

## Fundamentals of Belief 18B: The Church's Mission

Edited Sermon Transcript  
Jon W. Brisby; 8-17-2002

We're going to continue with this very long series on the Fundamentals of Belief of the Church of God, The Eternal. If you will remember from last time, we accomplished the first half of fundamental number eighteen concerning the identity of the Church. Today, we want to complete fundamental number eighteen with the second half, but let me read the first half of fundamental number eighteen as a quick review of what we accomplished last time. The first half reads:

We believe the Church is merely that body of believers who have, and are being led by the Holy Spirit; that the true Church of God is not a denomination; that the inspired name for this spiritual organism is "THE CHURCH OF GOD;" that the Bible name for each local assembly is "THE CHURCH OF GOD," and, considered collectively, "The Churches of God . . ."

That's the first half of the wording in fundamental number eighteen. Last time, we went through the description of what the Church really is and what it is not. The Church is not a denomination. The Body of Christ cannot be defined by a physical assembly of all human beings that decide to come together in the congregation. No, I explained that in the concept of what I call the Church, capital "C"—the Body of Christ—versus the church, little "c," "the physical assembly.

We went through those concepts, and also the principles that God's Church, God's people, have always existed in a mixed multitude. There is always the potential that there are those who actually don't possess the Holy Spirit, but who may be with us. Now, that's not to say that we should start looking sideways at each other and say, "Are you really in, or are you really out?" God has told us not to judge. We can know certain things by the fruits of those who are truly overcoming and manifesting those fruits, and yet God is the one who knows the difference. We are to treat all who come and express an interest in that Way of Life, who seem to be sincere, as if

they certainly are a part of the Body of Christ, and that's precisely how this ministry is going to treat every single one. We're going to give the benefit of the doubt, to believe that all who express an interest in it, and want to be with us, are coming for the right reason. We all have problems and difficulties in life; and so, those are just a part of the human struggle against these carnal natures. God is the one who knows in the end and will make the determination of who has truly been using the Holy Spirit as a productive force in their lives for the process of overcoming and preparing themselves for the return of Jesus Christ.

The Church, then, is a spiritual organism. It can't be defined by any physical fence set around a particular body. Now, certainly, we believe that a very high percentage of the fellowship of this remnant body are truly members of the Body of Christ, and that the majority, and hopefully all, of those that are here and under the hearing of my voice are those who truly love that Way of Life. If you have been baptized, you have received the down payment of the Holy Spirit and have been made a part of the Body of Christ. You are now using your time in that endeavor to actually make that Spirit grow within you—you haven't quenched that Spirit, put the fire out, but you're actually using and stirring up that Spirit within you for the accomplishment of that overcoming process. That's who we are, then, as the Church. We are those who are struggling, whom God has called for that special purpose, and we assemble together to obey Him.

Now, the second part of that fundamental. Here is the one—the one fundamental of the first twenty Fundamentals of Belief that Mr. Armstrong originally wrote—in which Church of God, The Eternal takes a bit of a departure. In other words, our fundamental number eighteen is not precisely the same as the one that Mr. Armstrong wrote so many decades ago. Why is that? Is that because Church of God, The Eternal has turned away from a significant doctrine? Is it because we have gone apostate in some fashion or form on some original teaching? Do we disagree with Mr. Armstrong in some way? Is that why our fundamental number eighteen is different than the original wording that he wrote? No, that is not the case at all, and I'm going to explain to you the difference.

First, let me begin by reading the second half of fundamental number eighteen as Mr. Armstrong originally wrote it, and then I'm going to read for you the revised version, which has been a part of Church of God, The Eternal since our beginning in 1975. To give you a synopsis, the second part of fundamental number

eighteen, as Mr. Armstrong wrote it, can be divided into two classifications. First, let me read part one of it for you. ". . . that the mission of the Church . . ." That's what we're speaking of today. Today's topic is actually concerning the commission of God's Church. Last time, we looked at what the Church is and what the Church isn't. Today, we're looking at the commission of God's Church. Here's what Mr. Armstrong said:

. . . that the mission of the Church in this time is to preach the Gospel (Good News) of the coming KINGDOM OF GOD, with special stress on the warning to America and Britain of the prophecies pertaining to them, into all nations as a witness, reaching the vast multitudes with power and conviction . . .

That's the first part of Mr. Armstrong's definition of the mission, or the commission, of the Church. And now, part two:

. . . to reconcile to God, and to save, thru Christ, such people as are now called; and to minister to the Church of God, strengthening and edifying the brethren in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

How is it, and why would it be that our fundamental number eighteen is any different from that which Mr. Armstrong originally penned? Well, let me read that portion of fundamental number eighteen from Church of God, The Eternal:

. . . that the mission of the Church in this time is to preach the Gospel (Good News) of the coming KINGDOM OF GOD . . . to reconcile to God, and to save, thru Christ, such people as are now called; and to minister to the Church of God, strengthening and edifying the brethren in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Then, we have a bracket with a qualification, which reads:

[Note, regarding the commission to the Church: The phrase, "with special stress on the warning to America and Britain of the prophecies pertaining to them, into all nations as a witness, reaching the vast multitudes with power and conviction"—which is included in the original Radio Church of God "Fundamentals of Belief"—is excluded

from the beliefs of Church of God, The Eternal. We believe this commission may well have been fulfilled by the Worldwide Church of God prior to 1973. If this commission has not been fulfilled, or if there is to be a further commission, God will in due time make His will known and raise up a Work to fulfill it.]

We're going to analyze all of the different parts of that, and we're going to talk about the history of the Church concerning that commission—the work that Mr. Armstrong did—and what has been passed on for the responsibility of this small remnant group called Church of God, The Eternal, and how we see our role. What was it that Mr. Raymond Cole determined was his actual responsibility and commission before God, as it compared to the commission of the apostle of this age, Mr. Herbert Armstrong? Why have we been doing and why do we continue to do the things that we have in our own mission in the ministry of this Body?

Let's begin with the first part of that commission which says, ". . . the mission of the Church in this time is to preach the Gospel (Good News) of the coming KINGDOM OF GOD . . ." That is absolutely the responsibility of the Church. It is the responsibility of the faithful ministry to proclaim that Way of Life. What is that Gospel? What is that message of Good News? It is the coming Kingdom of God. It is the eventual return of Jesus Christ to take possession of the throne of this earth, upon which Satan now sits and has been ruling for 6,000 years. And yet, at a time in the very near future, Jesus Christ Himself is going to ascend to that throne. Satan is going to be removed. He is going to usher in that glorious millennial reign for 1,000 years. Finally, all of the world will hear the knowledge of that perfect Way of Life—will come to understand God's perfect laws, His statutes and His judgments—and will have a chance to be converted, to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to live and to gain the benefits and the blessings of that Way of Life, even as all of you now, under the hearing of my voice, have that opportunity today. The entire world is going to have the chance to have the blessings that come with obedience to God, to come into a close personal relationship with the Father and the Son, which they have never had. All of you who have been called, who have been converted, who have been baptized and received the indwelling presence of that Holy Spirit, you have come into that close personal relationship with your Maker. The rest of the world has been separated. And so, the very Good News Gospel that Jesus Christ brought, which was prophesied from the very beginning, is that message of Good News for humanity—that which God is bringing and is carrying out in this wonderful Master Plan.

Let's begin with Isaiah 61 and verse 1, where we see reference to that very Gospel and the commission and the responsibility of the ministry and the faithful Church to proclaim that Way of Life. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the [Eternal] hath anointed me to preach good tidings . . ." Isaiah, as a commissioned servant of God, was commissioned to preach good tidings, the Good News, the Gospel.

. . . anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the [Eternal], and the day of vengeance of our God . . .

Do you see what Isaiah's commission was? What was that Gospel that Isaiah was told by God to proclaim and to record, even in this very book given his name? It was the very same thing that Jesus Christ brought, as we're going to see in a moment, and the very same thing that a servant commissioned by God in the last days also brought. It is all bound up, brethren, in the future of that which God is working out—the return of the Kings of Kings and the Lord of Lords and the establishment of the very government of God on this earth, the fulfillment of the accomplishing of the building of character in the lives of humanity that they might be born into the very Family of God. That is the Good News Gospel, and that's precisely what Isaiah was referring to. He didn't understand it at the time. Isaiah was given a commission to preach and to proclaim many things that God did not reveal to him to understand personally at the time, but it was precisely that same Gospel message. "To proclaim the acceptable year of the [Eternal], and the day of vengeance of our God . . ." What is he talking about? The day of the Lord—the return of Jesus Christ—that time we look to, that which is given in much more detail in the book of Revelation, the time when Christ will come back a second time.

To proclaim the acceptable year of the [Eternal], and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the [Eternal], that he might be glorified.

It's the solving of all of humankind's problems, all that humanity now seeks to solve. They recognize how futile life is, the problems on the face of this earth and in every nation and in every facet of life—the sorrow, the heartache, the difficulties, the penalties that they are all paying, and they don't understand why because they don't even understand or think that they are subject to the laws of God which are governing them. A day is coming when they're finally going to learn those laws that govern their existence, and they're finally going to be given the power of the mind of God to have a chance to live within that framework of law and to receive good things—to have their problems solved physically and spiritually, to be spiritually fulfilled for the very first time in a glorious rejuvenation, and to come into a relationship with their Maker. All of that which we are looking forward to, pictured even at the fall Holy Days coming very soon.

And so, Isaiah preached the good tidings, and he spoke of that day of the return of that King. That's precisely the thing that Jesus Christ did when He came with His Gospel. Notice very quickly Matthew 4 and verse 17—just one small excerpt because we could spend sermons and sermons going through the Gospel messages. Why is it called "the Gospels," the first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? It summarizes the work and the ministry of Jesus Christ in person when He walked on this earth in the flesh and the message that He was bringing to mankind—actually that which He was confined to give only to the House of Israel because that's to whom He was sent. But the message that Jesus Christ brought from the Father was that very same Gospel which had been preached through the chosen servants of God for years and decades and millennia prior. It was looking forward to the coming of that Savior and the salvation of humankind.

Matthew 4:17: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That was basically the summary of His message. Yes, it's expanded through all of those first four books of the New Testament and the details of what that involves, but in summary, that was Christ's message. That is the sum total of what we call, "the Gospel," that which Mr. Armstrong called, "the Good News of the coming KINGDOM OF GOD." ". . . Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was a message about the way to be prepared to enjoy the fruits of that Kingdom. Christ, then, commissioned chosen human delegates to continue the proclamation of that very same message. He, as the God of the second part, who was the God of the Old Testament, was

the very one who inspired those servants, those prophets of old, to proclaim that Gospel. Then, He Himself came in the flesh, was born of a woman, and proclaimed that very same message in His three-and-one-half year ministry on the earth. Throughout that ministry, He was preparing other chosen men who were going to become apostles and who were going to continue the proclamation of that very same Good News.

Notice Matthew 10 and verse 5:

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

The same way that the Father had restricted the jurisdiction of His Son, where He could go and where He could preach, in like manner, Christ continued that same limitation of authority in the commission of these servants. Verse 7: "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." That Gospel message is all about the coming Kingdom *of* heaven. It's not the Kingdom *in* heaven; it's the Kingdom that Christ is preparing in heaven to be brought back and established on this earth. It's the Kingdom of heaven, but it's the Kingdom of God on earth that is going to be its fulfillment.

Matthew 28 and verse 18. Here was one of the final declarations and commissions that Christ gave to those chosen servants. And I emphasize that, brethren, because as we're going to see, there are a whole lot of men out there who claim to be teaching in the name of Christ and giving that Gospel message, and they're not authorized by Him at all. Jesus Christ gets to choose who represents Him to speak in His name, and not anybody who chooses to can decide to raise himself up and become that messenger.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. [Yes, the Father certainly gave Christ that power and authority. And then, now, verse 19:] Go ye therefore . . .

Christ began in verse 18 by certifying that He had the power and the authority. It was given to Him by His Father. Therefore—that's the word He used, "therefore"—because Christ holds that power and authority in order to accomplish the will of the God Family:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations [What were they going to be doing?], baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy [Spirit]: Teaching them . . .

Who? Those who were going to be converted and become baptized. It's the same "them." "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . ." These are chosen servants acting as ambassadors for that Christ. They are delegates, agents in His service, not to do their own will, not to speak the things that come to their own minds and hearts, but to be instruments in the hands of that God and to proclaim the very same message that He spoke when He was there in person. They were to proclaim it to the people that God sent them to, no one else, because they were sent to the lost House of Israel, and what they were to teach was that very same Gospel. They were to teach them "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . ." So, Christ didn't say, "You can go out and just kind of preach what you think. You know, read the Holy Scripture and decide all of these new things that you think make sense and go with it—kind of create your own religion in my name, and I accept you all. People can come to me in all different manners, through all different doctrines." No, that's not what Christ said. He was very pointed, and He was very specific. He said, "The faithful servants that I am sending are going to do precisely what I tell them to do. They're going to preach precisely the things that I taught them, and that's the limit of their commission." "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever [comes to your mind and heart]." No.

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.  
Amen.

This is the certification that you've heard time and time again over the years from Mr. Raymond Cole, and continuing from myself. It is a certification, a promise, from Jesus Christ that there would be those faithful servants even until the very return of Jesus Christ, even until the completion of the plan that is pictured in this Gospel message of the Good News. Somewhere, there is somebody who is going to be faithfully speaking in the very name of that Christ. And it's our obligation, yours and mine both, to know where Christ is working.

So Christ, then, commissioned servants to preach in His name. It wasn't just men who were going to rise up and decide that they were going to be representatives of Christ. You don't get to volunteer to work for somebody. I've used that example before. You don't go up and knock on a big company's door and say, "I've decided to come work for you. I think I'll take this office over here. This is going to be my title; this is what I'm going to do for you, and this is what I want you to pay me." Now, we understand that is pretty absurd, don't we? Yet, apply it to the work of God. Does God not have the right to choose the servants that He wants to act in His name? And yet look at all of these men that are out there today—and women. You can't be restrictive because there are just as many women now, almost, who are deciding that they have authority from God to go out and to preach in the name of Jesus Christ and to perform a "ministry." I love the abuse of that word. Everyone is doing a "ministry." Every lay member, supposedly, in these Protestant churches, and even now in our former parent body, which just sickens me, uses this term "ministry." We're doing a "ministry" for Christ—as if they're all just authorized by virtue of accepting Christ in their own way, to go out and become a representative and to act on His behalf. What absolute arrogance. No, I think Jesus Christ and the Father have a right to choose their delegated representatives as much as any human being does, don't you? I think that's exactly right. God chooses His representatives. It is not a volunteer work at all.

Notice Acts 10 and verse 40: "Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people . . ." Here, one of those apostles is clarifying the very commission that was given, to whom it was given, and to whom it was not given.

Him God raised up [referring to Christ] the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us . . .

So, for the purpose of defining called servants who were going to go out and proclaim that Good News Gospel message, God was very selective. Here, the apostle is specifying the fact, "No, this isn't for all of you who decide you want to jump on the "Christ Bandwagon" to go out and decide that you're going to become a minister and proclaim the Gospel. No, that's not how it works."

Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded *us* to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

This is a reference again to the very time of the resurrection of the dead, both the first and second resurrections, as well as the third, when all humanity is going to stand before that judgment seat and receive, hopefully the majority of them, a reward of birth into the very eternal Family of God. And so, here, the apostle is speaking of that time and that Gospel message of resurrection.

And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness [Yes, they certainly were the prophets of old who witnessed that same Gospel message.], that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

That is that message of the Good News, and it is the commission of chosen servants, which God used within His Church, to proclaim that message. That has always been the commission of the Church and will continue to be the proclamation that the ministry will carry. The only question now is, who and what are the limitations of the proclamation of that Gospel message, and who has the authority to do a worldwide work? Who has the authority to take that message to the entire world in radio broadcasts, magazines, and all of these other endeavors? But first, before I get ahead of myself, let's look at some of the scriptures that show that many have presumed the right to go out and to do that work of spreading the Gospel when they weren't sent at all.

Notice Jeremiah 23 and verse 20:

The anger of the [Eternal] shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart . . .

Yes, God is going to do His will. Nothing is going to derail Him. Nothing is going to deter Him from His stated mission and purpose and that which He ordained from the very foundation of the world.

". . . in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly." So, tell me, brethren, what is the topic of this prophecy that was spoken by Jeremiah? Was this just a prophecy for the people at the time in which he lived? Was this just a message for those Israelites to whom he witnessed at the time, or is this a prophecy for last-day Israel, spiritual Israel—the Church? Yes, that's exactly what it is. ". . . in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly." Verse 21: "I have not sent these prophets . . ." Who were all of these other prophets at the time of Jeremiah that were standing on their soap boxes, proclaiming that they had a direct message from God and that they were acting and speaking by His authority? It was probably very difficult for Jeremiah to have his voice heard because his just sounded like another voice in the midst of all of these other prophets. That's the way Satan works. He tries to cover up. He creates counterfeits to try and disguise the original in the forest of all of these other trees. If the very message of God stood out there all by itself, then it would probably get a lot more attention; and so, Satan does his level best to disguise that message. "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." Who are these? And if it's a prophecy for the last days, who does it apply to in this era of time?

I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. [Verse 22] But if they had stood in my counsel . . .

We begin to see a glimpse now.

. . . if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

It tells us, brethren, more than likely, these are men who had the right of that knowledge. They were Israelites; they were ones who had been called. In the last days, we're speaking of spiritual Israelites—those who had been called into the Church, those who had received the opportunity to have the Holy Spirit, to be motivated to overcome, even as all of us have. And they were probably ministers. They probably did have that responsibility to teach the people, and that is what they're condemned for because they didn't fulfill the responsibility that God gave them. Instead, they went off on a tangent and began to teach contrary doctrine. They began to see themselves as prophets. Now, God said, we just read it in verse

21, that He did not send them as prophets. He didn't give the gift of advanced knowledge of future events. Does it begin to remind you of something that happened in the last-day Church? Do you begin to recognize the fact that it was through Mr. Herbert Armstrong that God gave the true doctrine? Christ personified the Word of Life because Christ is that Word—the laws, the statutes and the judgments of God from which we should have learned to live, the knowledge of the Sabbath and the Holy Days, the picture of salvation, the Gospel message, the Good News of the coming rule of Jesus Christ.

But what did many of those ministers get involved in? They became mesmerized by trying to figure out prophetic events of the future, which God never gave them to be able to understand. They weren't happy enough with just knowing the Truth, this priceless pearl of great price. They weren't happy with just working on being overcomers, which is the sum total of our commission as members of the laity and the ministry—to be overcomers, to prepare ourselves for that coming. No, they wanted to know when Christ was coming, even though He said that no one is going to know. They wanted to know who were going to be the two witnesses. They wanted to know who was going to fulfill this or that prophecy. They wanted to know who Mr. Armstrong was in prophecy. They wanted to know all of these details; they wanted to make all of their nice colored graphs and charts, and figure out how to interpret the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, and put all of the details together. Guess what? None of it panned out, which was the proof that those men were not prophets. They were not given the gift of prophecy. God didn't want us to know. If God wants us to know specific details of the fulfillment in the future, guess what? He can raise up somebody with the gift of prophecy, and those things will come to pass. But all the men in the Church that got involved in prophetic speculation over the years proved in short order that they were not prophets, because their prophecies didn't come to pass. The Church didn't flee to a place of safety in 1972. Jesus Christ didn't return in 1975.

But what was it that they did receive as a commission from God? To preach the Truth, to preach the doctrine—the personification of Jesus Christ—to uphold and to take care of the Church and all of those that God was calling around the earth who would respond to that Way of Life. That was their commission. That was Mr. Armstrong's commission. Mr. Armstrong was commissioned to preach that Gospel to the world. For what purpose? Was it a warning message in preparation for the return of Christ? No, it was a proclamation to the world

through which God was calling those out of the world and placing them within the Church. The ministry of Mr. Armstrong was for the purpose of building the Church of the last days. I went through these concepts in my July 2002 *Monthly Letter* concerning the prophetic office of Mr. Herbert Armstrong. These are the things that most people have not understood, and they have confused many things. They had the idea that Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah of the last days, doing the final warning work preceding the literal return of Jesus Christ; and yet, we know that Mr. Armstrong died more than sixteen years ago. Is the Elijah, or whoever is going to fulfill the Elijah work, going to finish that work more than sixteen years before Christ comes? Or, like John the Baptist prepared the way for the first coming of Christ, is the final Elijah going to do his work right up to and prepare the way for the literal return, the Second Coming, of Christ? Yes, that's exactly what is going to happen. But I get ahead of myself.

So here, in Jeremiah 23, we seem to be seeing men who, yes, were commissioned to do something, but it wasn't to be prophets, because God said in verse 22, ". . . if they had stood in my counsel . . ."—if they had preserved the Truth that they were first taught. What does it mean to stand? What does it mean to plant your feet and to be unmoveable in a way of life that you were taught, which that true apostle of the last days, Mr. Herbert Armstrong, brought to all of us? Those ministers, then, were taught at his very feet and also commissioned to minister to those who were responding to that monumental work—the *Plain Truth* magazine, the World Tomorrow broadcast that went out around the globe. Hundreds and thousands of people were converted by that message. Why? Because God was the one who was calling them. Remember, we understood and learned that no man can come to that Christ except the Father draw him. If people responded to the message, it was because it was God who called them and opened their minds to receive it; but He used a human instrument in Herbert Armstrong, whose voice went out on that broadcast, whose words went out in the *Plain Truth* magazine. And then, those whom God had opened the minds to understand it, received it. When they saw it and when they heard it, as many of you did, they were compelled by what they heard and what they read, and they knew that it was something that rang true. It changed our lives. Why? Not because Mr. Armstrong was a super salesman and an advertising guy who knew how to put print together. No, it was because it was the operation of God. It was because it was a spiritual, miraculous work that was changing your life. You were being called, and you were being placed into the very Body of Christ through that message.

So, even as the apostles of old in the first century were called to raise up those churches, that's precisely what Mr. Armstrong was called to do as an apostle in these last days, and that's exactly what he accomplished. He was absolutely successful in raising up the Church of the last days. There were congregations all over the world that believed and kept that Way of Life that we all once kept together. Thousands of people attended the Feast of Tabernacles in sites across the United States, Canada, Europe and Asia. Thousands of people assembled, believing the same doctrine, worshipping the same Christ—the singular Christ, not a counterfeit—in unity of mind and Spirit. What happened? Well, there was always a propensity to get into prophetic speculation, and a lot of those speculations go way back, as well. I once asked Mr. Cole, "Why was it that God allowed some of this prophetic speculation to be taught at the very same time, part and parcel, along with the doctrine that actually came from Christ?" His answer was that he felt it was probably a test for the Church. Because, even as we talked about how the church has always been a mixed multitude, so even in the last days, many came into the church who weren't necessarily compelled by the Truth—the doctrine, that Way of Life—as much as they were mesmerized by prophecy and wanting to know what was going to happen and transpire in the future. They were fearful of the warning message, and they were trying to get on the right side so that they could avoid the tribulation, make it into a place of safety and sit on the sidelines until Christ returned, which wasn't the proper motivation to respond and to become a part of the Church anyway. There were a lot of people that probably came in for that reason. It was the wrong reason. Hence, our mixed multitude of the last days. Who was it that really loved the Truth? Who was it that valued the message that came from Christ through that servant, Mr. Armstrong? Ultimately, it's those who hold on to it and don't allow anything to cause them to give it up.

But here are men in verse 22: "But if they had stood in my counsel . . ." meaning, if they had just been faithful to what they had been taught and had not perverted or changed it through their own human reasoning and their scholarship. ". . . if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear *my* words . . ." What were those words? It was the doctrine, the faith once delivered. ". . . then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." Yes, if that ministry had just been willing to stick to the basics and teach the fundamental doctrines of that revelation and avoid all of this prophetic speculation, they could have helped the people. Had they been faithful and not tried to change doctrine according to their own whims in this false concept of

growing in grace and knowledge—kicking in the head the things that we kept for the first 40 years—then they could have helped the people. But they weren't willing to stand faithful in the original revelation. They spent their time changing doctrine and engaging in speculation of things God never intended for us to know.

Verse 23: "Am I a God at hand . . .", He says. Do you believe that this God is real, that He is before you and that He is the Creator who is ruling from His heaven, that He sits upon that throne and that He truly is dominating all that happens on earth and in heaven? Do you believe that this God is real, or do you think He's just some paper doll that we can manipulate and form in our own image? "Am I a God at hand, saith the [Eternal], and not a God afar off?" All of these who were willing to corrupt the Truth that was first given are those who see God as afar off. They think they have the right to interpret on behalf of a God who is helpless to do it Himself, and a God who, I guess, was wrong because He revealed a little bit of truth and a little bit of error. I guess it was Christ's mistake because, oops, He led Mr. Armstrong to keep a Monday Pentecost for 40 years. "Oops, sorry about that; let Me inspire you now with what was right. It should have been Sunday all along." Is that how we view God? Is that how we view that Christ? Is He a God afar off? Is He deficient and negligent? Or, did we receive Truth from the beginning? That's exactly what we received.

Herbert Armstrong was a legitimate apostle whom God raised up to proclaim that Truth, that message—that Good News Gospel—and, brethren, we're going to continue to proclaim that same Gospel. It is the commission of the Church. Wherever God's Church is resident, wherever there is a faithful ministry, then that message needs to be proclaimed.

Now the question becomes, how should we proclaim it? Where should we proclaim it? Are we automatically required, expected of God, to go out and do a worldwide work like Mr. Armstrong did? That's what most of these little splinter groups who have come out of the parent organization have decided. They assume automatically that they are obligated, as a requirement, to go out and to do this big work in the name of God to spread the Gospel. Is that true? Well, Mr. Raymond Cole never felt that this was the commission God held for him. He knew that he had been chosen, ordained by the very hand of Mr. Armstrong as one out of the first group of evangelists that was ordained in 1952. He had been ordained to proclaim that Way of Life and to serve the people—to be a servant, to be a

shepherd, to feed the flock and to help. That's precisely what he did all the years of his ministry until his death last year.

He was a servant, and he knew that was his ordination. He also knew and believed that Herbert Armstrong was the chosen apostle of the last days who had been given the commission of God to take that message to the entire world, and Mr. Armstrong did that successfully. The fruit of that work bore out with the growth of that Church and all of those who came and were baptized into that Body around the world. The question becomes, now, when the parent organization went apostate, even under the watch of Mr. Armstrong in his old age in 1974, was it the responsibility of a faithful minister who held on to the Truth to go out, then, and to start a work with a big print magazine and a radio broadcast to try and continue the work that Mr. Armstrong was given as a personal commission? Mr. Cole was never so presumptuous to believe that he likewise had been given that unique commission that we know was given to Mr. Armstrong. And so, he spent all of the next 26 years of the remainder of his life doing that which he was absolutely certain was his responsibility before God—feeding the sheep, serving those whom God sent, helping those who had a love for that Truth and a desire to hold on to the faith once delivered. That is what he spent his time doing, and that, my dear brethren, is why fundamental number eighteen of the Church of God, The Eternal does not include the statement that Mr. Armstrong included for the Radio Church of God decades before concerning a witness to the nations of Israel—America, Britain and around the world.

It is our belief, and I'll read it again, that has been a part of our fundamentals for almost 27 years now: "[Note, regarding the commission to the Church: The phrase, 'with special stress on the warning to America and Britain of the prophecies pertaining to them, into all nations as a witness, reaching the vast multitudes with power and conviction'—which is included in the original Radio Church of God 'Fundamentals of Belief'—is excluded from the beliefs of Church of God, The Eternal. We believe this commission may well have been fulfilled by the Worldwide Church of God prior to 1973. If this commission has not been fulfilled, or if there is to be a further commission, God will in due time make His will known and raise up a Work to fulfill it.]" That is our belief. I can tell you, brethren, I am not going to presume that I have been given a commission to make a worldwide proclamation either. I am not hesitant to do whatever God requires me to do. Well, I might be hesitant, but I know that my salvation depends upon me doing whatever God will

require of me, not only as a member of the Body of Christ, like you are, but as an ordained minister of Jesus Christ. And I had better be willing to do whatever God wants me to do. But I am not going to presume it like many of these other men are out there doing. I do not want the condemnation of one who ran when he was not sent. I know what I was ordained to do, and that was to take care of this Body and to do everything I can to help any who have a real love, a determined desire, to live that Way of Life. That's what we're going to do.

Yes, we believe that Mr. Armstrong was one who was commissioned to give that worldwide message, which he accomplished, but we must also recognize the fact that this is very different from a warning message that will prepare the way for the return of Christ. They are two different things. Too many people out there of our former parent organization confuse the two. They confuse the commission to raise up the Church, to build the Body of Christ—the firstfruits harvest—with the warning message that's going to be done prior to the return of Christ. They lump those two things together, and they assume it's the same. They assume that if you're doing a worldwide work, it's doing both things at the same time—building the Church and also warning the uncalled Gentiles of the world in preparation for the return of Christ. And there's no doubt that Mr. Armstrong certainly came to believe that that's what he and the Worldwide Church of God were doing. In his later writings, it certainly demonstrates that he honestly thought he was doing the final warning message to the world in preparation for Christ's return, and it was a very understandable conclusion, considering the fact that he thought Jesus Christ was going to be returning in the mid 70s or early 80s. The problem was, Christ didn't return then, which means the work that was going on with those visits to kings and presidents of other nations could not have been the final warning to prepare the way for the return of Christ to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords—especially when you recognize, brethren, that the name of Christ was hardly used, if at all, in many of those meetings.

As I pointed out in that *Monthly Letter* in July, whoever it is that's going to do that "Elijah work," the work that John the Baptist did in preparation for the first coming of Christ—whoever does that same kind of work in preparation for Christ's Second Coming—that individual is going to be speaking loud and long about the real Jesus Christ. He's not going to be mincing words. He's not going to be using niceties and diplomacy with presidents and kings of other Gentile nations, and just speaking in terms of the great unseen power that is going to carry out His will in the

lives of men. No, he's going to be using the name of Jesus Christ, and he's going to be proclaiming that this Christ is coming back and that He is going to rule with power and authority over this earth. He is not going to be considered politically correct, whoever that individual is. And so, I can tell you that all of those things that were done in the early 70s, the late 70s, and the early 80s in these nationwide visits, had nothing to do with the final warning witness.

No, Matthew 24 and verse 14 tells us:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

There is no question that this kind of a work is going to be done. There is going to be a monumental work done by the authority of Jesus Christ through some chosen servant or servants that will lead up to and usher in the very reign of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But, brethren, we're not going to presume that we're the ones that are to do it. As Mr. Raymond Cole always said, if it is God's will that we participate in some way in that final work, that warning work to the world, we are absolutely willing to do so, but we're not going to presume it.

I'll tell you the way I look at it. I would much rather be a reluctant participant, waiting to be sure and receiving truly a divine call to a specific commission, than to be one of those who presumptuously ran when he wasn't called. There are far too many out there doing that right now. Brethren, I don't intend to be another one. I don't intend to be another presumptuous volunteer when God is the one who gets to pick His servants. I think about it in terms of Gideon. You know, Gideon was very reluctant to be the one that God picked to perform a specific function as well. He wanted to be sure that God was really calling him and sending him to do it, so he tested God. Remember that? First, I think, he wanted the fleece to be wet and all the ground around it to be dry the next morning. God absolutely answered that request. And he went out, and there it was. The fleece was wet, and all the rest of the ground was dry. But he still wasn't sure, so he said, "Well, that was too easy. To be absolutely sure, God, make all of the ground wet and the fleece dry." And God humored him and fulfilled that request as well so that Gideon was absolutely certain that he had been called and that he was not presuming the work that he was about to do in the name of that God.

I would rather be like Gideon, brethren, than one who is looking to be a volunteer. There are too many men out there who want a name for themselves. They want to be able to have people look at them and think they're something, that they have miraculous gifts and powers. It's just a big ego trip. I'm not interested in that. Like you, brethren, I tell you what I want. I want to be in that Kingdom. I want to be in the Family of God for all eternity. I want the love of that Family, and I want to be a part of that. I know for me, as well as for you, that means we have to be willing to sacrifice all and to put that God first in our lives. It's the reason why I never volunteered and never wanted to be in the ministry. I figured I had a full time job just being a member of the laity and doing what I need to do in order to prepare to pass the judgment—to be an overcomer. That's a full time job, let alone the responsibility of being a shepherd, to teach in the name of Christ and to spend that time. It's a huge responsibility.

If I fail at it, if I do the wrong thing, if I mess it up, if I harm you, if I am guilty of hanging that millstone around your necks, then I forfeit my eternal life too. Brethren, I don't want to be guilty of that. And so, Mr. Raymond Cole had to twist my arm, if I can use that term, because I was not a volunteer and I tried to strongly resist his determination to ordain me for that service. But I take it very seriously, brethren, I guarantee you, now that I am ordained, and I intend to use my energy to fulfill that responsibility because I know my eternal life is at stake. If I mess it up, if I don't do the job, if I don't do it right, then I'm the one that's going to lose, and I won't be there with you. I want to be there with you. But in like manner, I am incredibly fearful of assuming a commission to do a proclamation in a worldwide work if God has not intended it. I was ordained for the purpose of holding fast to the Truth, of teaching and feeding and continuing the service to this remnant body.

Now, at the same time, Mr. Cole was always concerned about the responsibility to seek out the lost sheep. It isn't that we want to hide in a cave. We do not want to hide in a cave. And so, one of the things that we have done, which is not a presumptuous worldwide work, but certainly is a way for people to know where we are and what we stand for, is our internet site. We have an internet site, and it has been incredibly blessed by God. Throughout the last several years, we've received a number of contacts of lost sheep who have responded because they found us through that means. Mr. Cole was very willing and thought it was an excellent idea to have an internet site so that people who were searching could find an oasis where the Truth was being kept. That's not a worldwide work. That's not

putting ourselves in front of people on the street or on their television sets when they didn't ask us to be there. You see, the only people that we're reaching through the articles on our internet site are those who are searching for the Truth. It's like being registered in the library—we're a book on the shelf in a public library. But that book doesn't jump off the shelf and chase somebody down the street. Somebody has to come into the library; they have to look it up in the card catalog; they have to be searching for that knowledge, that topic; and then they go and pull the book off the shelf, and hopefully, the material in that book touches their lives. If God is using it as a vehicle to help restore some of the lost sheep to a faithful remnant, then it is a very prosperous and glorious thing. Mr. Cole was always very cognizant of the responsibility to engage in those activities, to be available and to seek out the lost sheep—to help them—and that is what we want to do.

But, brethren, there are so many that are out there right now—those who came out of our parent organization—who are doing their sense of a monumental work, a worldwide proclamation, and who are trying to duplicate the work of Mr. Armstrong. And it's amazing; it's almost funny to see. They try to write in the same way that he wrote. They try to speak in the way that he spoke. They try to do their broadcasts in the way that he did it, and none of them are effective like Mr. Armstrong's was. Why? God blessed the work of Mr. Armstrong, and He's not blessing the work of these other men. First and foremost, it's because all of these other men have rejected the foundation of their calling, the very Jesus Christ they claim to represent. If you reject the Truth, if you teach a corrupted teaching on divorce and remarriage, if you reject the teaching on divine healing—that God is our Physician and not man—if you reject a Monday Pentecost in favor of Sunday or Sivan 6 or any of these other days, if you reject the Jewish calendar as the basis for determining those Holy Days, you are not going to be a servant of God, speaking in His name.

And so, even from the time that Mr. Armstrong in his old age allowed these other men to coerce him into changing those doctrines in 1974, God no longer worked in that organization. All of those so-called warning visits to heads of state around the earth, were not blessed of God. And they did not bear any fruit, did they? What was it that bore fruit out of that organization? The *Plain Truth* magazine and the World Tomorrow broadcast. It brought people into the Church, and they became baptized and accepted the Christ that we still serve. That's what was blessed. This idea of having fulfilled a warning work in preparation for the

return of Christ, was never blessed. The world has not been warned. The leaders of these world nations are not shaking in their boots. They're going about their business, doing things as they always have and they are not a bit concerned about the regime change which is coming under Jesus Christ. They have not been warned yet, but they are going to be warned. There is going to be a mighty work that's going to be done, and the nations of this earth are going to be shaken to their very primary elements—all the way to the floor. They're going to know that there is power which is coming. They're going to be forewarned. It hasn't happened yet. And we don't know how God is going to fulfill it, but we have to be willing to be patient and wait.

What is, then, the continuing commission of the Church today, and that which we accept in this remnant body? It is the second half of that commission as Mr. Armstrong wrote it word for word, which is this: ". . . to reconcile to God, and to save, thru Christ, such people as are now called; and to minister to the Church of God, strengthening and edifying the brethren in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." That is the primary commission of this remnant body and that which we are still absolutely committed to do.

2 Corinthians 5 and verse 18:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ [That's what those faithful ministers are.], as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

That is absolutely what the faithful ministry should be doing right now. That is something we're absolutely confident in performing. We know it's not a presumption to serve you, to help you, to pour ourselves out, to aid you and do everything we can to give you the spiritual strength to make those decisions that are going to bring you eternal life—the ministry of reconciliation. That is precisely what Jesus Christ brought, the message of reconciliation. We already talked about that in a previous fundamental. Remember, we talked about this process of redemption, which means bringing us out of a state of separation from God. It is a

process of reconciliation, bringing us back into a close personal relationship with our Maker who desires for us to live forever and to share that glory and power in His Family. If we are fulfilling our responsibility, it is a ministry of reconciliation, giving you the words of life—the meat in due season—that you need in order to apply those principles to continue that hard task of personal development of overcoming the self; to aid you, when the going gets tough, against discouragement, against the difficulties that arise, the challenges of life, the trials; to hold your hand, to be there as a friend and to exhort you in what that original faith was and still is.

Ephesians 4 and verse 10. We're talking about the responsibility of that ministry as it relates to the Church.

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ . . .

That's what the faithful shepherds are supposed to be doing. They're supposed to be caring for the sheep. They're supposed to be nurturing them, feeding them, helping them to grow and to accomplish, and keeping them safe from wolves who try to attack from without.

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

We're not there yet. We have not, as a Body, come yet to "a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." We're all in the process, on that road. We're still works in progress, as we are still fighting, and will be fighting all of our lives, to put off these carnal minds and to put on more of the very nature of Jesus Christ. And so, that means our work isn't done yet. How long was it that this work of the ministry, the edification of the Body, was to continue? Until the job is completed. That is another certification, brethren, that God promised to give faithful stewards, faithful servants—shepherds—who were going to be there, continuing to help a faithful remnant, even as small as it might become in these very

dark days since the Church of God that was once so prominent and glorious has been shattered and divided. And now, we are in a very dark time.

Brethren, as Mr. Raymond Cole always said, we're not trying to put a fence around ourselves. We do not put a fence around members of Church of God, The Eternal and say that we are the only ones in the Body of Christ in the last days. No, even as God said to Elijah, the prophet who thought he was alone, "No, Elijah, there are 7,000 who haven't bowed the knee to Baal." But I can tell you this, brethren, if there are others out there, they are holding on to the faith once delivered.

There are many ministers out there now who are trying to open up and expand an acceptance of those who believe all kinds of doctrines. "Oh, you can keep Pentecost whenever you want to; you can believe in this or you can believe in that; you can marry and divorce, or you can choose not to, whatever you like; and we're all a part of the acceptable Body of Christ, and eligible for His blessings and approval." No, there are many that are out there who are trying to open the door and water down the requirements to be accepted, and we're not going to do that. We were taught what was required for salvation years ago. We believe that they are still the requirements for salvation, and we're not going to compromise. What we're saying is that there may well be some very sincere people scattered about that we do not know of at this time, who are just as devoted and desirous to hold on to their original roots in the Truth. We're not going to be presumptuous and say that there aren't. There have certainly been a number who have been responding in recent months and years—those who have always had that spark still within them. They have been searching, and God is picking the time, at least for those that He has sent to us and who have become a part of this fellowship. But we will not put a fence around ourselves. It's a mistake to do it.

But as Mr. Cole always said, we do put a fence around the Truth. We do put a fence around God's Truth. We know what that Truth is, and we're not going to condone anything but. The example I have given so many times in writings, letters and e-mails to those who have enquired about what makes us tick, what makes us different from other groups, and very often they'll ask the question, "Well, do you think you're the only ones?" I answer, "No, we don't say we're the only ones. We've never put a fence around ourselves, but we put a fence around the Truth." The best analogy I can make, brethren, is that it's as if the revelation of

God in the last days was like a pool of fresh, clear water—an oasis in a desert. The only ones who found that living water were those that God called and led. He did so through the ministry of Mr. Armstrong. We had thousands around the world who came and found that oasis and drank from that pool. But over time, people began to change their minds and decide they weren't happy with that pool—that oasis in the desert. They decided they thought there were greener grasses and pastures somewhere else, so they began to leave for one reason or another. Ultimately, most of the entire body of that organization departed. The only ones who were left at that original pool were the ones who still held true and believed that it was a way of life that came from Jesus Christ. They continued to stay, and they continued to drink from that pool of living water—the Holy Spirit.

We didn't leave them, brethren; they left us. Just because we won't leave the oasis in the desert doesn't mean we're being exclusive. We didn't put a fence around it. They can come back to that way that they were baptized into any time they want. They are free to come back and keep the things they once kept, the same way you continue to keep the things you were taught from the beginning. No one is prohibiting it. It's just that we refuse to leave that which we accepted as Truth. That's not putting a fence around us, brethren; that's putting a fence around the Truth. We don't intend and we don't care to be exclusive, but we are going to stand firm in that way.

2 Timothy 4 and verse 1: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead . . ."—another reference to the return of that great King to take possession of His Kingdom, a proclamation of the Good News, the message.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season . . .

What does that mean? The word translated from the Greek as "instant," means to stand. It means to be present, to be a factor, not to flee, not to depart, not to be moved. It means to stand firm and set your feet in that way. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season . . ." It means to proclaim meat in due season at those annual Holy Days. The faithful ministry is to preach the Truth, and you should be hearing about the plan of salvation, repeated every single year from

the keeping of Passover to the Last Great Day in the fall. If you're listening to the faithful servants, you should be hearing those who are proclaiming that plan of salvation—that master plan that God is working out to save humanity. You should be hearing that message every single year in the services that you attend, if they are led of Christ. ". . . be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. It means that those faithful servants have the Truth. They're not scrambling to find the Truth, to separate the Truth from the error of the original teaching. No, they have the Truth, and they're also longsuffering. They're also patient and very longsuffering with the individuals that are a part of that Body.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth . . .

No, the people of God were never challenged to separate out the error from what was given at the beginning, and change to eventually acquire the Truth; they were challenged to hold on to the Truth that they always had from the beginning of that ministry—even as ancient Israel was given the Truth through the preaching of the foolishness of Moses' voice. Yet it came from God, and the Israelites had the Truth from the beginning. So did the Church of the last days, if it were the Radio Church of God. If the Radio Church of God was that Body, then it also received Truth from the beginning, and Mr. Armstrong was the apostle that God used to bring it to us. If it was wrong and if that doctrine was in error, then it means it wasn't from Christ at all. You might as well throw the whole thing out.

"And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." They walked away from that oasis. They weren't happy with the pool of living water, the Holy Spirit that God gave to the Church. They wanted to go out and find something they thought was better, more palatable to the human intellect and to the lusts of the flesh, which is exactly the basis of that change in divorce and remarriage. They weren't happy with their current wives, or they weren't happy with the vows they made which made them ineligible to marry. They weren't willing to live as eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake in order to fulfill their vow to a spouse who was no longer willing to dwell with them. No, they wanted to be able to heap it upon their lusts, to have a relationship with a man or a woman. They weren't willing to put the Kingdom of God first. And so, they watered down God's Truth to allow divorce and remarriage. It's exactly what we're reading about. "And

they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." There are thousands of fables out there right now, brethren—all of these false doctrines that have come out of people who should know better.

But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions [I know many of you have. You've endured all kinds of afflictions in the last quarter century.], do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

That's what Paul taught to the young evangelist Timothy. That's what all those faithful servants today are going to be doing.

In closing, brethren, Matthew 24 and verse 44. We're speaking about that time leading up to the fulfillment of that which was proclaimed by Christ in this Good News message—the commission to the Church, the preaching of the Kingdom of God, holding fast, preserving the sheep, taking care of that Body, fulfilling that commission. "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." No, we should get rid of all of our preoccupation with prophetic interpretation and trying to figure out the details of how it's all going to come down, because God doesn't want us to know. Why? He wants us to live by faith. He wants us to prove what we love the most by facing serious trials between now and the time that Christ returns, and having to choose right from wrong. If you already know which tests are going to come, when they're going to occur, and how it's going to play out, it won't be a test. He won't get to know whether or not you have faith. He's going to prove our faith, brethren, by making us earn it in the heat of battle—making the right decisions when we're confronted with it, when we can't see what comes next. We're going to have to prove that we're willing to trust Him, even when the future looks bleak, even if we have to sacrifice our own safety, the safety of our families, our livelihoods, our freedom. Are we going to be willing to make the necessary decisions to put Him first?

Those are going to be the tests of faith, so we're not going to get to see the answer in the back of the book on how God is going to carry it forward. We're not going to get to know who the two witnesses are. I'm sorry, brethren, just give up on that idea, if anybody has it. When God fulfills those last-day prophecies, and He certainly will, it's all going to happen just like it says in Daniel and Revelation.

But why can't we just be patient and be willing to wait for God to bring it about? He has given us our responsibility in the meantime, which is to be overcomers. That's how we prepare to be able to make the right decisions. We don't prepare by figuring out what's going to happen so that we can be at the right place at the right time. No, we prepare by adding faith and the power of the Spirit in our lives so that when we're faced with those challenges, we will be empowered to make the right choices. Then, we will receive God's protection, His mercy and His help in that day.

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

This is a specific reference to the ministry, the shepherds, whose obligation it is to take care of and to edify that Body. That is the commission of the Church, the commission of the ministry, to edify the Body of Christ—to teach the Truth, to give the meat in due season, to preach about those Holy Days in their seasons and what they mean in the plan of salvation.

Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming . . .

Far too many have turned to that orientation of mind because Christ didn't come in the middle 70s or early 80s when many expected. Then, they began to say, "The Lord delayed His coming." No, the Lord didn't delay His coming; they just presumed to know when He was coming, and they were wrong. Christ is coming on time, and the Father is the only one who knows when it is. Jesus Christ doesn't even know. The Father is the one who has preserved that knowledge, and He is going to tell Christ when it's time—when He hands Him that Book with the seven seals and says it's time. Then, that Christ is going to set about to open those seals and carry out those final provisions of the prophecy, leading up to His installation—His coronation—as King of Kings.

Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his

coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken . . .

That means they abused their offices. Instead of using them to serve the people, they began to selfishly use those offices of shepherds in order to heap things unto themselves, changing it so that the people were to serve them, rather than the other way around, which was never God's intent.

The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So, it is a grave obligation upon all of us, ministry and laity alike, to make sure that we are fulfilling our responsibilities with the time that we have left. I have a lot to say about that at the Feast of Tabernacles this year on the subject of good stewardship and how it is that we are currently managing those assignments that God has given us.

So, brethren, within the Church, we understand what the Church is and what the Church is not. It is a spiritual organism of those who are being led and motivated by the Holy Spirit. It is called the Church of God, and the commission of that Church certainly involved the proclamation of a worldwide message in this era, which Mr. Armstrong absolutely performed. And he was successful in raising up that Body of the last days. The commission of the Church also includes the edification of the Body, taking care of those who have responded and who have become sheep in that fold whom God loves dearly. And so, He appointed faithful servants to take care of them, to feed them with the very words of Jesus Christ, to edify that Body until the very day of the arriving of Jesus Christ, which is the fulfillment of that very Gospel message—the Good News—which is proclaimed by the Church.