NEWS WATCH

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P.O. Box 713, Toledo, OH 43697
www.CoG-PKG.org or theCofG@aol.com

News for the scattered Church of God – by Ron Weinland
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A SPIRITUAL WAR

In the late 70's and early 80's, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong often spoke of the need for the Church to get back on the right track. We must indeed conclude that the period of time when Mr. Armstrong made such statements was mild compared to the state of the Church today. It is in far more critical condition now than it was back then.

To get back on the right track meant that brethren had to repent of straying off course and make the changes that were necessary in order to come back into unity with God. That need for repentance and change is greater now than ever before.

News Watch and *Time Is Running Out*, a recent publication, have focused on the need to get back to the trunk of the tree, to those foundational truths restored to the Church during the Philadelphian period, through Mr. Armstrong. The reason for this focus is because brethren have drifted far away from that trunk. Many others, who believe that they are holding fast to the trunk, are themselves physically focused, lacking soundness of mind and unbalanced in the spiritual application of those truths. We are living through a period of time when those truths are being attacked from every side, as a great spiritual battle continues to be waged to destroy the Church.

This *News Watch* is being written to admonish brethren to become more on guard, more spiritually watchful than ever. As we draw closer to the end of this age and the final fulfillment of prophecies concerning the Church, we need to grasp that this battle against the Church, on a spiritual realm, is going to intensify.

The past three years have seen subtle, relentless attacks that are gaining momentum and working their way into the remnant of the Church. That means the scattered remnant, the small portion of the Church that yet remains, is going to be under siege from forces that are intensifying and working with greater deception and swiftness than what we have already been experiencing.

The choice before you is whether you will personally enter into a more guarded posture against such evil and draw spiritually closer in your relationship with God. Each of us must seek to draw closer to our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. We must become more fully filled with the power of God's spirit living in us if we are to stand fast through this battle that is before us.

The Battlefront

So where does one begin in order to understand the kind of strategies that are being used to weaken and conquer brethren. Most attacks are quite subtle but openly blatant. Each of us needs to seek God's help to become more spiritually focused so that we can readily recognize and expose any threatening advances of an enemy that is at work to destroy the remnant of the Church.

It should come as no surprise where the majority of such attacks are focused. If we have a good grasp of our history, then such understanding should be quite obvious to us. What would Satan want to attack and destroy in order to tear down and destroy the temple of God? The answer to that question is contained in understanding what God restored to the Church during Philadelphia.

We must indeed grasp who we are and from where we have come. At the early part of this last century, the Church was dying out. By the end of the Sardis era, only three basic truths remained. God then revived the Church by restoring truth that was needed for salvation. He raised up a man to accomplish that feat during Philadelphia. Toward the end of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's life, those restored truths began to be referred to as the 18 truths.

These are truths which are part of the trunk of the tree of God's law and His very plan and purpose for mankind. These truths, along with the three that were remaining in Sardis, capsulize and help magnify the very gospel of the Kingdom of God.

So again, it should come as no surprise that these truths are the very thing being attacked. You need to be aware of some of the most dangerous strategies being used to destroy the trunk of the tree. The most revealing area of truth that God restored, in order to revive the Church and give profound meaning to the gospel message, was that of the Holy Days. Is it any wonder that Satan should want to destroy such revelation and truth concerning God's plan and purpose for mankind, which shows the way to becoming part of the God Family?

Passover

The attacks against Passover are not new. When our Passover came to this earth, Satan immediately began to try to destroy Him. From the time of the very birth of Jesus Christ, all the way to the time He was finally crucified, Satan tried to thwart and destroy Him.

A short time later, in the very early history of the Church, the subject of Passover became a focus of strong controversy between the true Church of God and an emerging, great false church. The Nicean Council in 325 A.D. was a major attack against the Passover. The Council moved it to the Sunday following the Passover and changed the observance to Easter. The results of this controversy also gave rise to subtleties that were used against the Sabbath day in order to lend evidence (falsely so) to a Sunday sabbath.

In our time, the Passover began to be attacked during the mid to late 1970's. A movement began among some ministers trying to give credibility to a false doctrine that distorted the truth about the meaning of Passover. That false teaching began to put Jesus Christ in the same light that the Protestant world does – a rebellious Son who came along and changed His Father's law. This has been a subtle and yet constant effort on the part such ministers. They have worked to make this change and infiltrate the Church with their perverse false teaching.

God revealed to Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong the importance of the Passover and annual Holy Days. This was vital truth that God restored to His Church. Mr. Armstrong learned very early on that the vast majority of Jewish people did not observe Passover on the correct day and no wonder, because they did not accept the true Passover, Jesus Christ. Mr. Armstrong understood very well that the correct timing of Passover in the Old Testament and in the New Testament was on

the same day, the 14th of Nissan (Abib).

In the latter part of the 70's, Garner Ted Armstrong made it quite clear that he did not believe in the correct timing, thus he began to push the concept of a New Testament Passover being on the 14th and an Old Testament Passover being on the 15th. The term 14/15th is now commonly used to describe this belief. His ideas of this false teaching were published for all the Church to see in his book, "The Real Jesus." What a horrible thing to have done with such a book, because his new teaching did not reveal the real Jesus Christ, instead it promoted a false Christ. By his reasoning, Jesus Christ would have observed the Passover a day earlier than what was observed in the Old Testament. This kind of reasoning would have disqualified Jesus Christ as truly being the Passover, because what He did had to agree with the Old Testament scriptures if He was to be the true Passover.

Well known ministers adopted this belief and openly attacked the true understanding that God had revealed to Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong toward the very beginning of the Philadelphian era. There are too many today who do not believe that this conflict is a vitally important matter within the Church. They do not grasp the severity of such a false teaching or of the extreme danger in moving away from the truth once revealed to them. This in itself is witness of the true weakness and sickness within the Body of Christ. The teaching of a 14/ 15th Passover is not only a hideous and haughty presumptuous act, it is outright rebellion against God.

Those who followed Garner Ted Armstrong either supported this false teaching or taught it themselves, including Ron Dart who still espouses it. Anyone who supported such a ministry were themselves in complicity and just as guilty of heresy. There were many other ministers who held to this false belief and stayed in the Worldwide Church of God instead of following Garner Ted.

A group of ministers emerged once again in the late 1980's trying to change the truth of a 14th Passover to a 14/15th teaching. This teaching was sent out to all the ministry and leadership of the Worldwide Church of God. Video tapes were sent out from headquarters in an effort to indoctrinate full time ministers, as well as local elders, deacons and deaconesses. The minister who presented this subject on those videos was Dr. Hoeh. An additional large number of ministers adopted this false belief and moved away from the truth that had earlier been delivered to them at their conversion. Some of those men have either left the Church all together or have gone on to teach other false doctrines within the Worldwide Church of God.

But far too many of those ministers, who adopted this false belief, are still around the environs of the scattered Church. Many of those men are in the United Church of God, *IA*. Some officials within United have speculated that perhaps as many as half of their ministers hold to such a belief, even if they do not teach it openly. Such men have not been removed for holding to that belief, nor have those who teach it.

One such minister, Mark Kaplan, who recently left UCG,*IA*, openly taught this false doctrine. The leadership of UCG,*IA* at no time restricted him from spreading such falsehood within the Church. Mark has caused a great deal of harm to the Church because of the influence he held as a teacher at Ambassador College and because of the credibility he supposedly held for his Jewish background and knowledge of Hebrew.

Even one of UCG,*IA*'s long time council members, Gary Antion, has been teaching this false doctrine. Members of United need to take a hard and sobering look at their ministers and begin discerning if they are true or false. The leadership of United should also be held accountable for their allowance and liberal tolerance of such false teachings to continue in their midst. It is exactly this kind of complicity within the leadership of the Church that continues to cause so much destruction in the spiritual temple of God. These are not small matters!!!

Even in Global, Harold Smith was known for his false teaching on this subject of a 14/15th Passover. Although he has subsequently said he was sorry he ever gave such sermons since they had caused such a ruckus, he never repented or said he was wrong in what he taught. Even worse, this blatant teaching of his was brought to the attention of the leadership of Global. They responded by saying that such differences of belief have existed within the ministry for years, and that it would continue to be allowed since Mr. Armstrong allowed it. That is simply a lie. Mr. Armstrong understood perfectly well the truth of a 14th Passover and preached against the false teaching of a 14/15th Passover. Does anyone really believe that Mr. Armstrong would tolerate any minister under him for teaching such false doctrine? How absurd! Again, those leaders who allowed such perverse teachings within the old Global organization are accountable for their complicity.

Is it any wonder the Church is in such a weak and sickly condition today. Verses that warn of such consequences should scream out to us. *"Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world"* (1 Corinthians 11:27-32, KJV).

How could someone take a Passover service with anyone who holds to a teaching that works to destroy the very beauty, seriousness and meaning of that day? How could anyone hold such people in fellowship when the very night of Passover is about our true fellowship (KJV - communion) with one another, Jesus Christ and God our Father?

If they do not already know the answer, scattered brethren should immediately go to their minister and ask point blank what they believe about this teaching! Do they believe in an Old Testament 15th Passover or an Old Testament 14th Passover? An Old Testament Passover on the 14th is the only day that is in complete harmony and truth with those things fulfilled by the true Jesus Christ.

Pentecost

Pentecost 2001 is coming under great attack as many brethren plan to observe it a week later than they should. The correct timing of Pentecost was one of the last matters concerning the Holy Days that was revealed and restored to the Church through Mr. Armstrong. That issue began to be clarified in 1974.

Not only was the correct understanding given making it clear that when counting Pentecost it would always be observed on a Sunday, but the correct method of counting from the wavesheaf was also revealed.

As Leviticus 23 explains, the count for Pentecost was to begin from the morrow after the weekly Sabbath when the wave sheaf was offered, which is during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Mr. Armstrong understood that the instruction contained in Leviticus 23 was fulfilled and thoroughly clarified in Joshua 5. To deny that Joshua 5 is

a fulfillment of God's instructions in Leviticus 23 is to deny that God kept His promise to the Israelites. It is the witness and record of that fulfilled promise!

In some years the Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath, therefore the last day of Unleavened Bread falls on a weekly Sabbath. Some have come up with the idea that you should begin the count for Pentecost after the weekly Sabbath which is the same Sabbath as the 7th day of Unleavened Bread. This of course would mean that the wave sheaf would have to be waved after the Days of Unleavened Bread are over, which totally takes away from the meaning contained in our Wave Sheaf, Jesus Christ, who was presented to God for us during the Days of Unleavened Bread. He is the one who leads us out of sin, which has great meaning in these days. Such a false method of counting from the wave sheaf, after the Days of Unleavened Bread are over, also denies that Joshua 5 is the fulfillment of Leviticus 23.

All the human reasoning in the world does not change the truth of what occurred in Joshua 5. Since the events of Joshua 5 occur on very specific days of the week, those who seek to observe a different method of counting, than what was earlier revealed to the Church, end up with weird and convoluted arguments against Joshua 5 being the fulfillment of God's instruction in Leviticus 23. Arguments about how long it took to circumcise those now coming into the promised land and the healing that needed to follow are typical examples of human reasoning that seek to disprove this the fulfillment of Leviticus 23. Other reasoning about when the harvest could begin or intellectual arguments about whether the wave sheaf is more closely related to Unleavened Bread or Pentecost are also vain and lacking in true understanding. This is the same method of foolish reasoning that some try to use when distorting the correct timing of events relating to the Passover.

Joshua 5 conclusively proves that the count of the wave sheaf should always be made from <u>within</u> the Days of Unleavened Bread. The emphasis for the count beginning within the Days of Unleavened Bread does not center on the weekly Sabbath from which to begin the count, but upon the wave sheaf which represents Jesus Christ, where the count actually begins. This means that on the years when the Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath, the wave sheaf and count for Pentecost should begin from this weekly Sabbath of Passover, starting the count on the first day of Unleavened Bread. The weekly Sabbath is not part of the count, but it is only from that day. This is exactly what happened in Joshua 5. This subject is of such great importance that a reprint of an earlier article in *News Watch* about Pentecost and the fulfillment of Joshua 5 is being sent with this current issue.

It is a shame for brethren to move away from this truth that God restored to the Church back in 1974. Yet, John Rittenbaugh of the Church of the Great God teaches that in such years when the Passover falls on the weekly Sabbath (2001, 2005, and 2008), that the count for Pentecost should begin after the Days of Unleavened Bread are over. This teaching is false and brethren need to be warned not to observe it a week late. Again, what a shame it would be for some brethren to be outside the count of Pentecost after God had called them to be in the count of all firstfruits, as part of the fulfillment of Pentecost.

In John Rittenbaugh's magazine, *Forerunner*, he has been writing articles that seek to disprove the fulfillment of Joshua 5 concerning Pentecost. Rather than address so many of his convoluted arguments, it is better that brethren prove what is true and then, when they hear of such arguments, they will more readily recognize the errors and deception of such false teachings. Brethren who are not well grounded in what is true are more easily deceived by arguments that have the appearance of intellectualism. God's truth is not a matter of intellectualism. It is plain truth revealed by the soundness of God's spirit in our minds.

Mr. Rittenbaugh leaves the impression that this issue centering around Joshua 5 was never fully resolved in 1974 by inserting discrepancies between things stated by Garner Ted Armstrong and the *Pentecost Study Material* authored by Charles Dorothy. His writing on this subject clearly reveals that he believes Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was in error in 1974 or that Mr. Armstrong simply was not in full control of the situation, not being truly convicted of the issue concerning the matter of Joshua 5. Any such insinuations are totally false!

Mr. Armstrong's convictions, concerning these final truths to be restored to the Church during Philadelphia, are clearly revealed in the booklet "Pagan Holidays - - or God's Holy Days – Which?" that was authored by him in the 1976 edition. In that booklet, Mr. Armstrong writes, *"Then, on the day following the weekly Sabbath, in a solemn ceremony of the Levitical priesthood, the first sheaf of grain was cut. This event* ***always occurred*** *during the days of unleavened bread (see Joshua 5). The sheaf was then brought to the priest. The priest solemnly waved it before the Eternal to be accepted for them."* It is clear from this that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong clearly understood that the wave sheaf must be offered within the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Trumpets

Trumpets also is under siege, but in a rather strange way. Over the past few years, ministers from various scattered groups are coming out with a doctrine that takes away from the beauty and truth about the resurrection of the firstfruits at the return of Jesus Christ. Instead, several are teaching that there will be different resurrections for the firstfruits. They are espousing doctrine that we have always understood to be false. We have always believed that once anyone dies, they will not be resurrected and go off to heaven, not even the firstfruits.

But some ministers today are teaching that those firstfruits who are dead in Christ will be resurrected before Trumpets and go off to heaven for a short time. They do not teach that the dead in Christ will be resurrected on the Day of Trumpets, preceding a resurrection on the same day of those firstfruits who are yet alive.

Through numerous religions, this is a doctrine that Satan has tried to get mankind to accept in one way or another. The very place Satan could not ascend and overthrow is the very place he has tried to deceive mankind into believing they can go.

There are different variations of this teaching around the environs of the Church, but they all have a similar pattern and distortion of what is true about this important Holy Day. Fred Coulter teaches that the firstfruits in Christ will be resurrected on a Pentecost, and then they will be waiting for the rest who are alive to be resurrected on Trumpets. He also makes of great importance the sea of glass, as though it is some great revelation of new truth. Of course most of his ideas about it are new.

Rob Elliot of the Church of God Worldwide in Florida teaches that those firstfruits dead in Christ will be resurrected 30 days prior to Trumpets and go off to heaven until it is time for Jesus Christ to return, when those who are yet alive are to be resurrected. There are other scattered ministers who have held to such a belief concerning this 30-day period.

Don Ward, a council member of UCG,*IA* spoke on this subject in lectures given while he was in United. When covering material concerning the book of Daniel, he taught basically the same thing as these other ministers, but his period of time for being off in heaven is 45 days instead of 30.

It seems that if we will not accept the teaching of going off to heaven forever, perhaps we will believe that some will be there for at least a short period of time before having to come back to this earth.

Some may feel that these variations about Passover, Pentecost, and Trumpets (as well as other variations with these Holy Days and others) are not matters that we should be overly concerned about. But it is a most serious thing to move away from foundational truth that God has revealed to us. Once truth has been revealed, it is indeed a serious offense and sin to decide for oneself to turn away to some other belief. Sin cuts us off from God. Without God and God's Spirit in our lives, the truth we have remaining in us will not justify us, but in time will also dissipate.

Too many today seek to justify themselves through an outward display of things we have always known brethren should be doing, such as tithing, observing the Sabbath and Holy Days, and in general, continuing to go through the motions of religion. But those basic things in themselves do not fully reveal whether someone is truly being faithful in holding fast to the foundational truths God restored to the Church through Mr. Armstrong during the time of Philadelphia.

Atonement

From time to time, even Atonement is being polluted by an idea that some in Worldwide began to spread in the late 80's concerning the two scapegoats. Rather that one representing Jesus Christ and the other Satan, some have been teaching that both represent Jesus Christ.

Another great tragedy that diminishes from the meaning contained in this day is the false practice being pushed by many scattered groups today that it is permissible and even Christ like to allow fellowship with brethren with different beliefs like those we have discussed in this article. Such groups often speak of building bridges. They do not understand that when you build a bridge of fellowship with a group that believes a false doctrine, you construct a passage for that false doctrine to enter your own fellowship. Such self-righteous standards smack squarely against warnings from God against such practices. The haughty tolerance of such attitudes will rapidly weaken spiritual health and quickly take away from a true fellowship with God.

Such liberalism and perverted efforts exercised toward others who practice opposing beliefs have only served to turn brethren farther away from true fellowship and atonement with God. These false efforts of building such destructive bridges or justifying a continuation of false fellowship has resulted in large numbers of brethren falling from the truth while accepting many false teachings that separate them farther and farther from God.

Atonement teaches us of the need to fight against pride and to seek to become more in harmony and unity with God and His word. It is about getting farther away from deception and lies, not seeking to justify fellowship with such things that move us farther from God. We are to become more at one with God in every facet of our Christian development and spiritual growth.

The Feast of Tabernacles

The result of ongoing attacks against foundational truths discussed so far in this article is the primary cause of a continual weakening of the Body of Christ. The effect of this onslaught against the truth that God restored during Philadelphia is becoming more fully realized in the observance and understanding of the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day.

As the Church grows weaker, the Feast has become more of a placebo for brethren rather that producing what God intends that it should. As brethren become weaker spiritually, the true understanding and purpose of these days begins to diminish. The Feast then begins to take on more of a physical meaning rather than spiritual. People become more concerned with the physical aspects of this period of time and the spiritual senses become dulled as the Feast takes on a growing role of justifying the conscience. A person's mind can deceive itself into believing that since they are present at this Feast, then they are fulfilling their duty before God. People in the Church can treat the Feast in a similar manner as people in this world use Christmas and Easter to feel better about themselves.

When these things begin to happen to ministers, their sermons at the Feast begin to stray away from the subject and purpose of why they are there. It often becomes difficult to tie in any relationship between what they are preaching about and any meaning contained in these Holy Days. Such a careless approach to preaching works to lull brethren to sleep spiritually.

The result of such reckless attitudes of brethren and ministers toward this season of the year is the very thing that produces a loss of vision and confidence in what these days picture. Is it any wonder that lively excitement about our calling and real anticipation of God's Kingdom coming soon is less evident than ever before in the lives of brethren? Brethren can physically observe the Feast of Tabernacles and fail to profit spiritually. Sadly, that has become more the norm over the years.

Brethren need a spiritual Feast, not just a physical one. Each year, as physical Feasts become the norm, brethren grow weaker and begin to fall prey to the spiritual warfare before us.

Seek God's Help

We live in dangerous times! The battles before us are real. The very things mentioned in this issue are at the heart and core of battles being waged against scattered brethren. Prophecy shows that few will escape due to lethargy, complacency, and pride. Few will truly repent. Pride will not admit error, and it certainly will not be drawn to repentance.

These are the times to humble ourselves before God and cry out for His mercy. It has been said many times before, but we need to be reminded. Two thirds of the Church, as we once knew it, went by the way-side very early on in this battle. Of the third that survived into the later 1990's and became scattered, only a small portion will survive as God's true remnant. The odds are not in your favor. Are you certain of where you stand? Are you certain of how you are standing?

The problem with what we have discussed is not a matter of some being better than others, but of our willingness to examine ourselves realistically, repent, and seek God's mercy so that we might be able to be at one with Him. The need now, more than any other, is one of repentance. No one would survive if God were not merciful to us. All were slumbering or had fallen off to sleep. All had to be spued out of God's mouth.

The only way of survival and standing fast in battle is to seek God's help – more than we ever have in our past. Only through diligent pursuit and heart felt desire may we be a remnant people of God in these last days. **NW**