

Spiritual Lethargy in God's Church!

More people leave God's Church because of spiritual lethargy than for any other reason! You need to be on guard. Don't become a disfellowship statistic. Read this article and find out HOW to recognize and overcome spiritual lethargy.

By Dennis G. Luker
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Why would anyone leave God's Church - miss out on eternal life in God's Kingdom? Yet all too many do each year - few in comparison to the total membership, but each one a potential member of God's Great Family turned in the tragic direction of *eternal* DEATH!! The chief reason is *spiritual lethargy!* *Over one third* of all disfellowships during the last few years were for this reason! Spiritual lethargy is something we all have to fight. We must overcome *it* - or, *it* will overcome us! Don't assume it couldn't happen to YOU.

Read this article with *zeal*. Stir yourself up with God's abundant Spirit. Be *sure* YOU make YOUR calling *and election* SURE!

What is Spiritual Lethargy?

Let me quote from a report recently compiled by the Church Administration Department. "The greatest single problem in the Church today, as evidenced by the visiting reports and the reasons for which members are disfellowshipped, is lethargy, clarified further as a ho-hum, what's-the-use, I-quit, let's-not-get-excited-about-it, I-can't, it's-not-important-anyway attitude."

Many in God's Church care just plain TOO LAZY TO OVERCOME!

That's what spiritual lethargy means - being lazy in spiritual matters! Prayer, Bible study, fasting, meditation, living and applying God's laws and principles -these are spiritual matters. And the problem with too many in God's Church is that they *will not discipline themselves* to do these things as they should! Too many lack character, and will not repent and change!

Far too many are giving up the opportunity to serve others. Far too many will suffer the soon-coming Great Tribulation just because they won't *recognize* and *repent* of their spiritual lethargy. Notice this prophecy about some *in God's Church*: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16).

These people are not "cold," meaning spiritually unconverted, yet neither are they "hot," meaning spiritually zealous. They are "lukewarm," which means *spiritually lethargic!* They *have been* converted. They *know* the truth - but are not really zealously living it! These members say, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" - think they are doing all right spiritually. But Christ says to them, "thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" - spiritually they are lacking (verse 17)!

Jesus Christ says these members must suffer the Great Tribulation - the persecutions and tortures of the coming Beast Power - in order to be cleansed of their spiritual lethargy. This is what verse 18 means: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich. . . ." Zechariah was inspired to explain what it means to be "tried in fire": "And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried . . ." (Zech. 13:8-9). It will take captivity and much suffering before some will turn to God with their whole heart.

But it doesn't have to be this way, brethren! Heed Christ's admonition to the Landiceans: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: *be zealous therefore, and repent*" (Rev. 3:19).

Christ commands us to be zealous and repent of spiritual lethargy! If we don't He will correct us severely in the Tribulation, because He loves us and wants us to qualify for His Kingdom and eternal life.

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"Prayer, Bible study, fasting, meditation, living and applying God's laws and principles - too many in God's Church will not discipline themselves to do these things."

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"There is a way that you can overcome spiritual lethargy now before the Great Tribulation begins. PUT YOUR WHOLE HEART INTO GOD'S WORK!"

"Those who put their whole hearts into this Work and do their part are given the special promise and blessing from God of protection from the Great Tribulation (Rev. 3:10). Those who are zealous in God's Church for God's Work today will be taken in just a few years to a special place of safety and protection."

"A zealous and enthusiastic Christian is an inspiration and joy to be around. But, a lethargic Christian is a definite discouragement and bad influence - he carries a communicative disease!"

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"If you don't take it seriously, your blood will be upon your own head!"

"Don't be a half-hearted Christian! That is Laodicean. Be a Philadelphian Christian! This is the way to overcome spiritual lethargy - drive yourself to be zealous!"

"Real spiritual growth comes when you are totally wrapped up in God's Work. It is a Work worth fighting, suffering and dying for! "

"If you will commit yourself and give your life for this Work, Jesus Christ says you will gain eternal life. If you hold back, you may lose out entirely on the Kingdom of God!"

"Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up."

"Draw closer to God and pray especially and specifically about God's Work and your part in it."

"Fasting is a way to humble yourself before God and seek Him in prayer and Bible study with all your heart. Fasting is hard. It does take character, but the results are more than worth it."

"Are you willing to discipline yourself and fast for God's Work? If you are, God says to you: 'Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward' (Isa. 58:8.)."

"People today are starving spiritually and they need help! We have the spiritual food to give them and we must not hold it back."

"Brethren, if we do put God's Work first in our lives financially, He has promised that He will take care of all our needs! God has promised to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing we will not be able to hold (Mal. 3:10)."

"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. 10:24-25). "

"Eternal life is at stake! Don't give in to spiritual lethargy and go into the Great Tribulation. Don't take a chance of losing out on the Kingdom of God! Overcome spiritual lethargy by putting your whole heart into God's Work!"

ENEMY NUMBER ONE!

Spiritual Lethargy in God's Church



Overcome Lethargy Now!

There is a way that you can overcome spiritual lethargy now, in the few years left before the Great Tribulation begins. That way is, PUT YOUR WHOLE HEART INTO GOD'S WORK! You cannot have your whole heart in God's Work and be spiritually lethargic. I'm going to prove this to you! Those members of God's Church who have their whole hearts in this Work and keep them there are spiritually zealous and growing, and will be taken to a place of safety before the Great Tribulation begins!

Again notice Revelation 3: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write . . . I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast *kept* my word, and hast *not* denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. *Because* thou hast kept the word of my

patience, *I also will keep* thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:7-10).

These verses are talking about this present era of God's Work and Church — the Church of Brotherly Love (Philadelphia means Brotherly Love in Greek). These members have *love*. A special love for one another which motivates them to serve each other. A special love for the unconverted in the world which motivates them to give freely so others can be reached with God's truth. And above all, A DEEP AND REAL LOVE FOR GOD which motivates them to worship and serve Him and *show it* by being ZEALOUS FOR HIS WORK! These members have "works" (verse 8) — they are true and faithful in obeying God's Word and they recognize God's power and authority in His Church. They are submissive to God and His ministers, helping to *do* the Work of God! That Work is given in Matthew 24:14 and Mark 13:10 — the preaching and publishing of the good news (gospel) of the imminent return of Jesus Christ to set up God's government on earth — to bring peace and happiness to this suffering, war-torn earth. This message will be preached as a witness or warning and "then shall the end come"!

The "open door" of radio, the printing press and now television and mass- impact, worldwide advertising, has been made available by God for the accomplishment of the Work!

Put Your Heart Into God's Work

Those who put their whole hearts into this Work and do their part are given the special promise and blessing from God of protection from the Great Tribulation (Rev. 3:10). Those who are zealous in God's Church for God's Work today will be taken in just a few years to a special place of safety and protection. "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she bath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days . . . And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time" (Rev. 12:6, 14).

And — your obedient children will go where you go! If you go to a place of safety, they will be protected with you. If you are left behind, they will suffer and die with you. The consequences of spiritual lethargy are severe! Those Christians who won't

even repent of spiritual lethargy during the Great Tribulation, but become bitter at God, will have to be destroyed permanently in the lake of fire! They had their chance to become zealous and fervent for God and His Work, but they didn't. They had their chance to repent of this lethargy in the Tribulation and they wouldn't! So they must receive the penalty of sin not repented of — eternal death (Rom. 6:23)!

Our motivation is by no means to be the mere saving of our skins (Job 2:4) in some place of *physical* safety, but the promises are plain. Those who are *spiritually* alive will be saved from physical harm, while those who are *spiritually lethargic* will be *physically punished* in hopes of saving them spiritually (I Cor. 5:5).

Yes, brethren, spiritual lethargy is a sin — a great sin! And it affects not only you, but everyone you know. It spreads like cancer! A lazy, indifferent, lethargic attitude is a deadly cancer! It causes a person to take God and His laws lightly!

Our very purpose for living and breathing is to qualify *now, in this life*, to become a very son of God — and *to help others* who are being called in this age to qualify. You can't help others by being lethargic! In fact, you hinder them by setting them a wrong example.

Be Zealous and Enthusiastic

A zealous and enthusiastic Christian is an inspiration and joy to be around. But, a lethargic Christian is a definite discouragement and bad influence — he carries a communicative disease! This is why bad cases of spiritual lethargy must be put out of God's Church! We in God's Church have an *important job* to do. The salvation of this world depends upon how zealous we are!

God's Church must be composed of *individually* zealous members if it is to be zealous as a whole. We have each been called to be a part of a large team dedicated to proclaiming God's Truth to this present evil world as a warning message just before the return of Jesus Christ! This is an important job, brethren!

If *you* don't take it seriously, *your blood* will be upon *your own head*! God says this in Ezekiel: "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 shalt die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand" (Ezekiel 33:7-8). This Church collectively is doing the job of this "watchman." It takes all of us *working together zealously* to accomplish this big responsibility! We must each do our part *faithfully* and *zealously* in order to be as effective as we should and must be!

If you can't get stirred up about your part in God's Work, then you are spiritually lethargic! And if you don't repent of this lethargy, change and become zealous, you are going to end up out of God's Church! If the thought of being out of God's Church doesn't *frighten you*, then you are in bad shape spiritually! In fact, you are dead spiritually and will soon die eternally — unless you wake up and repent now!

Jesus Christ was *enthusiastic about God's Work*. He loved God's Work so much that many times He would miss meals and get it done! Once when the disciples asked Him when He was going to eat, He answered, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His Work" (John 4:34). Brethren, let's be like Jesus Christ. He is our example. Let us strive to be as zealous and dedicated as He was to God's Work! Let us be willing to sacrifice and *give of ourselves*

Here now are some points on what you can do to put and keep your whole heart in God's Work and overcome spiritual lethargy!

Prove Absolutely This is God's Work

Christ said look to the works: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in Him" (John 10:37-38). Believe the works! Look at what is being accomplished! No other work on earth is explaining the meaning of today's bad news and proclaiming the good news of God's soon-coming rule on earth! No other church on earth is really *changing people's lives* for the good!

The FIRST commission of God's true Church is to preach and

publish the gospel to the world as a witness (Matt. 24:13; Mark 13:10). No other church on earth is doing that job! We understand prophecy and the meaning of world events. We know where Israel is today. We know that the gospel is not just the story of Christ's life but the good news of His imminent return and rule on this earth, No other Work is crying aloud and showing the people their sins (Isa. 58:1). This Work does and continues to grow!

The second commission that Jesus Christ gave to His Church was to feed the flock of God. He told Peter three times, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15- 17). And He inspired Peter to write, "Feed the flock of God . . ." (I Peter 5:2). This is the only church doing that job! No other church really believes, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). Only God's true ministers use the word of God "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

Without a doubt, this is God's *only* true Church doing God's *only* work on earth. I hope you know this! If you don't, prove it before it is too late! Look to the works!

Why God Called You

Many in God's Church wonder, "Why did God call me?" Brethren, it is no accident that you are in God's Church. You were personally and individually called by God the Father. "No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him (John 6:44, 65). Because of His goodness He led you to repentance (Rom. 2:4). He gave you His Holy Spirit as a free gift after you repented and were baptized (Acts 2:38).

God didn't call you, grant you repentance and give you His Holy Spirit so that you could warm a seat in Church and wait for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Believe it or not He didn't call you *just* to become one of His sons! He *did* call you to be an active, dynamic part of His Work! Christ said, "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when He comes shall find so doing" (Luke 12:43). Doing what? Doing his part in God's Work! Christ went on to say, "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many

stripes . . . For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required . . ." (Luke 12:47, 48).

Why did God call you in this age? So that you can help in His Work — that's why! Come to realize, fully understand and believe this!

Be Wholehearted

Strive to put your whole heart into God's Work. Don't be a half-hearted Christian! That is Laodicean. Be a Philadelphian Christian! This is the way to overcome spiritual lethargy — drive yourself to be zealous!

Don't give in to the downward pull of human nature to be lazy. Set your mind and your will to obey God with all your heart! Real spiritual growth comes when you are totally wrapped up in God's Work. God's Work is a work of giving, serving and helping others. It is a Work which requires sacrifice. It is a Work of love. It is a Work worth fighting, suffering and dying for!

If you will commit yourself and give your life for this Work, Jesus Christ says you will gain eternal life. If you hold back, you may lose out entirely on the Kingdom of God!

Notice these inspiring and yet sobering scriptures: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:24- 27). The way to gain eternal life and a reward in God's Kingdom is to give up our life right now — lay it down, sacrifice it for God's Work!

Here is the way to do it.

Pray Fervently Each Day for God's Work

Set as a goal for yourself *one half of your prayer* each day just *for God's Work* alone. There are personal problems and others

in the Church to pray about, but strive to dedicate one half of your prayer each day for God's ministers, their responsibilities and the needs in God's Work. A tremendous aid in prayer is the "Church of God Distribution of Manpower" booklet which lists in an organized manner all of God's ministers, where they are, all foreign offices and all districts in the United States.

The college *Envoy* is a help in this way also. It shows you pictures of the three campuses of Ambassador College, the students and faculty. They need your prayers too! You'll find a half hour goes by before you know it, and you'll find your heart more and more in God's Great Work!

Take an interest, an active part! Be concerned about the needs in this Work. Get to know God's ministers by praying for them. Some of their pictures are in the booklet I mentioned. And remember, to be truly effective, prayer must be fervent and on your knees (James 5:16; Dan. 6:10)! Notice where they are serving in the world. Think of the possible problems of the people and needs of the Work there. Especially remember Mr. Herbert Armstrong and the Evangelists both at Headquarters in Pasadena, and around the world, that God will guide them in directing this *worldwide Work*.

Christ gives us the framework for our prayers in Matthew 6:5-13. He instructs us to go to a place where we can pray in private. Then, begin acknowledging and praising our Father in heaven. If you count your blessings, you will have plenty to praise and thank God for.

Next, Christ said, "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (verse 10). Pray for the Kingdom of God to come on this earth! When will God's Kingdom come? When this Work is finished! Remember what Christ said in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Christ is telling us here that God's Kingdom will not come until we have finished this Work. So pray for God's Work that we can finish it and prepare the way for the coming of Christ and the Kingdom of God!

Fast Regularly

Actually, we should *fast to get closer to God* so our prayers will be more effective. Every Christian *needs* to fast regularly to

stay close to God. Christ said, "*When* you fast . . ." (Matt. 6:17), not "*if* you fast."

Your goal should be to fast about once each month. Draw closer to God and pray especially and specifically about God's Work *and* your part in it.

James was inspired to write, "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:8-10).

David said he *humbled himself with fasting* (Psalm 35:13). So fasting is a way to humble yourself before God and seek Him in prayer and Bible study with all your heart.

Fasting is hard. It *does* take character, but the results are more than worth it! God says, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" (Isa. 58:6-7). Notice that God wants us to fast to overcome our own problems and grow, and *also* to help others. Fasting and praying about God's Work is a way to help the poor and hungry of this world. People today are *starving spiritually* and they need help! We have the spiritual food to give them and we must not hold it back.

Are you willing to discipline yourself and fast for God's Work? If you are, God says to you: "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward." (Isa. 58:8.) God will bless you and reward you and hear your prayers for His Work. "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry and He shall say, Here I am . . ." (verse 9).

Here is how you can effectively fast for God's Work. A spiritual fast means denying yourself all food and liquids for the purpose of humbling yourself before and drawing closer to your Creator. You should have a *purpose* in fasting. In this case, your purpose

or main concern is the progress of God's Work. You should spend much extra time on this fast day praying about the main needs or problems in God's Work.

Pray for God's ministers and others. Pray about having your heart in the Work and doing your part. In other words, dedicate that day to God for a special purpose — that of being a living sacrifice — giving your life, time and energy for the benefit of God's Work. It pleases God to see our wholehearted concern for His Work!

Tithe Faithfully and Give Generous Offerings

Christ said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). This is a living principle. If you want your heart to be in God's Work, put your money in God's Work! This really works, brethren. This is an important way to put and keep your heart in the Work of God. Those who are committed financially to this Work are automatically going to be concerned about it.

Our tithes and regular, generous offerings are a means of serving others. We are helping to give the truth of God freely to the world. And what counts is how much we give according to how much we have to give financially. There is no better place on earth to put your money than in God's Work. Christ said that you are laying up for yourself treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:30), a reward which you will receive when He comes. No one can steal this reward from you!

". . . you cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on . . . but seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall he added unto you" (Matt. 6:24, 25, 33). Brethren, if we do put God's Work first in our lives financially, He has promised that He will take care of all our needs! And God cannot lie (Tutus 1:2)! God has promised to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing we will not be able to hold (Mal. 3:10) if we give generously with a cheerful heart (II Cor. 9:7). You can't out-give God. The more you give to His Work, using wisdom of course, the more God is going to bless you in this life and in His Kingdom!

Apply this principle and overcome spiritual lethargy by putting

your whole heart into God's Work *financially!*

Attend Church Every Sabbath and Serve Your Brethren

It is absolutely essential for you to attend Sabbath services every week if you live in a Church area. If you don't, then attend as often as possible.

As a minister of God, I can say from experience that those who have their hearts in God's Work the most are those who are most faithful in attending Church and serving their brethren in any way possible — especially by being a good example of love and zeal.

God tells us to do this: "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. 10:24-25). As we see the end of this age approaching, we should realize more and more the need for inspired sermons and fellowship to help us overcome spiritual lethargy.

Those who don't attend Church when they could are lethargic and not really a part of God's Work or the local congregation. These are the ones who will eventually fall away from God's Church *because* of their spiritual lethargy

They are given a dire warning: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26-27).

Brethren, spiritual lethargy can be overcome! It must be overcome! Eternal life is at stake! Set your mind and will to apply the points you have been given in this article! Don't give in to spiritual lethargy and go into the Great Tribulation. Don't take a chance of losing out on the Kingdom of God! Overcome spiritual lethargy by putting your whole heart into God's Work!
