

May 15, 1995

Dear brethren;

I have wanted to write to all of you for a number of weeks, but have not been able to until now because of having to take care of the estate details of my recently deceased mother, and moving to our property in Wyoming. Mrs. Berg and I have missed seeing you on a regular basis, as we love every one of you very much.

What greatly concerns me and causes me to write is knowing that many of you are confused and uncertain about the recent doctrinal changes that have introduced dramatically different explanations and perspectives regarding our Sabbath, annual festivals, tithing and unclean meats practices.

Adding to this disorder are conflicting statements about the ten commandments and the old and new covenants. At first it was declared that the law was totally abolished by the new covenant. Now it is being explained that the law is not being done away with.

Perhaps this present emphasis is an attempt to diminish the flow of exiting ministers and members. To date, over one third of the ministry and membership of the Worldwide Church of God has left, with more in both categories departing every week.

To make the situation even more divisive, an answer from Pasadena to questions concerning observing non-biblical holidays such as Christmas, Easter and Halloween is currently being circulated. This letter states that God's Festivals originated in paganism, and because of its secular nature, Halloween is best avoided, but whether children should trick-or-treat is a parental choice and decision.

However, the letter also explains that if Christmas and Easter are focused respectively on the coming of Christ and His death and resurrection, WCG members can rest in the assurance that the Church does not police what they privately choose to do. It further states that while the Church's leadership does not officially endorse these holidays, neither does it condemn nor criticize such practices.

Much of this new doctrine, especially regarding the law and covenants, is based on the writings of Robert Brinsmead, who was an ex-Seventh Day Adventist particularly bent on doing away with the 7th day Sabbath, but who is now an atheist. The WCG ministry was sent large quantities of his material from headquarters to study, in hopes that it would convince us that the new doctrinal explanations were correct (which it did not for many of us).

Therefore, with the ministry split on these issues, it is no wonder that members are bewildered, perplexed and thrown off balance. But make no mistake about it. An assault on God's laws and practices IS being made, contrary to the sugar coated clarifications that attempt to make it appear otherwise, by claiming that "nothing has really been changed", when indeed many foundational truths have either been obliterated or emasculated. As an example, a letter from headquarters to me personally stated that "the law of the old covenant --- is not binding on Christians at all." ---"The laws of the old covenant itself, including what was written on tables of stone (the ten commandments), has now been set aside ---." ---"In Christ, we are free to hold worship services whenever we choose" (meaning any day). ---"The law is nailed to the cross." --- "Frankly, I wish no one would put leaven out---" (during the days of unleavened bread). The 3/95 PT, p.5, even stated that the book of "Revelation does not offer - nor has it ever offered - a blueprint of future events".

I hope you will think deeply about these statements and others like them that are currently being made in WCG sermons and literature. They are diametrically opposite and contrary to what Jesus and the Apostles plainly taught (Matthew 19:17; Romans 7:12; I John 5:2,3, Revelation 1:1-3).

While I can't address every facet of each new doctrinal change in this letter because of the magnitude and quantity of the details, I want to examine a number of foundational points to help you see that these new explanations are in fact old misconceptions that are terribly wrong and subtly misleading. The conclusions are not sound, and they do not properly analyze and harmonize God's word (2 Timothy 2:15).

The present WCG explanation of the law and covenants maintains that the whole package of the old covenant, including the letter of the ten commandments which was its central core, was set aside and replaced by Christ and personal faith. They use scriptures such as Romans 10:4 and Galatians 3:25 to supposedly prove these assertions, but, as we shall see, they don't correctly understand or explain them.

They say that Christians are now to live by the spirit of the law which is "internalized", but they throw out the commandments and instructions which define which law is being described. And they make a wrong and fictitious distinction between the law of God and the law of Christ. Since Christ is God (Hebrews 1:8), and He and the Father are one (John 17:22), it is erroneous to think that two standards exist.

It is also claimed that many Old Testament laws and practices are no longer scripturally required (such as the previously mentioned 7th day Sabbath, annual festivals, tithing and unclean meats). What is not clearly seen is that it is far safer, and less subject to misinterpretation, to continue a practice once God has established it, unless it is clearly and explicitly changed (like circumcision, Romans 2:29; Galatians 5:2, and animal sacrifices, Hebrews 9 and 10).

Never forget Romans 5:12-14 which explains that the ten commandment law existed and was in force from Adam to Moses. This shows that it started its jurisdiction over humans more than two thousand years PRIOR to the ratification of the old covenant. Therefore, since it did not create and establish these laws, the new covenant cannot possibly abolish them.

Both Abraham and Moses knew about and kept the ten commandments before Sinai (Genesis 26:5; Exodus 18:16). And since Romans 5:13 reveals that "sin is not imputed when there is no law," there are many examples of pre-Mosaic sin which prove that God's moral law existed from the time of Adam onward (Genesis 4:7, 20:6, 42:22 and 50:17, to mention a few of many illustrations).

See also Matthew 19:17, John 14:15 and 15:10, Romans 3:31, Romans 6 with I John 3:4, Romans 7:12, 14, 16 and 22 with I Timothy 1:8, I Corinthians 9:21 (NKJ, not NIV which is misleading and not accurate), I John 2:4 and 5:2, 3, Revelation 12:17, 14:12 and 22:14 which all show the letter of the ten commandment law still in force under the new covenant.

The baptism instruction in Acts 2:38 gives additional support and insight. When a person repents he deeply regrets having broken God's laws, turns around, and begins to keep them. His receiving forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit from God is predicated on this enlightened understanding and action. If the ten commandments were abolished, sin would not exist and this verse would be meaningless.

Some have used Hebrews 7:12, 18 and 19 to claim that the entire old covenant, including tithing, has been annulled. These verses do not show this at all. Instead, they explain that there had to be a change of the law regarding who is eligible to be priest, since Christ was not of Levitical ancestry. That being the case, the proper and logical conclusion is that Christ (and His representatives) are now eligible to receive the tithe. This interpretation agrees with Matthew 23:23 and is warranted since the earlier context of Hebrews 7 is dealing with who was the priest in Abraham's and Moses' day, and consequently the recipient of the tithe during those times.

Lamentably, other parts of Hebrews, especially chapters 8 through 10, are also used in various ways to attempt to abrogate God's laws. However, while Paul's letter is primarily an explanation of the superiority of Christ and the new covenant over the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system of the old covenant, nowhere do you find statements about the doing away of the ten commandments.

Even chapter 4, which the WCG presently uses as proof that the 7th day Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ and therefore eliminated as a requirement for Christians, contains the remarkably clear statement that a Sabbath rest (Greek-Sabbatismos) remains for the people of God (v.9) which can be understood in both a present and future sense.

Hebrews 8:6 shows that the new covenant is better than the old, because it is based on the superior promises of God's laws being put spiritually into the converted mind (verse 10), and imparting an eternal inheritance of spiritual life (9:15), rather than just physical blessings.

Chapters 9 and 10 of Hebrews show that the superiority of Christ's one sacrifice that truly forgives sin, over the continual Levitical animal sacrifices that only reminded of sin but could not pay and forgive its penalty. Therefore, the doing away of the old covenant and the establishment of the new (10:9), primarily centers around the annulment of the animal sacrificial system. There is nothing in these chapters about the cancellation of God's moral laws, or the creation of different commandments.

While I am discussing the book of Hebrews, I was terribly dismayed to read on page 1 of the 3/15/95 Pastor General's Report (PGR) that the WCG now teaches, in an effort to discredit the past, that we used to interpret the last phrase of Hebrews 8:13, "will soon disappear" (NIV), to mean that the old covenant is not yet obsolete. It is now alleged that we used to believe that the old covenant is still binding on Christians, and would soon disappear only when Christ returns!

Brethren, this is a total misrepresentation of what the Church used to teach. I can't remember any of our past literature stating such things. Not trusting my memory, I asked others about this and they drew the same blank. I don't know any older minister who understands and explains this doctrine this way. Such commentary gives the completely wrong impression that we of the "old school" have always felt that Christians are still under the old covenant, and that we are seeking salvation through works of the law. You should also note that this gives the impression that the WCG is freeing the Church from the bondage of the old covenant and presenting the terms of the new covenant to the brethren for the first time!

To the best of my memory and knowledge, the Church has NEVER believed and taught that the old covenant is still binding up to the second coming of Christ. During all the years I worked at headquarters, writing official doctrinal answers from the Letter Answering Department with Dr. Zimmerman, we never gave such wrong explanations. Such statements are terribly misleading and false, and have already caused some to erroneously think that this is what objecting ministers and members believe.

But understand this, for as long as I can remember, over a 40 year span of time, the Church has always clearly understood that the old covenant was abolished by Christ's death, and that the phrase "will soon disappear," or as it is rendered in the NKJ, "is ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 8:13), was fulfilled by the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. Paul used this phraseology because he was writing to the Hebrews in the mid 60's A.D., before the Levitical sacrificial system was brought to an end by the Roman invasion of Palestine under Titus, almost forty years after the crucifixion.

Also alarming, and in blind and misguided support of the above wrong understanding of our past beliefs, some are now preaching that Satan is striving to keep us under the old covenant, that the keeping of God's laws are not important, and that those of us objecting to all this think we have to be strict keepers of the law to be saved.

This is tragic misunderstanding and falsification of fact, and simply is not true as the following will show. It deeply saddens me to see how quickly and easily these distortions are being accepted by many as truth, without first testing such claims by in depth Bible study, prayer and fasting. It makes me wonder if such people really understood the truth to begin with.

The fact is that Mr. Armstrong knew and taught, and the Church has repeatedly written in official form, that salvation and eternal life are free gifts from God, and that law keeping or deeds of any kind cannot forgive our sins or make us immortal. Keeping the commandments does not mean that we are saved by doing so.

We are clearly justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Roman 3:28, 5:1, Galatians 3:24). And we are saved by grace and not works (Ephesians 2:8, 9, Titus 3:5).

We have also always understood that the new covenant is superior and more glorious than the old, and that the former has rendered the latter obsolete (2 Corinthians 3:8-11; Hebrews 8:6, 13). And those who comprehended have believed and practiced that they should live by the spirit of God's law, according to its spiritual intent, instead of just the letter and their fleshly capacity (Romans 8:1ff-; Galatians 5:16, 25). In short, we have never been an old covenant church; as some have been falsely calling us.

But none of the preceding does away with the ongoing standard and letter of the ten commandments, which have not been abolished by the new covenant, as has already been conclusively explained. If you do not thoroughly understand this, and have this frame of mind as a continual point of reference, you will never be able to properly evaluate and interpret Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians, which Peter said are sometimes hard to understand, and which the unstable twist to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).

And you will also remain in ignorance and confusion if you accept the totally false conclusion that the examples of Jesus, the Apostles and the early Church are not authoritative for us today, as was declared in the Festivals study paper of 2/14/95, pages 4 and 7. Even though this flies in the face of the many statements of Jesus and the Apostles to follow Christ, the WCG feels it has to counter such illustrations because the custom of Jesus, Paul and the early Church was to observe the 7th day Sabbath (Luke 4:16, Acts 17:2 and 16:13).

They go on to state that Jesus observed the Sabbath because He was under the authority of the old covenant, which, they say, shows that the examples of His practice were afterwards negated by His death which canceled the 7th day obligation. But they forget that in addition to offering Himself as payment for human sin, another purpose of His first coming was to explain and illustrate, by His words and deeds, the spiritual intent and amplification of God's laws, so that His followers could understand what was meant by living according to the spirit of the law (Matthew 5 through 7, Romans 8:1ff, and Galatians 5:25).

If we can no longer use Jesus' examples of conduct for our standards today, then neither can we authoritatively use the things He said while under the old covenant, which, to be consistent, would also be supposedly nullified by His crucifixion.

Because this is so obviously contrary to the purpose of Jesus' coming, it must be rejected as heretical and unacceptable. These are reasonings of people who do not want to submit themselves to the jurisdiction of God's laws. Besides, the practices and statements of the Apostles regarding the commandments occurred after the abrogation of the old covenant, which proves they were still in force after Christ's death.

Our congregations are also being told that they are putting the law above Christ if they hold on to their old beliefs and practices. Such an assertion lacks proper discernment. Upholding and obeying God's law is not relegating Christ to a subordinate position. Since Jesus is also God, who is the Creator of all law, it is ridiculous and irreverent to even imagine elevating obedience to the ten commandments, which can neither make people perfect nor forgive sin, above the saving grace, mercy and forgiveness that is obtainable only through Christ.

But doing away with the letter of God's written code of law is turning one's back to human experience and common sense, since the fruits of such action produce only anarchy and the breakdown of law and order. We therefore choose to obey God's law out of respect for His wisdom in formulating and establishing it, and because of our love of its inherent goodness.

Years ago we published articles which correctly explained what was done away in the old covenant by the new, and whether the ten commandments were still in force prior to and after the Sinaitic agreement. But many have forgotten these details, others have not read and studied them, and some are bewildered and overwhelmed by the new explanations and don't know how to evaluate them. I apologize for not preaching more about this subject, as I inattentively and wrongly assumed that you understood these foundational matters and were grounded in their truths.

Beware also of statements such as I have recently heard that "the law is not carried into the new covenant," and "the law is not done away, but the written code is!" As already mentioned, how one can keep the spirit of the law, without the underlying written code to define it, is something for you to ponder.

But it is very deceptive to say that the law is not done away, when the new official position says that it has been abolished. Some are explaining it this way because they fear even more people will leave the Church if they fully perceive the truth of the matter.

I have also heard that some of our people have had feelings of continuing guilt for years, because they could not live up to the standards of the ten commandments. They now feel relief for the first time as they are currently being told that they are no longer under the law.

Brethren, this too is terribly sad because it puts the blame on God's law rather than themselves. If some members have had feelings of guilt and hopelessness, it is either because they have not properly understood what the Bible makes clear and the Church has officially taught, or they have been caught up in personal sin that has not been repented of, or both. I am sorry they have not opened up about this so we could have helped them.

Along this line, I hope everyone understands that God's law is holy, just and good (Romans 7:12), and that it forms the foundation of all decent society and human character. As Psalms 119 states, people are blessed for walking in it (verse 1), they obtain peace by loving it (verse 165), and they attain a sense of what is right and wrong by studying it (verse 172). Without it the world would have no trustworthy standard for civilized conduct, and everyone would succumb to and indulge in their innate human carnality and weaknesses. We should therefore be grateful for its reminding and guiding restraint.

So be on guard against explanations and fabrications which attempt to discredit those who understand the truth of God's word, by trying to get you to think that we believe and practice incorrect doctrine when we don't. Such a thrust gives those who embrace these new interpretations the opportunity to present themselves as saviors of the Church, when in reality they are the ones who are misguided.

The new twist presented to the brethren of living by the spirit of the law, without its underlying letter (unless it is specifically stated in the new covenant), doesn't square with the plain New Testament instructions that have already been referred to about keeping the literal commandments. It makes no sense to say that we live by the spirit of God's law if its underlying standard is abolished. Without the foundation in place, how would one know the dimensions and nature of the structure? Clearly, the fundamental letter of the ten commandments is still in effect. The fruits of the spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22, 23 are the harvest from this essential seed.

Therefore, do not be misled. This is a wrong and deceptive interpretation that is being given to diminish the authority of God's eternal standards, including the 7th day Sabbath. If the ten commandments are no longer in force, then there is no reason for keeping the 4th commandment in its letter, which is the explanation some Protestant churches use to justify their Sunday observance.

Tragically, that is the direction the WCG is being pointed toward! Public statements have already been made that the law serves no further purpose since it is now written in our hearts. And because we now worship and serve God all seven days, the 7th day Sabbath is no longer holy time needing to be observed (church-wide video tape, 1/21/95).

Further, by incorrectly thinking that the Sabbath has been abolished because it is now fulfilled in Christ, and that the Sabbath rest of Hebrews 4 is the new life in Christ (PGR, 12/21/94, page 20), the WCG now feels that it is free to hold worship services on any day it chooses.

Therefore, even though it is explained that we are maintaining a tradition, some feel that the real reason why the Church continues to observe the 7th day Sabbath, at the same time it is being pointed away from it, is because of concern that a sudden shift to some other day at this critical time would result in the loss of too many members and too much money. It will be interesting to see what happens in the future.

Let us now briefly examine Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians. No other portions of the Bible have produced so much controversy and misunderstanding in the Christian world. Many churches, now including the WCG, use these writings to convince their membership that the ten commandments, annual festivals, unclean meats and tithing have all been abolished along with the various sacrifices of the Levitical administration. They refer to scriptures such as Galatians 3:25 to supposedly prove that "after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor," meaning in their minds the entirety of the law that was administered under the old covenant, which includes all of the above practices.

But is this the intended meaning of this verse and others like it? No it is not, since it does not harmonize with other scriptures which teach differently. For example, 60 years after Christ's death the Apostle John was still instructing the brethren to "love God and keep His commandments"--- which "are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2, 3). Years after the cessation of the old covenant Paul was striving to attend the Day of Pentecost festival at Jerusalem (Acts 20:16), and Zechariah prophesies of Feast of Tabernacles observance during the coming millennium (14:16). The distinction between clean and unclean animals was known before the flood of Noah, which was more than 700 years prior to the establishment of the old covenant (Genesis 7:2), and therefore was unaffected by its cessation. Also, God will still make a distinction between clean and unclean animals when He returns to earth in the future (Isaiah 66:17). Notice too that tithing was still being advocated by Paul after the termination of the old covenant (Hebrews 7:4-12).

Obviously many churches and people do not understand these matters clearly.

Besides knowing that the ten commandments are not abolished by the new covenant, the next most important point that is necessary to correctly interpret Paul's explanations is understanding that he uses the term "law" in two fundamentally different ways (he also uses the word a number of other ways, but they describe things different from the Old Testament law which we need to examine here).

You need to carefully study the context of Paul's usage of the term "law." When he speaks about God's law as a moral and ethical standard, he establishes and upholds it in a positive way by describing it as "holy, just and good" and "spiritual" (Romans 3:31, 7:12, 14 and 16).

But when he discusses the law as a means of justification, he presents it negatively because "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20, 28).

In other words, when Paul is talking about right living before God, he upholds the value and validity of God's commandments (Romans 13:8-10). But when he shifts to discuss right standing before God, he firmly asserts that relying on works of the law to achieve this is futile (Galatians 2:16). Christ is the end of the law for seeking righteousness (justification) based on merit, rather than on grace in response to faith (Romans 10:4).

In summary, he rejects the law as a means of attaining salvation by good works (legalism) but validates and upholds it as the standard of moral behavior.

The Church has understood this basic distinction for years. But what is happening now and constitutes the core of this present tragic division, is that we who properly understand Paul's writings are being wrongly accused of being legalists who are supposedly relying on works for salvation (which the preceding shows is not true), by those who are undermining God's basic standard of law because of their misunderstanding and wrong interpretation of what Paul teaches about the subject, and embracing flawed explanations of others.

The term "justified" is important to understand. It is a legal word which means to secure a favorable verdict, attain right standing, be acquitted and vindicated, be declared guiltless and righteous in God's sight. Both Romans and Galatians deal extensively with the question of how a person can be regarded by God to be righteous. This has obvious importance as all people sin, thus making forgiveness necessary because the death penalty of sin hangs over everyone, and thus needs to be paid so redemption and remission of sin can be given to the repentant sinner.

As has already been explained, Paul states that this cannot be accomplished by obedience to the law. It is faith in Christ's atoning, propitiatory and redemptive sacrifice that makes this possible. No one can obtain justification by looking to law to do that, because everyone keeps the law imperfectly, thereby rendering such deeds worthless to produce justification, since God demands a righteous requirement of the law (Romans 8:4).

In addition, the law is unable to forgive sin, which is why God established the new covenant "for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15).

But because we cannot be justified by deeds of the law, whatever they might be (keeping the commandments, offering sacrifices, being circumcised, etc.) and when we look in faith to Christ for forgiveness and justification, does that invalidate and abolish the law? Paul answers, "Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish (uphold) the law" (Romans 3:31). He says this because he knows that the law is spiritual, and therefore eternal (Romans 7:14). It is an expression and description of God's character. It cannot be abolished.

Knowing these things and using the marriage law for an example, Paul also explained that he died to the law (which would release him from that as a faulty means of justification, and living by the oldness of just its letter), so he could enter into a new marriage with another (Christ), and serve in the newness of the Spirit made possible by the new covenant (Romans 7:4-6, Galatians 2:19).

But even under this new marriage agreement, Paul lived under or within God's law to Christ (subject to, under or obedient to law - Analytical Greek Lexicon, Harper, page 141), even when dealing with Gentiles who lived without it (I Corinthians 9:21). This is obscured by NU (Alexandrian or Egyptian) texts used by the NIV that render it as Christ's law, to give the impression that it is different from God's ten commandment law. The received text (NKJ) gives the correct and intended meaning.

Turning to Galatians, Paul does not change his explanation of the law and justification. Nowhere does he say that the ten commandments are done away. The main themes in this book concern circumcision (2:3; 5:2, 3, 6; 6:15), and whether a Christian needs to submit to it, or perform any other work of the law, to be justified (2:16, 5:1-4).

Just as in Romans, Paul explains that "a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ --- for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. --- If righteousness (justification) comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (2:16, 21).

He then states again that he had died to the law (2:19, just explained), and goes on to the example of Abraham as the prototype of how to obtain justification and salvation. Abraham believed (had faith in) God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness (3:6, Genesis 15:6). This was before God made the covenant with him promising that he would be the father of many nations and inheritor of specified lands, of which circumcision was the sign (Genesis 17:4, 8, 11), and not the requirement for salvation as the Judeans in Acts 15:1 wrongly believed. Interestingly, even in Abraham's time, justification and salvation were explained in terms of faith toward God and the grace that was to come through Christ's sacrifice, rather than circumcision and similar works of the law (Genesis 12:3, Galatians 3:8, 16). Consequently, those who rely on works of the law (for justification) are under the curse of its penalty which is death (Romans 6:23, Galatians 3:10), because they are not keeping the law perfectly and thus become subject to its punishment for not doing so. That is why Christ has had to redeem us from the curse of the law, by paying our punishment for us through the sacrifice of His life (Galatians 3:13).

In one sense, looking to the old covenant system and codification of law, including the sacrificial, all of which was added to the Abrahamic covenant and promises, acted as a transitory and imperfect kind of justification and covering over of sin, until the Seed (Christ) should come to make perfect and complete justification and forgiveness of sins possible. (Galatians 3:19, 23; Hebrews 9:11-14; 10:4, 14). "The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ (by teaching and highlighting the antitypical things that Jesus was to fulfill), that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor" (Galatians 3:24, 25).

Because of the context and Paul's other comments about the law which have already been examined, this latter verse cannot mean that we are no longer under the ten commandments. Rather, we are no longer under the law as a guardian (Galatians 3:23, 4:2) and temporary substitute for true forgiveness, justification and reconciliation with God that is possible only through Christ. But instead of abolishing everything the tutor taught, we need to evaluate what is permanent in its teaching, and what has been changed or fulfilled by Christ. Under the old covenant, the law worked together with the promises made to Abraham (Galatians 3:21), as it still does under the new covenant and the fulfillment made possible by Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20, Hebrews 8:6, I Peter 1:4).

Also, in the context of a Gentile church, it makes no sense to say that the weak and beggarly elements (Greek-stoichea), and the days, months, seasons and years of Galatians 4:9, 10 are referring to the Sabbath and holy days, which should be done away with. God's observances are never described this way. Consequently, it should be clear that the Galatians were returning to their past religious practices (probably some form of Gnosticism) as a substitute for living by the Spirit and obtaining justification and salvation through Christ.

The same kind of elements (NKJ - basic principles of the world) (Greek-stoichea) is mentioned in Colossians 2:20, where its adherents were critically judging God's people for their joyful eating and drinking practices during the feast days and Sabbaths, in contrast to their extreme ascetic discipline (verses 16, 21-23).

They were looking to the "higher knowledge" of their Gnostic beliefs, rather than to the completeness that is in Christ through His nailing the written certificate of indebtedness (Greek - cheirographon, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament by Arndt and Gingrich, 4th edition, page 889) to the cross.

Note that it is the record and debt of our sins that is nailed to the cross and abolished, NOT the ten commandments! (Colossians 2:10, 13, 14). Similarly, the yoke of bondage mentioned in Galatians 5:1 is not the ten commandments, which are never referred to in the Bible this way (1 John 5:3 describes them as "not burdensome"), but circumcision being looked upon as a means of justification instead of Christ (Galatians 5:2). Again, looking to any part of the law as a vehicle for justification, instead of to Christ, obligates that person to keep the whole law perfectly, which is impossible to do (Galatians 5:3, 4).

Likewise, the yoke which no one could bear in Acts 15:10, was not the ten commandment law, but the endless Pharisaical additions and complexities that became so burdensome that they were almost impossible to keep. This is what the Pharisees wanted to impose upon the Gentiles, in addition to circumcision, that is mentioned in verse 5.

It needs to also be pointed out that while we are not justified by the works of the law, in the sense of using them for right standing before God, neither are we accounted righteous by faith only, without works. The Apostle James, who was the half brother of Jesus, makes this plain by stating that "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). The two need to work hand in hand, as faith is perfected by works (verse 22). James is not contradicting Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. Rather he explains that unproductive faith is not genuine and therefore cannot save. A faith that does not produce good works is a dead faith (James 2:20, 26), which is described in verses 15 and 16 as non-involvement and indifference.

Authentic faith is BEING ALIVE to works which prove one's trust in God. The examples of Abraham and Rahab show that they were justified by works in the sense of being vindicated before God by producing evidence of their faith (verses 21, 25).

Therefore, it is important to realize that if Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20), He can give us, if we stay close to Him, the spiritual power to discipline and overcome the downward pulls of our human nature, develop righteous character (for holiness sake, not justification), and produce good fruit toward others.

This also illustrates that it is important to keep God's annual feasts such as Unleavened Bread with proper emphasis, which pictures putting sin OUT of our lives, rather than just stressing that we are saved, holy and without sin, which can easily begin to produce the lethargy of a dead faith. Finally, because many of you are so scattered and somewhat isolated, and have been given only one side of what is happening in the body of Christ, I feel I need to give you an update and clearer picture of what has occurred. I am sorry to burden you with such a long letter, but I don't know of a shorter way that would give you an accurate understanding of the issues and decisions that face us all. In addition, I felt that I had to make a defense for the truth, by making it plain so all of you would have something else to study besides current WCG literature and explanations.

You will remember, that as new interpretations from headquarters got increasingly controversial, I would read from the Pastor General's Report to let you know what was being stated, and then I would try to help you see that there was another side of the matter which needed consideration. I described what our past understanding was, and how we arrived at our previous conclusions. I told you there were strong differences of opinion, and urged you, because of the complexities, to deeply and prayerfully study the subject yourselves, so you would make a right decision, since such judgments have to be made by each individual personally. I felt this approach was the best way to help you under the circumstances.



Because of my feelings of love and responsibility toward you, for your sakes I felt I had to give warning that our doctrinal moorings were being dangerously threatened. Many were accepting these new teachings without adequate testing, and many did not perceive the ultimate consequences. My efforts were obviously not acceptable to our local elders, who, thinking they were doing God and the Church a service, contacted Pasadena about my not teaching the new doctrines with my full endorsement. (Their action was very disappointing to me, since I had hoped that they were going to make a stronger effort to study the matter more carefully to determine the truth of these important issues.) They were then given authority over the three congregations in our area, and I was relieved of my duties, without anyone from Church Administration first talking to me about the matter. You also need to know that the same thing has happened in a number of other congregations across the nation. In all of these locations, the minister was turned in by the local elders and fired by the WCG when it saw that it had the support of elders in these areas.

Headquarters finally did call, only to inform me that they did not want me to preach in our churches any longer, and asking if I was going to resign or retire. I told them that I was not yet ready to do either, and that they would have to make the decision, which they did, by retiring me without my request and against my will.

They felt this was necessary because they had previously informed the ministry that it had to teach the new doctrines and lead the brethren away from their past "misunderstandings." While a member was allowed to have contrary beliefs and remain in the Church as long as he did not cause division, a minister could continue in his role of pastor only if he preached what Pasadena dictated, and kept his personal beliefs to himself if he disagreed, something I could not do in good conscience. Regardless of the consequences, I strongly felt that I could not preach what I knew was not true.

Besides, I could not just keep silent and give the impression I was agreeing with and supporting these falsehoods, and neither could I play the role of hypocrite by teaching you things I know are not true, and corrupting your Christian understanding and practice. I could not sacrifice personal integrity for the sake of a paycheck.

I feel I have to frankly tell you all this because the facts of what actually happened have not been presented to you, and many have been led to wrongly think that I voluntarily decided to retire. The truth is, I was given no choice in the matter. I had stated in a letter to Pasadena that I would be willing to step down if they felt uncomfortable with my position, but I have never said I would step out, especially in view of the seriousness of our present doctrinal crisis.

It then took over three more weeks before I received the correspondence that described the terms of my so-called "retirement." I was given two options. I could either choose a "severance package" of one week's pay for each year of service (I was going on my 37th year of employment), or I could accept what is called "discretionary assistance" of 60% of my salary (there is no retirement, social security or pension plan for the ministry, and never has been).

At first glance the second alternative sounded inviting, until I went on to read that it "is subject to termination or reduction in the future at the Church's discretion should it deem it necessary or prudent for financial or other reasons to do so." Plainly stated, such assistance could be cut off at any time, for any reason, if the Church decided to do it.

In other words, if any of you asked me a doctrinal question, and I gave you a truthful answer that did not agree with current headquarters explanation, and the incident was reported to church officials (which is bound to happen under the present circumstances), I would be cut off and lose all income. This has already happened to a number of brethren. Some who have been "retired" as long time employees, and had been receiving "discretionary assistance" for several years, were cut off when they left the Church for conscience sake to fellowship with another organization.

Viewed from this perspective, such monetary help is like a bribe and payoff to keep me and others silent. It is used as leverage against the recipient to keep him from rocking the boat. It would tape my mouth shut and tie my hands and feet. I therefore rejected "discretionary assistance," and chose the "severance package" which is a legal contract that would provide an income for a number of months. As a matter of principle, I felt I could not allow myself to be hamstrung and muzzled by restrictions and monetary pressures of this kind.

Therefore, I want everyone to know that I AM NOT RETIRED, and am free to teach God's truth as the Bible states it.

This whole terrible experience has been an inevitable and necessary confrontation for me, since Pasadena has been leaning heavily on the ministry over the past year by stating that we could not just "sit on the fence" or preach contrary to their interpretations. They tried to force us to go along with them by pressuring that we had to either accept what they gave us to teach, or step aside. There was no other alternative, since the many requests for a ministerial conference to discuss and test these new doctrines have been repeatedly rejected. While they gave us time to study these new doctrines, the bottom line was that they were right and those of us objecting were all wrong, and we had to go along with them if we wanted to remain in the ministry.

And so I have been faced with some difficult and agonizing decisions. On the one hand I could not forsake the truth I understand, nor turn my back on the spiritual needs of many of you who share my beliefs. But on the other hand, I felt a loyalty to the WCG, which had been my spiritual home and mother for over 40 years. During previous trying times I had stayed in the Church, and trusted God to resolve the problems and difficulties. But this time it was different. Rather than dealing with lesser things I could put on the back burner or live with, truths that formed the very foundation of my convictions and practices were now attacked, ridiculed and discarded. I could not believe it when the ten commandments, which I lived by for years and taught my children from baby up, were suddenly declared out of date by the new covenant, along with a number of other subjects already discussed.

A new and different spirit had gripped the Church. While some believed that necessary changes were finally being made, others disagreed and felt that heresy was being introduced. At first, division began slowly, with small splinter groups breaking away. But now it has escalated so much that literally tens of thousands of brethren are leaving the WCG to form new congregations with their pastors. In a short time from now, upwards of half the ministry and lay membership will be gone.

Headquarters has been decimated by employees and key department heads resigning or being let go. Our college in Texas has at times been like a battleground and war zone. A number of faculty and resident ministers have quit or been forced out. Foreign offices have been closed, our TV program has been discontinued, and editorial production has been cut way back. Even our headquarters property in Pasadena, which many of us helped to build by our tithes and offerings, may soon be sold. 10 of 14 regional pastors have already left.

All this has occurred because of doctrinal changes that are not resolvable, because Church authorities unyieldingly believe they are totally right, and refuse to hold doctrinal conference discussions, or be easily entreated and open to the possibility that other points of view have truth and validity. Tragically, the division that is upon us has gotten worse, and there are no signs that the situation will improve. Even at this moment, other changes are in the wind that will bring about even greater dissatisfaction, controversy and discord. I wish it could be different.

I know that some feel they will stay with the Church no matter what happens, even if its teachings go deeper into error, because God will eventually correct it. And others cannot believe that God would ever allow church leadership to be deceived and teach falsehood. (Such are putting their faith in men, rather than in God and His word).

I used to embrace such optimism, but I have since had to face the fact that history and the Bible prove otherwise. All one has to do is read Revelation 2 and 3 to see that God allowed some terrible errors to creep into those churches in the first century A.D. And there is no indication that He personally intervened to turn things around, or that He brought into being some kind of central church authority to clean up the mess. Revelation 3:16 even mentions that God spewed one of those churches out of His mouth. Under such circumstances, what is a Christian to do? Where does one draw the line? If the Church teaches more and more error, should a Christian remain with it, or should he leave its fellowship? How long can one remain in fellowship with falsehood and not be wrongly influenced and tainted by it? Should one feel loyal to the body when it becomes totally different from the one he first came into? Granted, we should allow for spiritual growth. But if we see that so-called growth and deeper understanding is in reality a slide into heresy and degeneracy, at what point do we obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29)?

Such questions are not without precedent, as the early Church of God faced the same kind of situation and decision. In Revelation 2:2 we find that God approved of the Ephesian church taking action that some today are afraid to take.

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear (endure) those who are evil. And you have TESTED those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars."

God then admonished them to repent of their weaknesses and heed and learn from the mistakes of their own and neighboring churches.

Paul also gave direction to the contemporary congregation in Rome which was faced with similar problems.

"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions (Church leaders, not the ministry or brethren, have currently done this) and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teachings you have learned. KEEP AWAY FROM THEM. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people" (Romans 16:17, 18, NIV).

And notice the directive he gave to Timothy.

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which is according to godliness (what could be more godly than Jesus instructing the rich young man to "keep the commandments - Matthew 19:17), he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. FROM SUCH WITHDRAW YOURSELF (I Timothy 6:3-5, NKJ).

Strong words, but like our first century brethren, we are in a spiritual battle to preserve God's truth!

From this perspective, being loyal to God is much more important and necessary than being loyal to a church organization that has departed from the purity and wisdom of God's word! (Acts 5:29).

As a protection for ourselves, our children and the brethren, we need to heed these scriptures. There comes a time (and I never dreamed that I would ever be writing this kind of letter and statement), when false teaching becomes so dominant that separation becomes necessary, and allegiance to God must take precedence over loyalty to human authority.

But I obviously can speak only for myself in these matters. Each of you will have to make your own evaluation and decision, since these are personal judgments, which are accountable to God, that must be based on the understanding and faith of each individual.

Many of you have already heard of the meetings in Indianapolis, Indiana, where over 300 ministers and wives gathered to form the United Church of God. I went to that assembly because I felt I needed to test the spirit and proceedings to see if they were of God.

Like everyone there, I was very grateful for the evidence of God's Spirit which was manifested by the bearing and concern of those who spoke (senior, experienced men of proven character, with faithful records), and the order, love and cooperation of everyone present. We all felt that something needed to be done to preserve the integrity of God's truth, and establish a fellowship for those of like mind, and we were thankful that God was showing us how that could be accomplished.

Because of wrong concepts and practices of church government that have been in the WCG for years, and which have been partially responsible for the division we are experiencing now, I was especially concerned about the structure of this new body.

For the sake of the Church in the future, to protect it and avoid what has just happened in the WCG, I personally felt very strongly that it was safer to establish a group of ministers as the leadership (like the Apostles in Acts 1), rather than having it revolve around just one or a very few in that position. To me, that was necessary to guarantee both a greater wisdom when making decisions concerning the Church, and to provide checks and balances for doctrinal refinement and establishment.

I am pleased to inform you that all these needs and concerns were satisfied at the conference. The entire ministry makes up a council of elders, and a board of 9 was set up so that a 2/3 majority could resolve differences of opinion. A chairman of the board was selected, not to rule autonomously, but to facilitate proceedings.

I want to take a moment to also say a few words to the leaders of the WCG, as I know you will eventually get a copy of this letter. I want you to know that concern for you, as well as the brethren who are still associated with you came up spontaneously a number of times during the Indianapolis meetings, and there was never any hostility expressed toward any of you by anyone at any time. We all wish our differences of opinion could have been resolved some other way, and we would welcome any sincere desire by you to sit down in the future to seek a solution to our disagreements.

In conclusion, a number of you have told me that you cannot accept many of the new doctrinal changes. Up until recently, we did not have any entirely satisfactory alternative. But now, with the establishment of the United Church of God, a satisfying, God-directed alternative is available, and an association with them is now possible. Even fall Feast sites across the country are being contracted.

Therefore, in the weeks and months ahead, I WILL BE REGROUPING AND ORGANIZING NEW CONGREGATIONS IN BOTH IDAHO AND WYOMING.

If any of you would like additional information, or want to fellowship with this restoration of the Church of God, or if any of you would like me to visit you to discuss these matters further, my new address and phone number are as follows:

P. O. Box 1379  
Dubois, Wyoming 82513  
(307) 455-2432

Leave a message if I'm not home. I look forward to seeing many of you in the future.

Sincerely in God's love,

(signed) Wilbur A. Berg, Minister of God