

A Better World

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung 11/10/2018

Within the last two weeks we have had two terrible mass killings in our country – one at a bar in California, and the other in a Pittsburgh Jewish Synagogue. Just a year after surviving the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history at a country music festival in Las Vegas, a Navy veteran died when the bullets began flying.

I want to share a story with you that has touched many hearts. In 1956, sixty-two years ago, a deeply in love with each other, beautiful young Jewish couple, Sylvan and Bernice Simon, were married in the same **Tree of Life** Synagogue in which they died on Sabbath – the week before last – in the deadliest attack on a Jewish community in the history of the U.S.

Sylvan and Bernice Simon were in a loving and nurturing congregation. I got to thinking just how much they belonged to – and had bonded with the people they had attended Sabbath services each week – for their entire lives – eighty plus years... from their childhood – long before they were married.

It wasn't just their faith, or their culture, it was their entire life! That is the way Sabbath services should be. A place where you go to have the word of God expounded... A time to prompt one another to love and Christian good works... A Sabbath congregation should always instill a sense of belonging.

I can remember our first days in God's Church and how delightful, how **good** and how **pleasant** it was to visit far away congregations of God's people. From Baton Rouge, LA, on Sabbath, we often visited our sister congregations of Lafayette and New Orleans. We were happy to see them and they were happy to see us. It was like visiting cousins – knowing that there were unbreakable bonds between you.

We had opportunity to travel the world – visiting God's people everywhere. From Alaska to the north – where the Plain Truth Magazine was displayed in faraway frozen outposts... To the deep south of the Scottish Dunedin, New Zealand – God's people were the same loving people. All over the United States and England in the UK. Some brethren we can only visit with by way of mail or internet – like in the Philippines, Kuala Lumpur, and remote parts of the world... Austria, Jerusalem – even Germany where we did not speak the same language, there was a sense – it was more than comradery – it was like being at your grandmother's home where you were loved, wanted, appreciated – we belonged there.

We did not have to show or prove allegiance or loyalty to anyone. We walked in the front door with a smile on our face and it was counted for devotion and truth – we needed no other credentials. What has happened to our once abundant and ubiquitous unity and fellowship?

I am not comparing our faith with that of the Jewish peoples. We are aware that within the Church of God we have the truth and others do not. It is only by the grace and calling of God that we are privileged to have God's truth.

I don't know how many of you are familiar with grafting. I did some grafting of plants when I was in high school – I thought it was extraordinary. Grafting is the horticultural technique used to join different parts of plants so that they begin to grow as a single plant. For example, you take a good strong – disease resistant root stock – and graft in a plant that produces – say a good fruit, or a beautiful flower. In grafting, the upper part (scion) of one plant grows on the root system (rootstock) of another plant.

I was surprised to find out that grafting was commonly known and practiced in Paul's day. He used it for an analogy because he encountered a form of anti-Semitism in his day – not unlike what we have widely in God's Church today. No! We do not hate Jews. *We are just so much better than they are because of our knowledge of Christ.* I speak facetiously.

The "better than thou" bias is not confined to nationality, race or religion – it extends into **many other areas** among the peoples of God's church.

I'm from the North... I've been in God's church longer... I know so-in-so

I out rank you... You don't have as much education as I do... My kids are better than your kids... My family is more prominent than your family... My pastor is smarter than yours... We have more members – and larger congregations... Our church is older than yours is...

Paul gave the *ridiculous* analogy of excluding others:

1Corinthians 12:14 For the [Church] body is not one member, but **many**.

It takes **all kinds of people** – that is exactly what God intended

1Corinthians 12:15 If the **foot** shall say, Because I am not the **hand**, I am not of the body; is it therefore **not of the body**?

1Corinthians 12:16 And if the **ear** shall [contend with], Because I am not **the eye**, I am not of the body; is it therefore **not of the body**?

1Corinthians 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

1Corinthians 12:18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

The Romans – possibly Italians – were in effect saying, *HA, Ha, HA, Hh, HA, HAH*, because they received the **Gospel of Salvation** – and the **Jews did not**. But Paul says of the Jews that their grafting into salvation will be **rather glorious**.

One other point that I have to bring in right here: The world is hopelessly confused over this simple matter. The world commonly makes the mistake of assuming that **all Israelites are Jews**. Yes, **all Jews are Israelites**, but not all **Israelites are Jews**. Judah was one of twelve brothers—children of Jacob/Israel.

Those men of the world make the common mistake of thinking that all Biblical references to "Israel" apply to the Jews alone. Please do not confuse the modern State of **Israel** in Palestine with the prophetic **Israel** of the Bible. Almost every television evangelist thinks that the Biblical prophecies of Israel refer to the modern Jewish country in the Mid-East. That single mistake closes the Bible off from their understanding.

Down deep inside of them, everyone seems to know that God has some special connection to Israel, but between anti-Semitism and secular Godlessness they do not even want to stop and consider what or who Israel really is.

This single mistake — that **all Israelites are Jews** — brings about a terrible misunderstanding of scripture, and misinterpretation of prophecy. Gentiles are simply **foreigners** and not of Israel. Please follow along...

Romans 11:7 What then? **Israel** hath not obtained that which he seeks for [salvation and a right relationship with God]; but the **election** [the **Church brethren**] hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

Unconverted Israel sought for national prominence more than anything. But Paul says – they have taken their eye off the ball and gone to sleep.

Romans 11:8 (According as it is written, God hath given them the **spirit of slumber**, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

Romans 11:9 And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them:

Romans 11:10 Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always.

God divorced Israel for a reason – they committed fornication by going after other gods and Sabbath violations. God made the opportunity for the entire world to come to salvation – and in effect – become Spiritual Israel.

Galatians 6:16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the **Israel of God**.

So we find the Gentiles being Grafted Into the Church.

Romans 11:11 I say then, Have they [all Israel] stumbled that they should fall [be eliminated from the Plan of God]? ~~God forbid~~ That is not God's Plan: but rather through their fall **salvation is come unto the Gentiles**, for to provoke them to jealousy.

Make room for the Gentiles, and provoke Israel to good works.

Romans 11:12 Now if the fall of Israel be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness?

God is not casting away Israel forever – one day they will be converted and saved. Beginning in the Millennium with Israel restored, and then in the resurrection of the Last Great Day.

Romans 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

Paul is a Benjamite – a tribe of Israel. Paul says that God knows that he, Paul, wants his own kinfolds – Israel – to prosper spiritually as much as he wants the Gentiles to prosper spiritually.

Romans 11:14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

Romans 11:15 For if the casting away of them [Israel] be the **reconciling of the world**, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? [Eternal Life]

That is speaking of Eternal Life. The Jews who **died in Pittsburg** the other day will see life from the dead in the Great White Throne Judgment. They are not "cast away" forever!

Romans 11:16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

Paul is saying that He chose Israel for His purposes – they are a holy people – lock stock and barrel – from the roots to the fruit – Spiritual Israel.

Deuteronomy 7:6 For thou [Israel] art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God **hath chosen thee** to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

Deuteronomy 7:7 The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were greater in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people:

Deuteronomy 7:8 But because the **LORD loved you**, and because He would **keep the oath** which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 7:9 Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which **keeps covenant and mercy** with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;

God is not going to forget Israel or the Jews.

Paul gets back to his **grafting** analogy: Israel is God's good root stock:

Romans 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off [The Jews are fallen away for a time], and thou [Gentiles], being a wild olive tree, wert **grafted** in among them, and with them partake of the **root and fatness** of the olive tree;

In a plant, nourishment and moisture must come up **from the roots**.

Romans 11:18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bear not the root, but the root thee.

Paul says that you are hearing the Gospel because of Israel.

Romans 11:19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.

OK – that certainly makes room – gives you the opportunity to come to God.

Romans 11:20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou stand by faith. Be not **high-minded**, but fear:

Whatever you do, Paul says, – don't get the big head! But **fear!** This is a real **serious** matter.

Romans 11:21 For if God spared not the natural branches [The Jews have taken a hiatus – an interruption], take heed lest he also spare not thee.

Paul is telling the Gentiles that they are just as likely to fall away.

Romans 11:22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, **severity**; but toward thee, goodness, **if** thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou, [too] also shalt be cut off.

Romans 11:23 And they [Israel and the Jews] also, if they **abide not still** in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.

Paul is saying – all things being equal – it is easier to graft similar stock than it is to graft wild stock [Gentile].

Romans 11:24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

Romans 11:25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.

Romans 11:26 And so **all Israel shall be saved**: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

Romans 11:27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Romans 11:28 As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies **for your sakes** [you Gentiles]: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

Romans 11:29 For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

Romans 11:30 For as you [Gentiles] in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy **through their unbelief**:

Romans 11:31 Even so have these [Israelites] also **now not believed**, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

It is a symbiotic relationship – it is a beneficial process that provides a balance for both – God is calling Israelites and Gentiles into His one Church.

Romans 11:32 For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

Romans 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

2Corinthians 3:8 How shall not the administration of the Spirit be **rather glorious**?

Brethren, I greatly miss the great widespread fellowship that we once had in God's Church. That was before so many brethren got cubby-holed and labeled. It is almost like everyone is wearing a sign for others at Sabbath services that says, "We don't want your kind here at services with us." Revisiting old relationships is called for – with a healthy measure of forgiveness and reconciliation thrown in. Like Paul was saying about the Jews to the Gentiles of his day.

Who among us is still attending Sabbath services in the same hall we used in 1956? Where is our permanence and stability? And, how many of us can remember back to the days when we could have attended Sabbath services in a Church of God congregation anywhere – and felt the welcoming love and friendship of our brethren in every single congregation? Those days are behind us, but they could be ahead for us if... (Fill in the blank)

One person wrote in response to today's Countdown to the Return of Jesus Christ:

"Unfortunately it's the ministry that divides the church and continues to do so. A difference of opinion [from headquarters] can result in a minister losing his pension after serving the church for fifty years. This practice continues in the COG; it is an unjust practice that God won't bless."

That is true. I had a friend in the ministry who went with the apostasy at Pasadena – not because he agreed with them – but because he had no Social Security and did not want to jeopardize his Pasadena pension. I believe it was simply a lack of faith on his part – and he went to his grave without serving God's true saints and without repenting.

No evangelist and no church leader took a stand for the truth. The people of God had no man on earth willing or able to shepherd them in their time of great confusion. Many ministers who were once seemingly on track started preaching watered-down, false doctrine. Most of the faithful brethren fled the apostasy before most of the ministry spoke up. The evangelists and leading pastors should have pulled together in defense of our faith. Now, they should repent of their shortcomings so that an error such as this does not occur again. The ministers who have continued in that wrong vein are not prepared to teach in the world tomorrow.

I received another email – from a Church member who understands what I was saying in today's Countdown to the Return of Jesus Christ:

"Wishing you are very Blessed Sabbath. I have forwarded your message to as many of the offshoots of WWCG as I have email addresses for! It is such an excellent reminder of how things should be. I have made a point of visiting as many of the "off shoots" as I can at Feast times in various geographic locations, [But,] each one seems anxious to get folks to "join " their particular club. Thank you for an excellent message."

I received another email this morning in response to today's Countdown to the Return of Jesus Christ:

It is short: It said: **Stop sending me emails!**

Brethren, What kind of world are we living in? The world is becoming a very dangerous place, physically and spiritually. Paul expresses God's will for His people to come out of this **evil world** and separate ourselves from it:

2Corinthians 6:16-18 What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

2Corinthians 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

Paul is not speaking only of **pork chops** here. He is speaking of the wrong attitudes and practices that we find all around us – especially in God's Church.

2Corinthians 6:18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

At the same time that we are commanded not to have anything to do with the ungodly ways of this world – we are told to make a difference in this world in various ways. We are told to light our light shine:

Matthew 5:15-16 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. **Let your light so shine** before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Brethren, we could have made an impact on this world over twenty years ago had we handled the break-up of the Church in a Godly manner.

Instead, we scattered in countless directions, not even speaking to one another – rather than coming together in a spirit of unity as God commands us to do. We should have been:

Ephesians 4:3-6 Endeavoring to keep the **unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is **one body**, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

God knows that we have been given the needed spiritual tools to be able to reunite and recognize each other as brothers and sisters of one faith. At the beginning of this chapter we see the **tools** that we need to bring about unity:

Ephesians 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love...

Ephesians 4:7 unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

So, here we sit these many years later in some kind of smug status quo as if the statute of limitations has run out on the **togetherness** God asks of us. The statute of limitations has not run out, and God is waiting to see who will act.

Who among us checks on the brethren we once knew and loved?

Who among us makes the day better for the people we encounter?

Who among us reaches out to those who might need a word of encouragement?

Who among us tries to get together with anyone.

Have we become fearful, hardened and calloused?

Matthew 10:40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Matthew 10:41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

Matthew 10:42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

This sermon is not about Church groups or organizations at all – but rather if we will look past the reasons to be sequestered and cut-off from other members of the Body (1Corinthians 12:12).

We all claim to preach the Gospel while we are declining to follow Christ's clear instructions to us. Have we forgotten how to **show this world** that we are indeed God's people?

Let's go over Jesus' last words to His Father before He gave His life for us and established His Church on earth.

First, Jesus says that we are **to be one** – not scattered as we are.

Then, remarkably, Jesus says that our action of being **unified** would have sent a clear and vibrant message to the **entire world!**

Have we missed out on a tremendous opportunity?

That the World May Know

John 17:22-23 The glory which you gave me I have given them; that they may **be one**, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and **that the world may know** that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Our solidarity and unity in God's Church would convince the world – and make this **A Better World.**

Brethren, we could have made **the world a better place**, but we did not. Instead, we are each going to stand before Jesus and tell Him why we refused to recognize all the brethren as His brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11):

Romans 14:10, 12 ...We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

God tells us:

Mark 12:31 ...You shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater.

Brethren, how nice it would be to dwell in unity as we once did.

Let's realize that we are fast running out of time.

Maybe we remember the words to this popular song of the same era.

"Where have all the **flowers** gone? Long time passing

Girls have picked them every one

Where have all the graveyards gone?

Covered with flowers every one...

When will we ever learn

When will we ever learn?"

End: A Better World