



Church of God-21st Century

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ARE YOU STRIVING TO BE A “PHILADELPHIAN”?

Don’t be *smugly complacent* in your answer—because, Jesus Himself revealed that *we*, God’s people, can be *deceived*—if we are not *vigilant*!

by Raymond F. McNair

In the January 2004 edition of THE JOURNAL, I asked, and answered the question of “**Who Are the Real Laodiceans?**” I explained that the real Laodiceans are not *just* LUKEWARM, laid-back Christians. Rather, Jesus said they would be “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:15-17).

Furthermore, Jesus revealed that the majority of Christians at the end of this age would be *spiritually blind*, and *naked*—thinking they were “spiritually” O.K.! Nearly 2000 years ago, Christ foresaw that the “end-time generation of Christians” would be *spiritually wretched* and *miserable*! Clearly, Jesus prophesied that the general *condition* and *attitude* of the Christians living in the *final Church era* would be characterized by deplorable *lukewarmness*, spiritual *blindness*, and shameful *nakedness*—rendering them spiritually “wretched and miserable” (v. 17).

What will produce that condition among God’s people? It is evident—that since the church members during the Laodicean era were laid-back, self-righteous, miserable, naked and blind—then, this surely implies that the ministers during that Church era must have been, in large measure, responsible for their wretched condition. In addition, it is evident much of the world is laid back today, and engrossed in materialism—rather than having a sincere love of, and zeal for, serving their Creator.

How can you know for sure whether you are a *Philadelphian*, possessing commendable Christian character, or a *Laodicean*, being destitute of sterling Christ-like character? **Jesus Christ reveals that it is only by your *fruits* either you, or others can determine whether you are in a Laodicean or a Philadelphian condition** (Matt. 7:15-20).

Let us carefully examine a few of Christ’s many warnings to His people. He said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity**” (Matt. 7:21-23). Jesus then showed that the foolish build their spiritual house on the “sand,” instead of on solid “rock,” meaning on Jesus Christ and His infallible Word (vv. 24-27).

On another occasion, Jesus also stated, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for *many*, I say unto you, *will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*” (Luke 13:24). Verses 25-30 reveal that many will weep and gnash their teeth when Christ tells them they have “missed the boat”—by not qualifying to enter the Kingdom of God.

A Mighty Midnight Cry—Prepare to Meet Christ!

Furthermore, Jesus also reveals that half of the spiritual “virgins” (that is, the *saints* of God) will be foolish, and will not take sufficient *oil* (God’s Spirit) in their lamps to illuminate their way into the wedding at Christ’s return (Matt. 25:1-13). Therefore, they will not be “ready” for attendance at Christ’s wedding when He returns (vv. 10-13; Eph. 5:25-32; Rev. 19:1-9)!

But is it possible to possess **the Truth**, that is, to believe in the essential, foundational doctrines of the Bible (Heb. 6:1-12), and yet not be acceptable to Christ at His return? It certainly is! There are those who “talk the talk,” but do not “walk the walk”! They profess to follow and obey Jesus, but instead, they go their own way, not really allowing Christ to dwell in them through His spirit, and not really obeying Him. Just believing in the Truth—keeping the *Ten Commandments*, the *annual Holy days*, not eating *unclean meats*, faithfully paying God His *tithe*, which He, in turn commands His true ministers to use in their Work of carrying out their ministry—doing those things will not necessarily “guarantee” you a place in the Kingdom of God when Christ returns to this earth to establish His glorious Kingdom.

Also, we need to remember that many of the Jews during the time of Christ believed in God, and in keeping the Ten Commandments, the unclean meat laws, the law of tithing and God’s annual Holy Days. But they omitted to cultivate the God-like character traits of “**judgment, mercy, and faith**” (Matt. 23:23)!

The 13th chapter of I Corinthians clearly reveals that a person can understand *prophecy*, speak in foreign *languages*, work mighty *miracles*, possess great knowledge, understanding and wisdom, and can even preach mighty sermons etc.—all to no avail! The person’s mind and heart is not filled with the love of God—which enables him to “fulfill” God’s law, according to the spirit or intent of God’s law of liberty. If we really love God and keep His commands, according to the “spirit” or “intent” of these laws, then we can know we will be acceptable to Him—otherwise, we will be rejected (1 John 2:4, 3:22; 5:14). If we abide in Him, then “when He shall appear...we will have complete confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His Coming” (1

John 2:28). God's true Church is a commandment-keeping Church (Matt. 19:16-19; Rev. 12:17; 22:14).

Good or Bad Fruit—Which?

Sadly, many who profess to be in the Churches of God today, clearly reveal by their actions, they are producing “**bad fruit**” (Gal. 5:19-21) rather than **good fruit** which God longs to see in the lives of His people: “But the fruit of the Spirit is *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance* [“self-control”]: against such there is no law” (vv. 22-23)!

Let us take note of some of the “*bad fruits*” being produced in the lives of many professing Christians—fruits that can keep them from entering the Kingdom of God, unless they repent, and seek God's help to enable them to clean up their lives.

God's Word has a lot to say concerning those who vilify and slander others. God says He hates “A proud look, a lying tongue....A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:17-19). We must remember that Satan the Devil is a slanderer—one who falsely accuses and who maligns and vilifies God's people (Rev. 12:7-17).

Most, if not all of us have been the target of false accusations, and scurrilous attempts to smear our good name. It is a sin to seek to exalt ones self, and it is certainly wrong to seek another's position. Raw, unbridled ambition, pride and covetousness often go hand in hand. Jesus sternly warned His followers against covetousness and greed: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” Luke 12:15).

We ministers must be careful to make certain that we fulfill the very high calling of being inducted into Christ's ministry—for service toward His people. Christ once told a man, “Follow me.” But the man made excuses. And another also said, “Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.” And Jesus unto him, “**No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God**” (Luke 9:58-62). Jesus used this illustration of a *plowman* who in His analogy represented a *minister*. The Apostle Paul also used the same analogy, saying that “he that ploweth should plow in hope...” (1 Cor. 9:10). God does not appreciate a minister of His ever turning his back on his calling into the ministry. We must never look back to the world, thereby forsaking our duties as a minister of Christ.

Jesus truly had a heart of *a faithful shepherd* (see John 10:1-16): “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as *sheep having no shepherd*. Then saith He unto His disciples, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the **laborers** are few: Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will *send*

forth laborers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:36-37).

Let us examine some statements from a number of ministers which clearly reveal that several of God’s ministers, while serving in the WCG, were harsh, uncaring and unconcerned for the genuine welfare of “God’s sheep,” which had been placed under the guidance, care and protection of the ministry of the WCG. During the past few decades, I have heard many first-hand reports of ministerial *arrogance, harshness, dereliction of duty, and outright abuse!*

Recent Statements from Ministers and Laymen

We have received well-wishing messages from many evangelists, various pastors and elders of different Churches of God. They have expressed their grave concern for the “sorry” spiritual condition of “God’s Church.” They have urged me to do everything within my power to encourage the brethren, and to faithfully reaffirm the teaching of sound doctrine, and to assist God’s people in their struggle toward entering the Kingdom of God. I wish to quote some of the comments made by both ministers and laymen:

<>In a letter to me, one evangelist stated, “I have been concerned for many years about ministers who have lorded it over Church members and other ministers who have a lesser office. Also, those who have been harsh on others. I appreciated your comments about such people in the article.”

<>Another comment from one of the earlier ordained evangelists: “There has been much water over the dam, but when the chips are down, we need to appreciate the things that unite us, and not dwell on those that divide...we may be in different organizations created by man but we are still very much in the one spiritual organism that Jesus built...His one true Church.”

<>One percipient man says, “I have waited a long time to hear a man of God speak out to the rest of us. We are in dire need of spiritual feeding, not the gossip and back stabbing that is going on...the subject I’m referring to is ‘Spiritual Competition’...Like Mr. Armstrong used to say that some of us just love competition...we cut down the other guy, and that makes us feel superior, while blinding us to the fact that we are blind and naked...we all need someone to get our focus back on positive things, and begin provoking one another to godly deeds, as you mentioned. Thanks for getting the ball rolling.”

<>Still another person says, “I have repeatedly seen the ‘leaders’... take the approach that they were to be the next trumpet to sound the Truth to [the] world, while faithful brethren who need love, comfort, counsel and true direction have been right there in front of them bruised, battered and ‘bleating’ for help.... Sadly, most of the bruising, battering, and poor treatment has come at the hands [of] those ‘leaders’ themselves, or at the hands of other brethren. I have seen very little ‘leaving the 99 and going after the one.’ There is far too much of what I call ‘church building’...going on, and not enough shepherding. Thank you again for your very kind, encouraging words...what you have said, both in your article and your letter to me, have brought a breath of fresh air and a ray of hope, piercing a very dark, musty environment in the church today. Many, like myself have been gasping for this type of fresh air, hoping for a relief, and a home for God’s people. It is my desire to be a part of any effort that will provide the green pastures and cool waters for God’s sheep to eat and drink from.”

◁“We are still mostly staying at home for Sabbath services. Sometimes we will meet with others for services. We listen to the pre-1986 sermons from the ministers if we feel it was what HWA endorsed. We also listen to HWA’s messages. We keep trying to meet with others of like mind. It seems to be so hard anymore, we are so scattered...again there was a split in the church. It was very ugly, like a messy divorce. I now feel that I cannot fully trust that minister any longer. This is so confusing for us. This is why we keep going back to the old sermons.

◁“...In the Chicago area we went through the dictators, who believed in ‘government over truth.’ Then while in [Church’s name] we had some hirelings and we were taught nothing. Then when it dissolved, a few of us got together on Sabbath, and we have been there ever since. We started and we have been there ever since.”

How Can We Better Serve God’s Scattered Sheep?

Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34 clearly speak of **ministerial abuse**, and of us ministers being at least partly responsible for *scattering God’s flock*. I would appeal to every one of us ministers of God—regardless of our particular Church of God affiliation—to look into the spiritual mirror of God’s Word, and see if *we* may perhaps unwittingly, have been responsible for confusing, discouraging, and scattering God’s sheep. May we always remember that the “precious sheep” belong to Almighty God, and if we are in any way *abusive* toward His sheep, then God says he will remove us from our ministerial positions: “I will require My FLOCK at their hand, and cause them to *cease* from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds *feed themselves* any more; for I will deliver MY FLOCK...” (Ezek. 34:10). Why were they “scattered”? God says, “and they were scattered **because there is no shepherd**” (vv. 5-6).

What does God *promise* His faithful shepherds as a reward for their loving care and concern for His flock? “The elders which are among you I exhort... Feed the *flock of God* which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being *lords* over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. **And when the CHIEF SHEPHERD shall appear, ye shall receive a CROWN OF GLORY that fadeth not away**” (I Pet. 5:1-4)! Are we ministers truly ready to appear before our Chief Shepherd?

May our All-merciful Father and His Son Jesus Christ inspire all of us ministers to make certain that we are really interested in **teaching, encouraging, protecting** and **serving** our brethren in every way possible!

A PERSONAL NOTE. Here is a brief note regarding my varied experiences in the Work of God during the past 55 years. Most of you will have become familiar with my articles in various Church publications (the *Good News*, *Plain Truth*, *Tomorrow’s World*, etc), and more recently in articles which were published in other “Church of God” publications. I have served for nearly 50 years as a *writer* and *editor*.

My appointment to serve on the WCG Doctrinal Teams. Mr. H.W. Armstrong

appointed me to serve *under him* over the Headquarters Doctrinal Team in 1974, knowing that I would not introduce “liberal” doctrines into God’s Church. After Mr. Armstrong’s decease, the Pastor General who succeeded Mr. him appointed me to be over the Doctrinal Team in Pasadena; but shortly afterward, my wife and I were sent to the South Pacific to head the Work of God in New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, etc. Since I would not endorse the *strange doctrines* then being seriously considered at our Pasadena Headquarters, my continued presence would have been a big obstacle in the eyes of those who planned to make sweeping doctrinal changes in the WCG.

My ordination as an Evangelist in the WCG. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong ordained me as an Evangelist—over 51 years ago. During those 51 eventful years I served as the pastor of 14 churches in the U.S., Britain and New Zealand, and in 1954-1955, I founded the Chicago Church of God, the first WCG Church east of the Mississippi River. I also served as Director of the Work of God in Britain (1958-1973).

Appointed Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador Colleges in England, and Pasadena, CA. In 1960, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong appointed me Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador College, near London. Later, in 1978, Mr. Armstrong asked me to serve as Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador College in Pasadena, California—in order to help him put Ambassador College *back on track*. I continued serving God’s Work in that position for nearly ten years—until 2 years after Mr. Armstrong’s death in 1986. I was gratified to hear him say, before his decease, that **he was very pleased to see Ambassador College *back on track***. I always counted it a great honor and a fantastic privilege to work with God’s end-time Apostle for over 36 years, from the time I entered Ambassador College in 1948, until his death in 1986—approximately 36 years.

I was privileged to conduct many baptismal tours while serving in the Worldwide Church of God. In the summer of 1949, Mr. Armstrong sent Raymond Cole and me on the first student-led, nation-wide baptismal tour, during which time we baptized about 125 brethren. In the following years, I conducted *seven* more baptismal tours in the U.S. and Canada before being sent to London, England in 1958 to take charge of God’s Work in Britain, where I continued to serve the Work of Jesus Christ during the next 15 years. After arriving in London, England, I conducted several baptismal tours in the British Isles, and was later sent to Southern Africa with another minister to baptize a number of people in Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and in South Africa.

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