and I in thee that they also may be one in us that the world may believe that thou sent me." (6) Because the unity of the Church is the most luminous evidence of divine mission of Jesus Christ, Jesus prayed that his followers may be united in the bond of a common faith as He and His Father are united in essence and certainly the prayer of Jesus is heard of every year down through

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the ages, nineteen hundred years ago to this very present time.

The Apostle Paul ranks schism and heresy with crimes of murder and adultery and he declares that the authors of sects should not possess the kingdom of God.(7) He also addresses a letter to the Ephesians from his prison in Rome, where he tells us in this epistle, "Be careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace because there is one body and one spirit as you are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in us all. And as you all, he says, worship one God, not many Gods, as you acknowledge the same divine Jesus Christ as our Redemption and not many Redeemers, as you are sanctified by the same Holy Spirit the power of God and not by many spirits, as you have one hope for the same kingdom of God to be established here and not many kingdoms so must we all profess the same faith which was handed down to the saints, delivered to the early Christian church, and then passed right down to us today through the many ages.

Unity of government is not less essential to the Church of God than unity of doctrine. Our divine Saviour never speaks of His churches, but only of His church. He does not say upon this rock will I build my churches, but upon this rock I will build my church.(8) From which words we must conclude that it was never the intention of the Father nor the Son to sanction so many different denominations and so many churches; but one corporate body only with members united under one visible head. For as the Church of God is a visible body today and Christ is real and the Father is real and so the Church of God today is very real and this is the church I want to write to you about.

The term Church of God is used by many denominations and groups.(9) This is rather confusing. One way of differentiating these groups is by adding the headquarters cities to the name or a prefix or a suffix to the name. These Churches of God are all of distinct American origin, but with one exception, the Church of God, 7th day with headquarters at Salem, West Virginia. It is the only church that had European connections before coming to America. European Sabbath keepers came to Rhode Island and later spread over the rest of the 13 original colonies. The Sabbath keepers came from Holland, Bohemia, Moravia, Germany, France. They came from all countries of Europe where they were persecuted, to come to this country where they had peace and religious liberty and freedom for a while in order to keep the commandments of God and the Faith of Jesus. The Sabbath keeping people spread through the original states very quickly. The Church of God grew in leaps and in bounds in the new world, which was open to all for religious freedom. Satan, the ever present adversary, began changing his tactics. No longer did he try to persecute the church with physical harm or physical incarcerations, but now he was

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using a form of godliness and pernicious doctrine.

When America was still young, the Church of God was founded in nearly every colony. Let me read to you just an instance from an article here concerning the Continental Congress which was set up 200 years ago in our country. When the Continental Congress sought a man who was at once trustworthy and loyal as well as competent to conduct a diplomatic correspondence with governments of Europe, the Elder Peter Miller, from the Ephrata community, a man of honor, was chosen. And he wrote many of the documents that were written during the Continental Congress. He was a personal friend with William Penn. He was a personal friend of Benjamin Franklin, whom he also persuaded to keep the Sabbath. That is where we get the Saturday Evening Post from. For Benjamin Franklin observed the Sabbath and put out the Post daily except for on Saturday (Sabbath)..After sunset on Sabbath, the Saturday Evening Post was put upon the streets of Philadelphia. Peter Miller helped in also writing up portions of the Declaration of Independence. Upon conditions identical with the foregoing the same Peter Miller translated also portions of the writings for American Liberty which was set in seven different languages to the different imperial courts of Continental Europe.

It was the same Peter Miller who pled with George Washington to keep a person from being hung at the scaffold for refusing to bear arms and refusing to work on the Sabbath day. Peter Miller went to the commander in chief and with his hand outstretched and tears flowing down his cheeks he asked George Washington, "Why are you putting this man to death? Aren't we here to fight for religious liberty? Aren't we here to protect our religious principles? Let this man go. Give him some other type of service. Don't make him break the commandments of God by the orders that were handed down to him by the officers of the army." With Christian forbearance General Washington, with generosity granted Peter Miller's prayer. We find other such statements made from people of the Ephrata community which was a Sabbath keeping community on the eastern part of the state of Pennsylvania. Which did many wonderful things during the trying times of the Revolutionary War. Much of the writing and the literature that was printed was printed by the Ephrata brethren.

When Peter Miller went back to the Ephrata community after the war was over he tried to purchase English Bibles. The only place they could purchase them from was England. And so they went about printing the first Bible in America. And it was printed there at Ephrata, Pennsylvania. And we are so proud it was Sabbath keeping people who were able to put out this wonderful message to the people here in America. First the Bible was written in German. It was then translated and put into English and placed on the market for a more reasonable cost than the English Bible they could purchase from England.

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Recently our country held a celebration for their 200th anniversary. The fathers of Philadelphia thought they would like to reconstruct the center parts of the city of Philadelphia like it was 200 years ago when the Continental Congress met there. They asked where are the historical plans for this city as it was originally laid out and how can we duplicate the scene that existed in 1693 and on. So they tried to redo the town square. They found there were two churches on the town square of Philadelphia. One was a Moravian church and the other was a Sabbatarian church. This causes us to think. The first two churches in Philadelphia, one was a Sabbath keeping church and the other a very fundamental church, the Moravians, who partly kept the Sabbath day, but who were never too strict in keeping the commandments of God.

The first elders name that we find written in the history of Philadelphia Sabbath keeping people was Elder Kelpius. He was baptized, we find, by a record of an Elder Koster, who was also a German settler who was originally a Lutheran but when he was reformed became a Sabbath keeper. Elder Koster conducted services in both languages, in German in the morning, in English in the afternoon.

Rhode Island was the only state that would not ratify our Constitution until a Bill of Rights was put into the Constitution. The Bill of Rights which gave a man the right to worship God the way he feels in his heart, to give a man right to freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of religion, freedom to assemble. And so we are grateful for the Sabbath keeping people who were living and residing in the state of Rhode Island who held out and would not ratify the Constitution of our wonderful country, until the Bill of Rights was inserted. And we still have that Bill of Rights today. Much is being chopped away from our Constitution today, but the fundamentals are there and our Constitution was written by the help of Commandment keeping people who wanted liberty granted to everyone.

After Peter Miller passed away another brother came on the scene of action whose name was Conrad Beissel. He came from Germany and went to the Ephrata community and became the leader there of the group. He instituted Monasticism. This was wrong. We know Satan always brings in a wedge of disorder somewhere and always tries to do some harm to the church. So this idea of monasticism where brothers and sisters should live a celibate life came into existence. This broke up the Ephrata community. The community is a historical place today.

The Eckerling brothers, Samuel, Gabriel, Emmanuel and Israel did not like the idea of not being married. They determined to leave Ephrata and take wives with them and start up another settlement of Sabbath keepers. They came over into western Virginia. This is now West Virginia. They settled on the Ohio river and for fear of the

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Indians they camped and made a settlement on Blennerhasset Island, which is just off of Parkersburg today. After living two years on the Island, the Eckerling brothers went a little north to where Point Pleasant is today and built the first building of the Church of God in West Virginia. From there the truth went north and south along the Ohio River. (Samuel and Emmanuel went to the Kanawha River Valley and began another settlement.) The Sabbath was kept in many small communities in the State.

Later the Wilbur Church was built, which is still in existence today. A small community church made of logs approximately 40 miles west of Salem, West Virginia.

Satan could not tolerate the advancement of the truth in our new country, so he started the Advent movement. The Advent movement was a group of ministers getting together and saying that the Lord would come in 1844. This message, called the Advent message, swept our country like wildfire. This was the stopping of the Church of God, because you can well imagine a church that preached against the second coming of Christ would be classified as a heretical church. It could be classified with all the other churches that teach heresies. So the Church of God began to decline from 1820 down to approximately the last two decades.

We feel the turning point has come. We can see growth again in the Body of Christ. Each day it is getting stronger and letting its light shine brighter. More and more people are seeing the glorious Gospel for what it really stands. Satan certainly was wise in bringing about the Advent movement to get people away from the truth. Look what happened. The Church of God said, that Jesus could not return at that time because Israel had not yet become a nation in their own home land. Now the world did not tell it that way. The world said, "The Church of God, does not believe in the second coming of Christ." And a church branded with that type of a stigma caused people to shy away from it. We are glad for those staunch brethren that remained true to the Word of God and continued to speak out and write out: "The Lord will not return until the fig tree becomes green again." Did not Jesus say these words to the inquiring disciples when they asked when will the end be? (10) The fig tree represents the Children of Israel. They are back in their homeland today ruling themselves. This is one of the foremost doctrines of the Scriptures and is found described all through the Bible. We are vindicated today. It buoys us up and makes us so much stronger, for we know we have been in the one Body of Christ. We have been following in the footsteps of Jesus teaching his testimony for He is the Spirit of Prophecy.

The Church of God has proven to the world that the Word of God is true and it means what it states. No one can set a frivolous date for Christ's return. We must all watch and wait for the coming of Christ. (11) Only God the Father, in heaven knows at what time He will send forth His only Son the second time to the earth. This

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Jesus, who purchased this church is the Head of the Body. We are all members in particular of it. (14) We are in need of each other. Unity is the most precious thing in the Body of Christ. Satan tries his best to disrupt this bond of perfectness. He is an adversary to be wary of continually. Besides the unity of the spirit, the Body of Christ bears the fruit of the Spirit and exercises the gifts given by Jesus Christ when He returned to the Father after His crucifixion. (15) We all must covet earnestly the best gifts and practice the "more excellent way." (16)

There is so much more history that we can relate. There are so many wonderful incidents in the Church of God that are handed down to us through historians who tell us how hard the Church has struggled to keep alive the standards of God, and to preach the truth of God's Word. Join in with us in continuing to do this task to uphold the blood stained banner of Jesus Christ and proclaim His truth and that He is coming soon to set up His Kingdom.

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