

What Is the WORK OF GOD

Church of God, The Eternal
P.O. Box 775
Eugene, Oregon 97440
www.cogeternal.org

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WHAT IS THE WORK OF GOD?

What makes a religion "God's Work"? Can a "Work of God" cease to be God's Work? Must "God's Work" be organized? Is participation in an organized work required for salvation? Finally, what happens to Christians who "leave the Work"? These questions, and many more, are answered in this revealing article. It's time you knew the TRUTH about this vital subject!

Man's presence on this earth is not accidental. He was created for a purpose. No other physical being was made "in the image of God." Of man, God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . ." (Genesis 1:26). "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (verse 27).

What Is Man?

Yet, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalm 8:4).

Even today, the world does not know the answer to this question. But the Bible makes it plain. "Thou madest him [man] a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the work of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him (Hebrews 2:7–8). Yes, man is eventually to rule all things! But this has not yet happened.

Man—A Potential God

Man, at the present, is a potential God (John 10:35). But he must qualify before he can be given the powers and immortality of God. Though unconverted, man in his present carnal state is destined to become God. Psalms, chapter eighty-two, summarizes how evil men must change before God will grant immortality. But those who do qualify will be like God, for ". . . when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God [potential sons of God]: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (1 John 3:1).

Man in his present state is mortal, subject to death. But when he is made as God, he will be immortal, spirit (1 Corinthians 15:34–54). This is why John said, "We shall see him as he is," for no man can look on God in His present glorified state and live (Revelation 1:14–16; Exodus 33:20).

Jesus, our forerunner who alone (presently) has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16), was the instrument ". . . in bringing many sons unto glory for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:10–11).

At the resurrection, man will receive a glorified, immortal body (Revelation 22:12; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16), to reign with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 20:4–6). Man will then be God—a member of the ruling family (Psalms 82:6). He will have fulfilled the purpose for which he was created.

Man Must Qualify

In faith, true Christians look forward to the fulfillment of God's promise and to eternal life. Peter wrote, ". . . we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). But Peter knew Christians could not receive these promises without first qualifying. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (verse 14).

Christians must be obedient to the Law of God, which the Bible defines as righteousness (Psalms 119:172), for they are warned, ". . . if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18). John stated, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he [Christ] is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:3–4).

Man must recognize the difference between right and wrong (defined by God's Law), then with God's help choose the right in opposition to the wrong. When man has accomplished this through a lifetime of trial and error, he will have developed perfect, holy character. This is why Jesus said, "Be [become] ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

The kind of power and responsibility God will give man at the resurrection demands perfect, holy character. God will not give man His very own powers and capability to see man misuse them as he misuses his present limited powers. This is why ". . . now we see not

yet all things put under him" (Hebrews 2:8). Further, this is why the Bible says, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

To the man who asked Jesus what he should do to have eternal life, Jesus said, ". . . if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). God's commandments are holy (Romans 7:12), of which the Bible says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

Man to Rule

It is after a lifetime of overcoming self, Satan, and this evil world that true Christians are qualified to rule with Christ in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 2:26; 3:21; Daniel 7:22). Christians do not qualify by merely professing Christ (Philippians 3:10–15). They must overcome. They must learn obedience. They must remain faithful to God and His true way throughout life (Revelation 2:26; 3:11). It is only then that man will have the character required to rule with Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22–28).

Man's rule on this earth is near its end. The "crisis at the end" is "even at the door" (note the *Moffatt* translation of Daniel 12:4 and Matthew 24:33). God will intervene in human affairs by sending Jesus Christ to rule all nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:11–15). God will prevent man from destroying himself (Matthew 24:22). Individual Christians who qualify will rule with Christ for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4), a time period during which the world will be at peace (Micah 4:1–3). This is the purpose of human existence! This is why you were born! God is reproducing Himself through humankind! This is why man was made in the image of God, after God's likeness. He now looks like God, and has in a limited way some of the powers of God, but soon he will be God! (1 Corinthians 15:49). He will have the very powers and capabilities of God. This is the very reason Jesus said, "ye are gods" (John 10:34). He understood and proclaimed the purpose of life. He preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God—a message of obedience to God's Law, the necessity to develop holy, righteous character through free moral agency, and the need to qualify to rule with Christ for a thousand years in the Kingdom of God.

God is working out His marvelous plan in the lives of individual Christians. Those who are not called according to God's purpose now, will have their opportunity at a later time (1 Timothy 2:3–6). Therefore, it is axiomatic that any religion or "religious work" which misleads, thwarts, hinders, destroys, causes to fail, or subverts the attaining of that purpose either by what it teaches, or by what it fails to teach, IS NOT GOD'S WORK, regardless of any claim made otherwise!

So what, then, is God's Work?

God's Work—Creating and Sustaining

Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). God created the universe through Jesus Christ (John 1:1–3; Hebrews 1:1–3). It is the sovereignty of God, through the forces and powers He set in motion, that sustains the universe. "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" (Isaiah 40:17–18).

God says, "I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded" (Isaiah 45:12). So God is the Creator, and He is the Sustainer of life (Colossians 1:16–17). "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands, They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee" (Psalms 102:25–28). So creating, and sustaining that creation, is God's Work!

God's Work—Direct Intervention!

On occasion, in order to fulfill His purpose, God intervenes in the affairs of mankind. One major intervention was the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:6–8). In addition, two catastrophic events were brought about in order to secure God's plan and to prevent evil men from subverting His Work. The first of these was the Noachian Flood; the second, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Of the catastrophes we read, "And [God] spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5–6). A third catastrophe is prophesied during which ". . . the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

So, direct intervention in the affairs of mankind is God's Work!

God's Work—Fulfilling Prophecy

God often fulfills prophecy in order to substantiate and continue His purpose—His Work!

God made human nature. He knows how it reacts under given conditions. Furthermore, He controls events and circumstances. No wonder He says, "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:9–10). And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and come, let them shew unto them" (Isaiah 44:7).

Not only does fulfilled prophecy maintain God's purpose, but also it is a proof of His existence. Numerous prophecies give credence to the truth of God's Word, and serve to sustain the faith of those faithful believers who understand the purpose of life.

As God exercises His power over those events which transpire among the nations, He also directs His power to fulfill His purpose in the lives of individuals (Isaiah 44:28). While it is clear God's Work includes creation and the sustaining of that creation, God's Work also involves what He accomplishes in the lives of specific individuals. God's Work is both universal and specific.

God's Work—The "Called Out" Ones

No Bible student can deny God's specific direction in the lives of individuals. Abraham, the father of the faithful, "was called" to go to a place which was to be an inheritance (Hebrews 11:8).

Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . ." (John 6:44).

Paul said, ". . . God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel . . ." (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14). Christians are members of the Church (Greek *ekklesia*, the called-out ones). "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). So, Christians are called into the knowledge of the Truth and God's Way of life. Note Acts 13:48: "And when the Gentiles

heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained [appointed] to eternal life believed."

God's Work—Specific Responsibilities

As Christians are called out for the purpose God intends, there are those called to special responsibilities. Abraham was given a special call (Joshua 24:3), as was Noah many years before (Genesis 7:1). Jeremiah was told, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

John the Baptist was chosen of God before his birth (Luke 1:5–7).

Paul said he was chosen by God for a special mission in life (Galatians 1:15; Romans 1:1, Acts 9:15).

God "... 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" (Ephesians 4:11–12).

All these represent specific responsibilities appointed by God, and are the direct result of His Work. For in their lives, and in the fulfillment of their specific purpose, they too were the Work of God!

Your Response

But regardless of the specific reason God has in calling one, it is the individual's responsibility to yield to that call, to repent, and to be converted.

Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). And again, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out . . ." (Acts 3:19).

The conversion process, then, requires a direct miracle from God to lead one to a knowledge of the Truth, and a willingness on the part of the individual being called to yield to that calling.

The Holy Spirit—God's Work

After repentance and baptism, God grants the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The working of the Holy Spirit leads one initially into the Way of Truth (John 16:13), and then later grants the strength and help necessary to live up to it (Galatians 2:20; 5:24–25).

Christians are warned to "Quench [stifle or suppress] not the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19), and to ". . . grieve [injure, damage] not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

The Christian's responsibility, then, is to yield to the Holy Spirit of God, for it is not God's desire that any should perish, ". . . but that all should come to [make room for] repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

But it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the Christian has righteousness and strength (Isaiah 45:24). But righteousness and strength can come only by constant, daily contact with God through prayer and study. A Christian is admonished to "Study [endeavor] to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). We are told to "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We are commanded to, ". . . grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

It is then only we can have the necessary strength and conviction to remain faithful to the end. True Christians do not forget the warning, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

It is the individual's responsibility to take the necessary steps to utilize God's Holy Spirit in standing fast in his convictions. It is ". . . he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron . . ." (Revelation 2:26–27). Further, Christians are told to ". . . hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Revelation 3:11).

Thus the Holy Spirit—the inspiration, the guidance, the strength and power of God's character and mind—is the working of God in the heart and mind of every individual called to a knowledge of the Truth.

Without God's Spirit, it is impossible to overcome or to live up to the responsibility incumbent upon every called-out child of God. God will not force any individual to go contrary to his own will. Man is a free moral agent. God is ready and willing to help all live up to that standard which alone will grant the character necessary to qualify to rule with Christ.

Thus the Holy Spirit is the very Work of God in the lives of those who are yielding and remaining faithful to the Way of Life found in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

No Loss of Continuity

There is not, and never has been, any contradiction or loss of continuity in the fulfilling of God's plan. While there have been gaps of time with regard to an active "work" (which we will examine later), there has never been any alteration with regard to that purpose, intent, or requirement for attaining that purpose. "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). While God has changed His mind with regard to His activities with individuals and in some cases with nations, He has never changed His purpose, His intent, His requirements, or His standard!

Standard for Character Unchangeable

Character, by its definition, demands absolutes. If character—accurately defined as the ability to recognize right from wrong, and to always choose the right in opposition to the wrong—has no absolute standard, then it really doesn't exist. If no permanency is required, then the standard for character becomes shifting and changeable. In theory, then, there is no such thing as a permanent standard for evaluating righteousness. One's standard then is interpretative, applies only to the time period in which he lives, and is subject to the caprice and whims of a changeable society. Righteousness, per se, does not exist. It is completely individualistic in evaluation. It is ascertained on the basis of how one society differs socially from another. And what may be prohibited today may not be tomorrow. In brief, there is no such thing as character or righteousness, for any standard is a subjective evaluation left up to the individual (Judges 21:25; 17:6; Deuteronomy 12:8; Proverbs 4:12).

Yet this thinking is as old as man himself, and was in fact the basis of morality in many past civilizations (Genesis 6:12; 19:9; Psalms 14:2–3).

When Jesus said, ". . . except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20), it is clear He knew of a standard by which to judge.

God's very character is unchanging (James 1:17; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). Man's purpose is to become God; it follows that a permanent standard of righteousness is required so that man too can develop permanency of character!

Yet, man at the present is very changeable, very erratic and, for the most part, unreliable. He does not yet have the character of God. He has, as a whole, rejected the basis and standard for evaluation.

On the other hand, many who did understand have become confused, disoriented and uncertain. They are torn between loyalty to a religious organization and their own convictions. Character has been severely damaged in some, while others have completely abandoned God's Truth. Some have almost totally lost their convictions as a result of compromise and peer pressure. Others have completely changed their beliefs (doctrinal truths) and lifestyle for the sake of security, friendship, prestige or recognition. Yes, the Work of God in the lives of many Christians is being destroyed.

Don't let it happen to you!

God has never changed, altered or abolished His standard for character development. The requirement for salvation does not differ from generation to generation. Jesus came to magnify the Law and make it honorable (Isaiah 42:21). Salvation was not offered in the Old Testament period except to the righteous men and prophets with whom God chose to work at that time. The New Testament standard is the same Law given to man from the beginning, except now man, through the help of the Holy Spirit, is expected to live by the spiritual intent of the Law.

God does not change! Nor has He given man the prerogative to alter or change His standard. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Man will be judged by the same Law, irrevocable throughout all generations (Psalms 111:7–8; Acts 17:31).

God's Message Consistent

The consistent message from God to mankind has been that of obedience to God and His Law (Genesis 2:16; Revelation 22:14). The basis for the establishment of the nation of Israel as the Old Testament Church was the Law of God (Acts 7:38; Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). John the Baptist came preaching the baptism of repentance and the remission of sins (Luke 3:3). And in Mark 1:14–15 we read, ". . . after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." So Christ, too, taught obedience to the Law of God, and the necessity to repent and to cease breaking the commandments.

After Christ's ascension to heaven, the first inspired message by the Apostle Peter was that of repentance and obedience to God's Law (Acts 2:38; 3:19).

The Gospel Message—the Gospel of the Kingdom of God—was the message Jesus Christ brought (Matthew 4:23; 6:33; 9:35; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2,11, 60; 16:16). It was not a message about Christ's person. It was not a message from the "four gospels" (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) about the life of Christ, which later came to be called the Gospel. It was a message of obedience to God's Law, the necessity to repent of sin (commandment breaking—see 1 John 3:4), the receiving of the Holy Spirit in order to overcome, qualify, and rule with Christ in the Kingdom of God. It was the same message preached by the Apostle Paul (Acts 20:25; 28:23, 31).

No Confusion

Many have misused the word "gospel." The Gospel Message, as taught by Christ, should not be confused with the various misconceptions applied by men. "Gospel" is the Old English word meaning "good news." So, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God was the "good news of the Kingdom of God." It was the message Jesus Christ brought, hence is referred to in the New Testament as "Christ's gospel," "gospel of Christ," "gospel of Jesus Christ" and "gospel of his [God's] Son."

Christ is God. He brought the message from God the Father to mankind. Therefore, it is sometimes referred to as the "gospel of God."

Since the Gospel Message includes God's grace and forgiveness when one repents of his past, it is on one occasion called the "gospel of the grace of God."

It is the message of world peace to be brought by the establishment of the 1,000-year rule of Christ on this earth, and is referred to as the "gospel of peace."

Since it is the same message preached to both Jews and Gentiles, one time it is called the "gospel of the uncircumcision." There is but one Gospel!

All these expressions are one and the same, and refer to the same message—the only message from God to mankind—the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. It is the message of the establishment of God's Kingdom on this earth, the opportunity for eternal life to rule with Christ in that Kingdom, the need for repentance from sin, acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Savior who died for our sins, then overcoming through the power of God's Holy Spirit, living a life of obedience to God's Law and building the character necessary for

salvation. It is the consistent message God gave to mankind from the beginning (1 Peter 4:6).

The Gospel—and "Specific Works"

How, then, does the Gospel relate to any "specific work"?

Notice, first of all, John 4:34. "Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Jesus had a commission, a work He had to accomplish. He told the Jews of His day, ". . . This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29). So God's Work was leading those whom God called to believe and understand that Jesus was God the Father's Messenger, sent from heaven with a message. Finally, just before His death Jesus said, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). So we see, there was specific work given Jesus which He was to accomplish during His ministry—a work which He completed. The result was the establishment of the New Testament Church.

Years later, God raised up another work. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy [Spirit] said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). We know, from the book of Acts, the message was the same as that of the apostles (Galatians 1), that there was cooperation with Jerusalem (Acts 15; Galatians 2); yet Paul's work to the Gentiles was independent, and there were no financial ties with Jerusalem. The example in Acts 13 clearly shows there was more than one Work of God at a given time! Paul was at Antioch under the auspices of the apostolic Church, yet God made it plain that Barnabas and Saul were to be raised up to do a work independent of what was to be done from Jerusalem. (Compare numerous Old Testament examples of contemporary prophets who did God's Work independent of each other).

Some time later we read of Barnabas and Paul, "And thence [they] sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work (Acts 15:38). Yet it was not the only Work of God being done!

Furthermore, Christians are called the "work of God" (see 1 Corinthians 9:1; Romans 14:20; Philippians 1:6), and Christians can be engaged in "the work" of God (1 Corinthians 15–58; Ephesians 4:12; Philippians 2:30; 1 Timothy 3:1; 2 Timothy 4:5).

We should not assume God limits His Work to one individual, or to one group. Old Testament as well as New Testament examples show differently. Keep in mind, however, that independent works—when raised up by God—will not be in disagreement doctrinally;

and at times there is likely to be mutual cooperation, especially when the overall Work of God could be affected adversely by a unilateral decision by one of the "works."

God Uses Human Agencies Intermittently

While God is not limited in power (Isaiah 40:25–31), and at times chooses to act directly in accomplishing His Work (Revelation 14:6), most of the time He uses human instruments to proclaim His Truth, and to set the proper example of living God's Way of Life. Noah was an outstanding antediluvian example (Genesis 6:9, Hebrews 11:7). Noah lived 350 years after the flood, during which time the world again pursued a wrong course. God prevented the acceleration of united evil by the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11).

Later, God called Abraham, the father of the faithful, who became the ancestor of the Israelites. While human and subject to mistakes, Abraham exercised faith (Hebrews 11:8–12), and set a good example of obedience to God's commandments and Laws (Genesis 26:5).

When Israel was placed in Egyptian bondage, there was a considerable time gap with regard to any kind of organized obedience to God's Way of Life. And while God's purpose was being accomplished by the circumstances of slavery, it was not until Moses came on the scene that God began a mighty work and witness to the entire world.

This same witness continued at intervals from the time of Moses until Israel and Judah were taken into captivity from 721 to 585 B.C. There were periods from approximately 1490 to 585 B.C. when the lamp of God's Truth burned dim in Israel. But God raised up champions (judges, kings, and prophets) who revived His Truth and restored His Way of Life. What is plain by this is: There were periods of time when there was little righteous activity on behalf of God's people Israel, even by those who were responsible for guiding them (Judges 2:10–16). Why should we assume it should be any different today?

After the Babylonian captivity, only a small remnant of the Jews restored God's Truth in Palestine; yet even this remnant had drifted so far from God that before the advent of Christ, God sent a man to stir up the religious conscience of the Jews so that Christ's work could be effective. That man was John the Baptist. No wonder Christ said of him, ". . . them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist . . ." (Matthew 11:7–11). No prophet had risen on the scene for several hundred years before John was raised up to do a significant work (John 1:6–7).

Of Christ, Moses said, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (Deuteronomy 18:15). While God did send His Son, Jesus Christ, to bring the good news of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world in the "last days" (Hebrews 1:2), it was only during segments or fragments of time (*Authorized Version*, "sundry") that God spoke to the fathers by the prophets (Hebrews 1:2).

So, while a work can be raised up by God, it's plain to see it can become intermittent by going dormant, or even cease to be God's Work by apostatizing (Judges 2:7–13).

Apostles and New Testament Church

The mission and purpose of the New Testament Church was to preach the Gospel to the world, teaching the nations to observe all things commanded by Christ, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19–20).

The book of Acts records the history of the New Testament Church up to A.D. 61. It concerns itself with the Mediterranean regions primarily, but it is clear from historical records the apostles did go to the whole world. (See *The Plain Truth*, May 1964, article, "Where Did the Twelve Apostles Go?").

Paul's Work

The Gospel at first went to the Jews (Acts 10:37). Peter was instrumental in the conversion of thousands (Acts 2:14, 40–41). And while he was the one who was first authorized to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10), it was Paul who was chosen to bear the responsibility of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles and to carry the lion's share of the load (Acts 9:15). No man was more qualified for this task than the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 11:22–28; Galatians 1:13–14; 2 Peter 3:15–16). He labored for years among the Gentiles and was responsible for writing 14 books of the New Testament. Yet he was not under the authority of Jerusalem; and while he did cooperate and show deference to his fellow apostles, he had his own responsibility and jurisdiction (Galatians 2:7–9).

Many signs, wonders, miracles, and healings were done by the apostles in the early New Testament Church (Acts 2:22, 43; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:12). These were not only acts of God's love, but placed God's stamp of approval on His Work, and served to catch the attention of the Gentiles who were so subject to the many distractions of a heathen society.

Gospel at "Time of the End"

One thing is clear from Christ's statement in Matthew 28:19–20: The commission to the Church was to continue until the time of the end. However, this does not mean a continuous commission—an active work has been going on every year since the time of Christ.

After the death of the original apostles, the active work diminished. After A.D. 100, little is known about the true Church. By A.D. 300, another church appeared on the scene considerably different from that of the apostolic Church (see *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, by Edward Gibbon, chapter 15). Scant history remains of the true Church of God throughout the Middle Ages; but from what evidence is available, there are traces of true Christians up to the present. What is apparent in all this is that after the work of the apostolic Church, the preaching of the Gospel to the world was almost nil. There was little active work done for centuries, yet there were those faithful brethren who kept and preserved the Truth of God.

It wasn't until the early thirties that any kind of formidable work took place in modern times, and even then it was many years before it became a work of any magnitude. And while there were remnants of true Christians scattered here and there prior to the 1930s, their failure to engage in a gigantic activity did not make them any less Christian. It has been God's intention, from the beginning of time, not to leave the world without witness to His Way of Life. We know, from the Bible, there were vast periods of time when there was no active, evangelistic work taking place. Therefore, whether one is engaged in "a work" or not, is not the criterion for determining zeal. The matter of a work is strictly God's selection, apart from any promise regarding eternal life (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Apostasy Prophesied in Latter Days

What has been largely misunderstood by most true Christians in modern times is that there was to be an apostasy shortly before the return of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:1–3). The words "falling away" in verse 3 have been grossly misunderstood. The Greek word here is *apostasia* and means "rebellion, abandonment in religious sense, apostasy" (*A Greek-English Lexicon*: by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, p. 97). This does not mean a "falling away" from a church, but rather an apostasy or abandonment of Truth! It was to affect those who did not receive the love of the *truth* (2 Thessalonians 2:10), those who would be deluded so they would lose their spiritual equilibrium and be unable to ascertain truth any longer (2 Thessalonians 2:11–12). They would confuse truth with error and unrighteousness, and would be carried off into various pleasures of the flesh (divorce and remarriage, etc.).

Moses foretold this very thing. Read it in Deuteronomy 31:29: "For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands." Note the context, "in the latter days." Here we see a corruption, a turning aside from the way commanded by God through Moses, and evil would come. How can one turn aside from that which he never understood or practiced? This text does not apply to the unconverted. It could apply only to those who were enlightened, who knew the Truth, who practiced it and then turned from it!

Jesus warned true Christians (not professing Christians who do not comprehend the Truth) to "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matthew 24:4). So, true Christians can be deceived! (Send for our article, *Can True Christians Be Deceived?*).

And Peter, writing to Christian brethren, stated, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you [note, this is a prophecy], who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them [compare Titus 1:16], and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (2 Peter 2:1–2, 20–22).

So it is clear from Bible prophecies that there was to be a falling away from God's Truth, and the Way of Truth—God's Way of Life—would be attacked, besmirched, repudiated, and rejected by the very people who once believed it! Unbelievable, but it has happened!

Yet, in spite of this, a remnant would hold fast. And they would hold fast at a time when God says to His people, "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. Then they that feared the Lord [compare Psalms 111:10] spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not" (Malachi 3:13–18).

Yes, only a remnant would remain loyal—to God and His Law—in a time of spiritual turmoil, utter chaos and opposing "options" which have left thousands of true Christians confused, bewildered, questioning, or even abandoning God's Way of Life. Note a historical example, 1 Timothy 1:19. Many have forgotten the purpose of life, why they were born, the need to qualify to rule with Christ, the absolute necessity to build character in order to be given the powers and responsibilities of God. Some have been deluded into believing obedience to God's Laws and commandments is no longer necessary, that they have the personal prerogative to decide right from wrong. Many have been led to believe that as long as they are in "the Work," they are pleasing God—even if what is now taught and practiced is a total departure from that which was formerly believed.

If God is pleased now, He surely must have been displeased in the past.

Yet the blessings that befell God's Work for so many years did not diminish until there was a departure from God's Way of Life, as well as major doctrinal changes. So we need to ask the question: Can "God's Work" cease to be God's Work?

"God's Work"—Cease to Be God's Work?

Let the Bible answer!

God's true ministers are to "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isaiah 58:1). For years, this was powerfully proclaimed. Yet in more recent years, for whatever the reasons, God's real power and authority is no longer thundered out! For this cause Malachi was inspired to write, "And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings [could these have been our past blessings?]: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart" (Malachi 2:1–2). For the priest's lips should keep [Hebrew word, *shamar*, 'to keep, to watch, to guard . . . to keep safe, to preserve . . .'] —*Hebrew and English Lexicon* by Gesenius, p. 837], and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he [the priest] is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But ye [those who once understood] are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts. Therefore have I also made you [those who have departed from God's Law and Way of Life] contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law" (Malachi 2:7–9).

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hosea 4:6).

Yes, how clear! God rejects those whom He had chosen to serve Him when they fail or refuse to carry out the charge committed to them! When Eli failed to exercise his God-given office and to discipline his sons, we read, "Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age" (1 Samuel 2:30–33).

God is consistent. He does not change. Why should we assume God would act differently today?

What Happens When Standards Are Abandoned?

Jesus said, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven . . ." (Matthew 5:19). Remember James 2:10, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." The change of just one basic tenet of that high standard of character makes one guilty before God!

Righteousness, as mentioned earlier, is defined as the keeping of God's commandments (Psalms 119:172). It is the basis and standard for character. But what happens when standards are abandoned or rejected? First of all, many feel disillusioned. They wonder why they "could have been so misled." They lose respect for the ministry and for those who have been their "spiritual guides." They no longer regard God's Word or the ministry as having any authority over them. They become confused, disoriented, unable to achieve solid spiritual footing. There are deep feelings of bitterness and resentment. They begrudge the sacrifices made to support the cause in which they once believed.

Those who do not abandon their convictions immediately, make lateral moves first to one group, then to another, using these groups as stepping stones to justify eventual abandonment of the Truth. For them, it becomes a process of erasing convictions gradually in order to lessen the trauma of an immediate, total abandonment of faith.

Others, however, find security in numbers, remaining "loyal" to the "cause." And while they are deeply disturbed, they believe the majority is generally correct. As they see standards lowered and doctrinal changes taking effect, they adjust. It is painful at first, but as an injured man "becomes accustomed to pain," so these adjust to the mental stress. In order to conform, they compromise many convictions, and abandon others altogether. Yet they feel safe because remaining with the majority grants security. They do not realize, of course, what is happening to them. They believe they really are not compromising, but they have been so badly damaged in character that they are unable to recognize that damage. They feel they would stand up to their convictions if there were "major doctrinal changes" within the organization. But they fail to realize they have already so compromised that any major doctrinal departure would not seem major to them. It would merely be another "minor adjustment" or "broadening of approach," especially if they were told, ". . . These adjustments in teaching in no way change the truth of God." (*The Good News*, May 1976, article, "What Do You Mean—God Doesn't Change?").

Those responsible for the changes set upon a course of opposition to the past in order to justify their present actions. They scrutinized the past in order to point out all evils which they felt needed reconciling. But above all, they were extremely careful not to openly admit they had been wrong. To do so would jeopardize their own credibility. For some few thinking people might begin to realize if they did not teach the Truth in the past, what assurance is there that they are now teaching truth?

Righteousness and Character Relevant!

All parties involved in these compromises would totally forget the relevancy between righteousness and character. There can be no character without a standard which defines character. Those sufficiently naive to believe there is a changing standard—that truth is not permanent—must admit there is no such thing as character. Yet, what is it that makes one man stand true to his beliefs and convictions while another readily compromises? It is those who overcome and endure to the end who shall be saved (Revelation 2:26; Matthew 24:13). What is there to endure if there are no permanent standards to which we must adhere? What is there to overcome if standards can be lowered any time there is a "need"—according to modern thinking—to adjust to modern times and conditions? Without a standard by which to judge character, we could conclude God isn't the least concerned about our character. And while He may have character and be unchanging with regard to truth, He is unconcerned whether we have character or remain faithful to our convictions. What He is really concerned with is that "Our faith is not in an opinion about doctrine—it is in Christ!" (*The Good News*, May 1976, article, "What Is the Spirit of Real Christianity?").

But is this true?

To learn the truth, send for our article, *Doctrinal Changes—How They Affect You!*

Man Must Overcome

John wrote, ". . . I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14). First, Christians must overcome the power and influence of Satan. Second, Christians must overcome the evil influences of the world. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). Third, Christians are to overcome human nature with its evil lusts and pulls (Galatians 5:16, 24).

It is through the power of God's Holy Spirit dwelling in every true Christian that overcoming is possible (Galatians 2:20; 5:22–24; Romans 7:24–25; 8:4–5). It is the only means whereby one can live a godly life and qualify for God's Kingdom (Romans 8:13–14). Lowering the standard will not solve the problem of human nature. It is only a temporary nostrum which will leave God's people empty and disillusioned (2 Peter 2:19). But, it is the panacea of the day. Note a statement issued by the Church Administration Department of the Worldwide Church of God:

Even baptized Church members sin and thus alienate their mates from time to time. If they are so unforgiving and vindictive that they cannot find it in their hearts to forget the sin of the offending party, they may have a divorce if they so wish (Letter from Wayne Cole, September 2, 1975).

No need for the injured party to earnestly seek for God's Spirit and God's love in order to forgive and forget. No need for the Church to teach its membership the necessity to overcome human nature, with all its bitterness and inability to forgive; but rather, "If . . . they cannot find it in their hearts to forget the sin of the offending party, they may have a divorce if they so wish."

Holy Spirit as a Source of Power Rejected

This is a candid rejection of the power of God's Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit inspiring, leading, influencing, and helping Christians to overcome, and to live God's Way, is the work of God in our lives! To reject the Holy Spirit as a source of power by lowering

standards, by telling Christians "If . . . they cannot find it in their hearts to forget the sin of the offending party, they may have a divorce if they so wish," is treading on dangerous ground! "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:26).

It is true that the vast majority of those practicing this "new approach" and accepting doctrinal changes without question, do not realize what is happening to them. They are not deliberately rejecting God's Way or willfully sinning. But, let Hebrews 10:26 be a solemn warning to those who "have ears to hear" to realize where this approach can lead; and let them " . . . return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

Holy Spirit as a Source of Inspiration Rejected

In addition, it is clear from recent statements made in Church of God literature, that the Holy Spirit as a Source of inspiration to lead Christians into a knowledge of the Truth is also being rejected. No longer does Truth come through divine revelation. It comes through "scholarship." Note this statement from the May 1976 *Good News* magazine:

We are gradually led "into all truth" (John 16:13). Doctrines may change from time to time in the light of new insight and study. . . . The Spirit of truth is leading the Church into all truth, But this is a process which continues throughout the ages of man. . . . (*The Good News*, May 1976, article, "What Is the Spirit of Real Christianity?").

The author fails to mention, what is now taught as doctrine in some major areas is totally different from what was taught a few years ago. How could we then be gradually led into all truth when there is a total contradiction between past and present beliefs?

Either we were wrong in the past and were not led into truth, or we are wrong now and are being led (obviously not by God's Spirit) away from truth, for both cannot be right!

(Write for our article, *Doctrinal Changes—How They Affect You!*).

Doctrinal Changes Foretold

Paul wrote, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 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, and shall be turned unto fables [Greek: tale, story, myth, legend]" (2 Timothy 4:2–4). Consider recent "permission" to celebrate birthdays and to attend Christmas parties, in the light of the word fables.

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies . . ." (1 Timothy 4:1).

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons]" (1 Timothy 4:1).

It should come as no shock, in the light of these texts, that a repudiation of Christian standards and true doctrine would occur simultaneously. For one cannot occur without the other. These texts are not talking about professing Christians. These texts clearly refer to true Christians—to those who understood the Truth and rejected it (compare 2 Timothy 4:3 and 1 Timothy 4:1).

Why Brethren Followed Error

Faulty administration was the primary reason why the majority of true believers followed a leadership into doctrinal error. (For a complete understanding, send for our article, *Should the Church Enforce Doctrine?*). While church government is clearly revealed and was practiced in the New Testament Church, the kind of supervision and enforcement which took place primarily over the last decade, in the Church of God, is not Biblical. It is the responsibility of the true ministry to preach the Truth, and to set the right example. It is the responsibility of the ministry to maintain peace and harmony among brethren, to discipline those guilty of blatant sin, and to prevent heresy. It is not the responsibility of the ministry to enforce private preferences upon the membership. Many areas which belonged in the private domain were made Church matters, hence subject to regulation.

The vast majority of brethren did not obey God from the heart. Had they done so, they would have remained faithful to the true doctrine. Rather, their obedience was predicated upon fear of excommunication from the Church. Members were not taught to exercise faith ". . . to thyself before God" (Romans 14:22). They had never been allowed to "grow up" spiritually. They had to rely on an organization because they had never learned to rely on God.

The membership was taught their only responsibility was to obey what the Church told them. They were told ministerial decisions were the responsibility of Christ, that He would hold the Church responsible.

Therefore, whatever was done in the name of the "Work" was acceptable to Church members. If it became totally secular, it would still be "the Work." Members failed to realize God rejects those who fail to properly carry out responsibilities given to them—that God's Work can cease to be God's Work! If told the world is now being reached through "culture," they would believe it even if the true Gospel were no longer being preached, and the doctrines were changed so radically that people could not come to true repentance even if they wanted to!

It was that kind of administration which produced this syndrome. What began as individual repentance and commitment to God and His true Way of Life became, over a period of time, a commitment to a church government and supporting a lifestyle which was dubbed in some literary circles as "God's Jet Set."

The sad part is, the Truth of God concerning repentance, the real requirements for salvation, the necessity to overcome and to build character, are no longer preached. As standards and doctrines change, many ministers do not know what they can safely preach. Those who strongly preached in times past had entire sermons revoked by doctrinal changes.

Embarrassed to Be Associated With a Church

Church members were told, via the *Ministerial Bulletin*, the leadership while visiting kings and dignitaries was faced with no end of embarrassment because it was associated with a church (*Ministerial Bulletin*, June 3, 1975, page 293). Furthermore, it was reputedly stated that Jesus Christ and/or the Gospel could not be preached to these kings, otherwise "we would be kicked out."

What a contrast to the Apostle Paul. "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). Festus, upon hearing that Christ should show light to the Gentiles, said, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad" (Acts 26:24). And Agrippa said, "Almost [briefly] thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Paul was not accepted by these authorities and kings, but he was not embarrassed to preach the Truth.

Paul did not forget what his responsibility was, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me [Christ]" (Acts 26:18). Paul preached ". . . that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (verse 20).

How different from "the give and get principle" which is now preached as the Gospel! Preaching the return of Christ and the Kingdom of God without preaching repentance and obedience to God's Law, is hardly different from what other well-known evangelists preach. If these well-known evangelists do not preach obedience to the Ten Commandments, and repentance from sin, how do they differ from what is called the "Work of God" by Church of God members today?

Were God's true ministers and prophets ever commissioned as "Ambassadors for Peace"? On the contrary, God's true servants were never accepted as the friends of this world, including its dignitaries and kings (Jeremiah 26:20–24; 1 Kings 22:8; Matthew 23:35; James 4:4).

Gospel to World "As a Witness"

For years, Church of God members were told they had a part in preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom "for a witness unto all nations" (Matthew 24:14). They were told this was the final warning to all nations before "the Work" was finished. Now they are told there is another work to be done (*Co-Worker letter*, August 19, 1976). Revelation 10:11 is now conveniently lifted out of context as was Matthew 24:14. Revelation 10:11 comes chronologically after the sixth trumpet plague of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1). If the book of Revelation has any chronological order at all, the world has not yet prophetically entered the fifth seal (Revelation 6:9).

Matthew 24:14 is even more questionable. It is the corollary chapter to Revelation 6. Matthew 24:9 is equated with Revelation 6:9, the fifth seal or the great tribulation. It would be strictly an interpretation to say Matthew 24:14 applies to the commission given the Church of God during the past 40 years. If this text applies at all, it has already occurred because what is being preached today as the Gospel of the Kingdom is a "watered down" version of what was previously taught. The doctrinal changes which have taken place in past years cannot be a part of the true Gospel Message Jesus brought. The church has repudiated divine revelation, the Holy Spirit as a source of power to overcome, and obedience to the Ten Commandments (James 2:10–11).

Five Answers to Matthew 24:14

At least five explanations are possible fulfillments of Matthew 24:14. Remember, the context indicates an event that is to take place after the fifth seal or great tribulation.

1) We know, from Daniel 9, only 69½ prophetic weeks have been fulfilled. This leaves one-half of a prophetic week, or three and one-half literal years, yet to occur before the prophecy is complete. Since Christ was to confirm the covenant for one prophetic week or seven years, and His ministry was cut off at the end of three and one-half years, this leaves a three-and-a-half-year ministry He has yet to complete. Since confirming the covenant has to do with His ministry, and is not limited specifically to Israel, Christ could well be the one to take the Gospel to the world as a witness to all nations.

2) Two witnesses are to appear on the scene (Revelation 11). Since the context of Revelation 11 implies an event to take place between the sixth and seventh trumpet plagues of the seventh seal, Matthew 24:14 could well be fulfilled by the two witnesses.

3) Malachi 4 tells us, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, Elijah will be sent. Specifically, he will turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers (verse 6). This is why God says, "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (verse 4). This is said at a time when God's Law of marriage has been rejected. Divorce and the breaking up of the home and family is a major sin today (Jeremiah 5:7–9). The world has long repudiated God's Law of divorce and remarriage (Matthew 5:31–32; 19:9). Now, the people of God who understand have done the very same thing! No wonder God says He is about to smite the earth with utter destruction (Malachi 4:6)! The coming Elijah could well be the one to fulfill Matthew 24:14.

4) Revelation 14:6 describes an angel coming to preach the everlasting Gospel to the entire world! In context, this occurs after the seventh trumpet of the seventh seal, just before the seven last plagues are poured out. The message is universal in extent, so this angel could fulfill Matthew 24:14.

In fact, it is the candid admission of the leadership of the Worldwide Church of God that up to 1972 it did not fulfill Matthew 24:14. Yet, this was the text used to substantiate "the Work" for years. At best, we can conclude the Worldwide Church of God was fulfilling the command Jesus gave to His disciples in Matthew 28:19–20, because in a recent letter to the brethren and co-workers, it was admitted only, "Now doors are opening into many nations where this Message was barred UNTIL the year 1972" (letter from Herbert W. Armstrong, August 19, 1976). The prophecy of Matthew 24:14 is to go to all nations, not just to those who were reached before 1972. Therefore, the Worldwide Church of God has not, and never did, fulfill Matthew 24:14.

5) Finally, then, Israel is to be in a state of captivity at the return of Christ (Jeremiah 31:2, 8, 11). God says Israel's cities are to be laid waste (Ezekiel 6:6). Yet, a remnant of the

captives who escape the sword shall ". . . remember me [God] among the nations. . . ." They will be a witness at that time, wherever they are, and will loathe themselves for all their abominations (Ezekiel 6:8–9). "And they shall know that I am the Lord, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them" (verse 10). So, scattered Israelites will witness to the world that God's Word means what it says, and that God's authority will soon affect all nations. Thus Matthew 24:14 could apply to captive Israel.

Ministers Required to Teach Truth

Regardless of who will accomplish God's Work and at what time God chooses, one fact is certain: Wherever God's people are—whether or not they are engaged in any type of evangelistic work—God's ministers are to faithfully proclaim the TRUTH!

God indicts those who fail to do so!

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. 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 [administrative abuses], and to eat and drink with the drunken [doctrinal changes and character defects]; 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. . ." (Matthew 24:45–51).

As in the days of Israel when the pastors destroyed God's vineyard, few today are willing to lay it to heart (Jeremiah 12:10–12). "Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil is accounted mad [margin]: and the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. . . . and wondered that there was no intercessor. . ." (Isaiah 59:15–16).

"Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. . . . And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken. . . . And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:26, 28, 30).

"Again, when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning,

he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand" (Ezekiel 3:20).

Note, this requirement to proclaim the TRUTH to God's people is apart from any specific commission to evangelize, to witness or to "do the Work." And it is especially incumbent upon those who remain true to God at a time of apostasy!

How Important to "Do the Work"?

It is clear from Hebrews 1:1 that God has not carried on a continuous "work." Only in "segments or fragments" of time has He made Himself known, and then only in part. It was not until after Christ came on the scene that God's Truth became universal in intent. The prophet Habakkuk pleaded with God to "revive thy work" (Habakkuk 3:2). There is a time yet coming (if it is not already here) when there is to be a famine of God's Truth (Amos 8:11). Being engaged in "a work" is contingent upon what God has ordained as a continuation of Matthew 28:19–20. One fact is made plain in the Scriptures: Any direct and specific commission given by God to any individual or group will be made clear by God, for He must call—either directly or through circumstances—before one can assume such a prerogative. Any work not of God will come to nought (Acts 5:38).

There is no Biblical basis for assuming that "feeding the flock" is not the same as "doing a work." There were vast periods of time in the Bible when no active, organized work was being done, yet there were those faithful pastors who took care of God's remnant flock so that God was not, in any period of time, without a witness to His Way of Life (Romans 11:1–5). While the lamp of God's Truth burned dim at times, when God raised up a work the support was always there to sustain it (1 Kings 18:4, 13).

Worst of all is the assumption that "a work" cannot deviate from the responsibility given it, and that salvation comes only through being actively engaged in it. It has been amply demonstrated that God rejects those who fail to be true to His Word, and who deviate from the commission given. Any who perceive this happening should separate themselves from any so-called "Work of God," regardless how much they are otherwise persuaded! (Write for our article, *True Christian Fellowship Today*).

The Present Configuration

Based on the Scriptural analysis presented, what can we conclude then, as to the organizational configuration of true Christians today? First, consider this in relationship to "a work." Secondly, consider it in relationship to a personal responsibility.

At the present we can conclude there is no true, organized work of God of any magnitude. The oft-quoted text, ". . . I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5; refer to Matthew 6:25, 34) does not relate to a "work." The statement of Jesus refers to His trustworthiness. He is consistently our Sustainer. What was the "Work of God" has drifted off into secularism, erosion of truth, with false doctrine in major areas. How obvious, man can leave Christ. In addition, there is little force of conviction any longer in the message, and questionable practices among the membership have become commonplace.

There may be some yet who have not been tainted doctrinally or morally; but if they remain much longer, there will be little that humanly can be done. God's true Work has dwindled down to those who yet have a measure of God's Spirit and have not yet significantly compromised.

As far as you are personally concerned, it is your responsibility to hold fast to what God revealed to you at the beginning of your conversion (Hebrews 3:6–14). This will undoubtedly mean separating yourself from those who hold to Biblical error and have departed from truth. You need to read and study our article, *Why a Monday Pentecost?* It will mean being honest with yourself and facing the greatest trial in your life, yes, even more difficult than when you were first converted! God's Spirit convicted you, led you to truth, gave you the strength to overcome and grow. It nourished you and helped you throughout the years to believe, adhere to, and live God's Way. Are you going to reject God's Spirit by denying your call and conversion and by attributing what you came to understand to coincidence or mere chance? Will you deny the power of God's Spirit in your life by compromising with worldliness, taking the path of least resistance, or by divorcing the wife of your youth?

God's Work now is the Holy Spirit in your life—shaping, molding, making you into the kind of character God can use in His Kingdom! To turn from God's Way of Life now is to reject your calling, your conversion, and your savior!

It is time all true Christians come to grips with themselves! It is time they realize what great trials they are facing. It is time to realize they are God's workmanship ". . . created in Christ Jesus unto good works . . ." (Ephesians 2:10). They BELONG TO HIM (1 Peter 1:18–19)! It's time they realize the decisions they make regarding where they place their loyalty—either in God and Jesus Christ, or in an organization which is rapidly abandoning its purpose and calling—will affect them for all eternity! God help each of you to make the correct decision, and give you the strength to be courageous and loyal to the God who made you and gave you the Truth you possess!