

Personal Gospel

By Warren Zehrung – January 7, 2012

Brethren, who is supposed to preach the Gospel?

Is the preaching of the Gospel one of those things like, "Don't try this at home," because it is better left to the experts? That is a joke, but that is how too many of us look at preaching the Gospel – "It is someone else's job to do it."

We have always heard that the Gospel is to be preached – but whose responsibility is it?

Most of us remember hearing that the Gospel message, and the warning, was going in great power to all of the world for a witness. Now, there are billions of people who have never heard it.

There are two fundamental questions to which we must understand the answers.

What is the Gospel? And, what is the Kingdom of God? As we will see, the Gospel is about the coming Kingdom of God, and the announcement of the Kingdom of God being set up by Jesus Christ.

So the question is, "What should we be doing?"

So many people are not receiving the witness of the Gospel. This world has not been sufficiently warned. The world needs to hear the Gospel.

Obviously, brethren, we still have our work cut out for us!

A lot of people are hoping that one of the groups, with its charismatic leader, will "Take off" nationally and internationally, just like when God gave a special gift to Herbert W. Armstrong. They would like to see the Gospel being carried around the world again – making the new charismatic leader's name a household word.

Herbert W. Armstrong was human, and he was carnal. But nonetheless – the Gospel did go forth to so many! That is where I heard it, and that is where many of you heard it.

More than a quarter of a century has passed since Herbert W. Armstrong died, and it does not look like Jesus Christ is going to give that special evangelistic gift to any of the wanna-be's.

There are some men who would love to have their name in lights, being known as the one who does the healing, who does the preaching, and the one who leads the great worldwide effort.

Do not get me wrong, there will be a very powerful outpouring of the Gospel message that will come when God gives power unto His two witnesses:

Revelation 11:3 "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

In the meantime – what are we to be doing? And the answer is still not – "Let someone else preach the Gospel."

Have you ever thought about making the preaching of the Gospel your personal gospel?

That is the title of today's sermon – "Personal Gospel."

Can you say to yourself the Gospel is "**My Gospel**?" Notice what the apostle Paul says:

Romans 2:16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to **my gospel**.

Paul refers to the gospel as "*my gospel*." We do not say the "gospel of Paul," but what Paul was saying here is that he was taking to himself, taking personal responsibility, for the gospel that Jesus Christ preached.

Romans 16:25 Now to him that is of power to establish you according to **my gospel**, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

We only know that from God. Let's look at one last place where the reference is to "my gospel," in II Timothy 8. That is not blasphemous, and it is not overreaching.

II Timothy 2:8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to **my gospel**:

The way that the King James' version of the Bible translates that verse, it is almost like Jesus was raised from the dead because of something that Paul did. Paul was just saying that it is part of the Gospel message that he preached that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

Because Jesus lives, we have hope to live. That all goes to the preaching of the Gospel. A lot of people do not know what the Gospel is, and they say that the Gospel is the coming Kingdom of God -- and do not add anything else to that phrase. But, there are a lot of details that go into telling us what the Gospel is and how to live the Gospel, what it will be like, and what are the rules of the Gospel. All of that comes together to become for each of us individually – "My Gospel."

Let me make it clear that Paul was not heralding a Gospel different from the one that Jesus Christ brought. No, Paul taught that Jesus announced the Gospel of the soon coming Kingdom of God, and what it is all about and how we are to live it.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ was fully embraced by Paul, and became Paul's own **personal Gospel**, so that he could say, "My personal Gospel".

Brethren, I want to talk today about how you and I can make the Gospel our gospel, our personal gospel. We have Paul's example. He internalized Christ's Gospel. By internalized, I mean that Paul fully incorporated Jesus' Gospel as his own personal beliefs, into his own value system, and he made it his own life's motivation.

Paul was serious about both living his life according to the Gospel of Jesus, and preaching what Jesus taught.

Can you and I do the same with the Gospel? Can we say, "I believe it, and that the Gospel Jesus taught is 'My Personal Gospel'"?

I am going to demonstrate in today's sermon that we must take personal ownership of the Gospel to ourselves, and not leave it to someone else far away with a powerful broadcast system to preach the Gospel. We must take personal ownership of the Gospel and make it our personal Gospel...to the point that, like Paul, we can recognize the Gospel of Jesus Christ as our own "Personal Gospel."

Mark 1:14 *After John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God,*

We have all heard, and we know that the Gospel is not about Jesus, it is not about Jesus walking on water, and it is not about Jesus healing the blind and the sick. That is a gospel *about* Jesus, and the world spends their time on the gospel about Jesus rather than the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus' Gospel is about the coming Kingdom of God. This world is not "good" and it is going to be replaced when Jesus Christ establishes the Kingdom of God on this earth, and everything is going to change.

The question that we see here is, Do we believe the Gospel ourselves? Do we live it ourselves?

What does it mean to "Live the Gospel?"

Mark 1:15 *...and [Jesus] saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel."*

There is a command from Jesus Christ for us to "*believe the Gospel*"?

This is what we want to talk about. We must believe the Gospel and make it our own personal Gospel.

What did Jesus mean by believe the Gospel? Let us ask ourselves, "Do I represent the Kingdom of God in my personal life – in my behavior towards others, and in my demeanor towards all others. Do I live according to the rules of the Kingdom of God – even now? Even now, do I believe the Gospel? It is a very, very important question, and a very scriptural question.

Do I help to make the assembly of Christians – the Christian Body – a place where newly called novices can find an environment suitable for spiritual growth?

A problem with so many of those who purport to be the “voice today,” preaching the Gospel – is that when someone responds to the broadcast – they are brought into a group of people where spiritual growth is not conducive for them.

The exact same wrong practice was going on in Christ’s day with the Pharisees seeking to make converts.

There are men today who would love more than anything to have the big numbers, to make lots of converts, but is God going to call new people, novices, into church congregations where there is going to be all kinds of “mismanaged Christianity” – let us just put it that way and be a little bit gracious? There are congregations where a new person cannot grow spiritually, but will become a part of the political mess that exists in so many church groups. The problem could be with the pastor having a heavy hand, or the brethren, and their inordinate desires. We have all seen congregations that were not healthy spiritually.

Matthew 23:15a Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

Jesus is not mincing words. Would you go to a ministerial conference, where there were a group of ministers who were not really preaching the Gospel, and living the Gospel in their own personal lives the way that they should be, and many people are aware of it? And would you say that they were a bunch of hypocrites? Jesus Christ did it in this case. And here is what He said:

Matthew 23:15b ...for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.

Those are very strong words. But Jesus Christ looked at their fruits, and they were not godly. Their fruits were political, their fruits were evil, and their fruits were worldly. So Jesus Christ says even when you do make a convert you are not making a Christian convert. I submit to you, brethren, that it is very much the same in the Church of God today. It is one of the reasons that God is not calling a lot of people out of the world into many of the congregations that are still extant.

Jesus wants us to be living the life of Christian love that expresses itself in the example that we give to others, and the way that we get along with others.

Again, what did Jesus mean by “*believe the Gospel?*”

Does my deportment and demeanor encourage others to set the very highest standard of godly behavior possible?

In short, is my life a personal Gospel to all others with whom I come into contact?

Matthew 11:12 is a difficult scripture to understand because of the way that it is translated. I will just read it exactly like it is in the scripture, and then I will come back and explain it a little more.

Matthew 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

That translation does not work very well in today's English – "violently – forcefully taking the Kingdom", what is that about – what does that mean?"

Let me try to clarify this verse by putting it in my own words:

This verse is about the way, and to the degree to which we seek the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said, *"From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven is acquired with an utmost struggle, or you might want to say that it is acquired with a maximum effort, and with all your being and strength on your part; and it is only the most serious and dedicated ones who obtain the Kingdom."* (Matthew 11:12)

That tells us a little bit better what Jesus Christ is saying here. We have to have an all-out irresistible maximum effort to be in the Kingdom of God. Only those who are spot on, no pretense, no hypocrisy, and only the most serious and totally dedicated ones will obtain the Kingdom of God.

"Many are called, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:14) It is not something where you just go into the Kingdom with the crowd. Have you ever seen a huge herd of cows or a large flock of sheep and there is one in the middle and he just follows along. That is not the way that we go into the Kingdom of God.

You might find your own analogy, like a mountain climber getting to the highest peak with a terrific struggle. But it must be conquered, and so these words about "violently" and "forcefully" do not miss the mark; they just do not work in the translation in the way that it is presented to us. We have to have the utmost zealous effort to obtain the Kingdom, and that is who is going to attain the Kingdom. Not the thousands or maybe the millions who think that they will.

Let us understand what we are doing personally, today. We are not trying to build a corporate organization that brings recognition to its leaders. Why? Because we are already called into the greatest body there is, and that is the Body of Christ. We do not need to add anything to that!

We are preaching, we are publishing, and we are living the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ wants the Gospel to go out again in an even more powerful way to the world, and there is some man that can handle it, and God is ready for it, and He is ready to call more out of the world, it is going to happen. But it has not happened in twenty-five years.

We wish to make it clear that we are not organization building – and we are not wanting to have other brethren leave the fellowship with which they attend in order to join with us. That is not what we are about.

Our understanding is that we are already in the One Body of Christ.

Just today, I received requests to come to Pakistan to preach the Gospel, and come to Africa to talk with brethren there.

We are trying not to cause false hopes in those who hear the message, because we are not nearly able to visit all those far-flung places.

Where God is working He will supply the need.

We are a small group of Christians living in communities throughout England, Canada and the United States, working together to promote unity with like-minded Sabbath-keeping individuals in God's True Church around the world.

We believe and hope that the sincere preaching, publishing, and living of the Gospel that Jesus taught will help the eventual unification of God's people – according to His perfect will and timing.

Ezekiel 34 tells us that Jesus will unify His people when He returns. We should be a part of that unification of the Spirit – even now!

We are going to experience religious persecution before Jesus returns.

Mark 13:9 But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.

That testimony against them is our giving evidence of our Personal Gospel.

Mark 13:10 "The Gospel must first be published among all nations."

It has been a long time since Jesus, the apostles, and the first-century church, and yet this Gospel has to be published among all nations. Then the religious persecution is going to come upon the true people of God. It will not come on those who are going with the flow, but it will come on the true Church brethren.

Matthew 24:14 This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

That is yet ahead of us brethren.

Because the true Church of God is a spiritual entity, we are spiritually affiliated with all those who are striving to live their lives according to the doctrines of Christ, including in particular – the seventh doctrine – going on to perfection (Hebrews 6:1-2). We must be going on to perfection, we cannot just hunker down and say, 'Okay, I am who

I am, it is what it is, and I am fine just like I am'. We have the doctrine of Christ – which is to go on to perfection, and none of us come close to the measure and the stature of the fullness of Christ. We have our work cut out for us.

As we count our brothers and sisters in Christ, all those who are led by God's Holy Spirit are among that number (Romans 8:14). This scripture defines who is converted, who is in the Church, who is a saint – a “called out one,” and who is in the Body of Christ.

Please understand that God's true Church consists of a very small number of believers in comparison to this world's vast population.

But Jesus said:

Luke 12:32 “Fear not, **little** flock; [not like the Catholic Church, or the Muslims or Protestants] for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”

This world is not qualifying for the Kingdom right now.

We often receive requests from around the world for very noble endeavors such as orphanages, and buildings for Sabbath services. We could all use more supplies and resources; but our faith is that God provides according to His will.

God knows well our physical requirements, and He has promised to supply everything needed to perform His work, not everything that we want: bigger buildings, better electronics, better facilities for broadcasting, more transportation, and more visibility – those are the things that we want. But God has promised to supply everything needed to perform His work. There is a qualification – if we will seek His righteousness and Kingdom first. We must be like Him, and seek His Kingdom first. We must seek to live as Jesus Christ lived. Seeking the Kingdom first is living the Gospel.

Jesus said:

Matthew 6:33 “Seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

No one would look to God if we were rich, and doing great wonders, because it would be expected; but that is not how God is working with us.

I Corinthians 1:27 “God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.”

That is a truism. God is not using the people with billions and billions of dollars to preach the Gospel. He could, but He is using the weak and the small to confound the things that are mighty. In that day, when it is revealed who the people of God are, the millionaires and the billionaires will say, “Wow, they knew it and we could not see it.” It will confound those who are mighty.

Zechariah 4:6 "It is not by [our] might, nor by [our] power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."

That is how the work gets done, and that is how new people are called. That is how we were called, it was the work of God.

But my brothers and sisters in Christ, we true Christians are spiritually rich, and do not doubt that for a minute. God has blessed us with the priceless knowledge of His way of eternal life; and that is what we are able to share with all who will hear.

We do not have the resources to build buildings – or even visit faraway countries in most cases. But we have very much to offer, just like Peter said in Acts 3:6:

"Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have, I give to you."

What we have, we share. We have Bible Studies, we have a Statement of Beliefs, and we have sermons on many, many topics. We have explanations of hard to understand scriptures. We have the Truth to share!

God has given us the spiritual riches and the spiritual understanding to be able to live His way of Life – even now. That is what it is about. It is not about just knowing, or about memorizing, it is about living the personal Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our Gospel. Do we live it? Do we believe it? Even now we have the spiritual understanding to be able to live God's way of life.

We are inheritors of the entire universe!

Notice what the Holy Scriptures say:

James 2:5 "Hearken, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?"

That verse is an economy of words. It says so much and so quickly. Yes, we are the poor of this world, but that is not to be demeaned or looked down upon, because we are "*rich in faith*," just as James tells us. We are heirs of the Kingdom.

I remember awhile back, people were selling a piece of Mars. You could send off twenty dollars and they would send you a certificate of ownership of a piece of land on the planet Mars.

We are heirs of the *entire* universe, and that is incredible (Romans 8:17, Hebrews 1:2)!

We are rich in faith, and that is what we have to share.

Do we believe the Gospel? That is God's promise.

Acts 2:39 "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." We are recipients of the promise.

We go out on the Internet – it is God’s gift to us at this particular time. When Herbert W. Armstrong first started in Oregon, he was on a small radio station because that is how far God wanted the Gospel to go. Later on he was on clear channel stations like XEG Mexico, and the Gospel swept up through Arkansas and Missouri, and all the way up into Canada. When God was ready, the Gospel went to Radio Luxemburg. But now, as small as we are in resources, as poor as we are, we have this powerful tool – the worldwide web. God can call anybody who can be in the remote regions of Africa or Asia. They could walk into an internet café and type in “Sabbath”, “Church”, or whatever God’s Holy Spirit leads them to type in. They will find what God wants them to find.

- We preach the soon coming return of Jesus Christ
- We preach a warning message to the entire world.
- We preach that Jesus will set up His Father’s Kingdom.
- We are a fellowship of True Believers who are endeavoring to grow toward God’s moral excellence.
- Our beliefs are founded on the principles and doctrines of the first century Church of God. It was given to us, directly and correctly by Jesus Christ. It was right on, but as men put their hands to it things can go off course.
- We point people to God – not to any man, and not to any organization.
- We live Christian lives of caring concern and service to one another. That is what the personal Gospel is about. We must have godly love to one another, according to the Commandments. We do not steal from others, we do not lie to others, we do not abuse others. That is applying the Ten Commandments, and that is what Christianity is all about.
- We know that Jesus left us an example when He laid His life down for us. Now that is a big, big story, and we will be touching it soon as we come into the Passover season.
- We believe that it is a salvational matter that we learn to likewise lay our lives down for one another. Have we even learned how to perform the spiritual sacrifice of laying our lives down for one another?

I John 3:14a “We know that we have passed from death unto life...

Brethren, understand that “death unto life” is a salvational transition, we were going to die now but we are going to live eternally. We know that we have passed from death to life, but how do we know?

I John 3:14b ...because we love the brethren.

That love is a godly love. We are helping one another into the Kingdom of God. This is not the love of Hollywood, this is not the love of your favorite kind of pie, but this is godly love. This is when we see one of our brethren missing the mark, not headed for the Kingdom, having a sin in their lives – that we will do everything, even dying, to turn them around. Not pridefully, not arrogantly, but turn them around toward the Kingdom of God.

I John 3:14c He that loves not his brother abides in death...

When we will not love the brethren with this kind of godly love, we have not made the salvational transition from death to life; we still abide in death if we do not love our brother. Our Christian faith is about loving one another. Of course we want to jump to, "I love God" and everybody be on his own. But Jesus Christ says that if we are not loving our brother we are not loving Him.

I John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He [Jesus Christ] laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

That is not just a suggestion, that is an absolute requirement. We will not be in the Kingdom of God if we have not learned to put ourselves in jeopardy for others. Yes, sometimes we have our own personal concern. We can say that we do not like people; we are not comfortable around people; people make me nervous; people are going to see how I live; and people are going to judge me. We can come up with a million excuses why we do not lay our lives down, but the commandment is that we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

When we see people that are confused, someone who is hurting, and somebody that is in need, or somebody that is sinning. That is when we get busy, and it does not matter whether it (and I speak as a fool as Paul would say) is the lowliest member of the congregation, or the minister himself. We must step in and lay our lives down. That means that you might get kicked out of church, you might be abused, again and again. But that is our ticket to salvation and the Kingdom of God. We could write a book on the ways that we lay our lives down for the brethren. We see right here in this little section that John writes in the last days, the closing words of the Bible – that sums it all up. This is how we are to be as a Christian.

The most important spiritual accomplishment for us in this life is the development of godly character. God the Father gave-up His Son, Jesus Christ, so that we could live. So we see that God's character is the same. Jesus Christ died. Can you imagine what God the Father went through when His Son died? No we cannot, it is too much for us to understand the godly pain that God the Father experienced when His Son died.

In these precarious last days, when so many people are just limping along spiritually, we are with all of our heart zealously striving to live in accordance with God's highest standard.

It is our desire that God's Spirit guide us in all that we do.

God intends that all His people, who share in our true common faith, be really unified in and by His Spirit.

Jesus prayed the night before He died that we would all be "one" with Him and the Father. He says it five times in John 17:

John 17:11, 21-23 "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, **that they may be one** as We are. "That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Are we "one" today? No! We are not nearly "one." We are not even "one" in individual congregations. That is our job, we must be living the Gospel. We must be putting ourselves forward in godly love to unify one another.

The love and esteem that the Children of God demonstrate toward each other extends to all within our spiritual affiliation. We are a spiritual affiliation, you cannot find us in the Yellow Pages, and you cannot find us in the phone book. Jesus Christ when He looks down from His throne in heaven, sees only "one" Church. He does not see these artificial barriers and walls that separate people. We are to be building bridges in a spiritual affiliation with the entire Body of Christ – the Church of God.

I John 3:1 "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Children of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the Children of God."

That is not something that we are waiting on. When we were baptized God gave us of His Spirit and we became His children – His sons and daughters.

The people of God are not yet prepared for Christ's return. Just look at the state of the Church.

In preparing ourselves to meet Jesus Christ, we must continue to be the people of God, and we must be becoming holy, loving and caring Christians.

For years and years, in the Church, preaching the Gospel worked something like this:

People send in their tithes, and they pray for the work. Headquarters preached and published a Gospel message that went out on radio, TV and in various publications.

Sometimes that Gospel message included the Good News of the World Tomorrow. That is what the Gospel is about, the very "good news" when this world lives at peace and harmony under the direction and the rule of Jesus Christ. But back in the days when the Gospel was going to the world and so forth sometimes that Gospel message that we were putting out on the air-ways was more about "bad news" – increasing crime, war, pollution, and disease gripping mankind. It was not exactly good news that was being preached to the world.

For better or worse, that message went out over the air waves in the hope that some would hear it and be called by God.

Brethren, are these the last days? What do you think? We had better believe that they are – because there are many Biblical warnings especially for us:

II Timothy 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

I submit to you, brethren, we are living in perilous times. Spiritually perilous times, especially because there are so many people that are smug and complacent, sitting in their congregations and knowing that all kinds of things are improper and wrong, and not according to God's will and yet, they are still sitting there – not addressing the problems. These are perilous times.

II Timothy 3:2-4 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

There are a lot of bad things going on. You might say, "Well my congregation was never that bad." Well there are a lot of things included here by Paul to cover a lot of categories. The idea when Paul is writing is that we cannot opt out. We all know of somebody that married somebody that shouldn't have. We know somebody who stole something that they did not have a right to. We all know somebody that was abused. You can go through here and find faults that are not being addressed today.

Let us talk about what is going on. We think that we are holy in the Church. The minister thinks that he is very holy in the Church, and he puts himself at the head of the congregation and he speaks for God. But notice what Paul said that it is going to be like in the last days:

II Timothy 3:5a Having a form of godliness,

That is not godliness, it is only a form of godliness, and it looks good, but it is not godliness.

II Timothy 3:5b ...but denying the power thereof:

II Timothy 3:5c from such turn away.

The minister will say, "I do not do what the scripture says, because it never works."

Look at what God says very clearly at the end of verse 5:

II Timothy 3:5c ...from such – turn away.

Certainly God put this minister here, and he has a nice congregation, and after all there are a lot of people here and some of them are very nice. Where else can I go? We can come up with a long list of reasons why I am going to sit right here in this congregation and do nothing.

II Timothy 3:6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, [creep into your life and put their words in your mind] and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

We put all of the things first that God says do *not* put first. I want to be with my friends. I enjoy the potlucks, we have a wonderful choir, and other places are too far to go. They are "divers lusts", and we are not putting God first. What happens?

II Timothy 3:7 Ever learning, [learned something new at church today, but some people say that they did not learn a thing. A little question mark should go up there?] ..and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

What happens? They end up going around and around, and they end up sitting there.

They just cannot put it all together correctly!

Jesus warns us so many times of false preachers – who have a form of godliness, but they will not enact the **Personal Gospel** in their lives.

They will not go to their brother – as Jesus directs that we must do.

Some of the ministers, and I know of a few that hoard millions of dollars for a rainy day, some ministers even now are hoarding millions of dollars to get the people to the Place of Safety. When the minister knows that it is time to get everybody to the Place of Safety, he will know how to get the plane tickets and passports, and he has the money set aside.

There are some ministers that teach that *our Lord delays His coming*. Just recently one minister wrote, "Well obviously the things that are going on in the world show us that it is going to be quite a bit longer before Christ comes back than we have been anticipating". The scriptures are replete with examples that Christ is coming *soon*, and we had better get ready, and we barely have enough time.

There is even an example of a minister going to jail because of his secret Swiss bank accounts.

Some ministers teach their followers to dishonor their elderly parents. If the parent is not in his group you do not have to have anything to do with them, he teaches.

There are some ministers that do not know the true Nature of God.

We are warned many times by Jesus Christ about false prophets or false preachers. Why would God have so many of them in the Bible?

Matthew 24:4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

That means to you and to me, watch out that no man deceive you. Jesus is saying that it is possible, but what do we think? We think that we are beyond being deceived – I am too astute. I have my eyes wide open, and after all I have known this fellow for a long, long time.

Matthew 24:5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

The Word of Christ is that many are being deceived. We look around and think that they are not quite like us, but it does not matter where you go people are the same, and nobody is perfect.

Matthew 24:11 And many false prophets [preachers] shall rise, and shall deceive many.

Do we believe that many are being deceived, and many are sitting in their congregations thinking, 'I am in a really big corporation, and we have been around longer', or 'We are bigger', or 'We have better ministers,' brethren? Jesus Christ says that many are being deceived.

When Jesus Christ says that there are going to be many false preachers that is not speaking of Billy Graham and Joel Osteen – we are not deceived by Catholic and Protestant ministers. We are deceived by ministers who claim the mantle of authority of being in God's Church and representing Christ. We must be very suspect. That is why we have to have a **Personal Gospel**. In Romans 14, it says that we are going to give a personal account to Jesus Christ.

Romans 14:10, 12 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

I Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times [brethren, are we in the latter times?] some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

We say that we are not hearing doctrines of devils for sure. Anything that is contrary to what Jesus Christ taught is a doctrine of the devil.

They will not realize that they are departing from the faith – but they will not be living their **Personal Gospel** when they are deceived and they are seduced.

We think that we would never fall for that – and yet, can we discern the voice of Christ?

God wants each generation to live as though time is running out – because it does.

How many people back in the Worldwide Church of God days have died hoping to save their skin by being carried away to a Place of Safety? They were never carried away to the Place of Safety, but they got old and they died.

I John 2:18 Little children, [very endearing the way that he speaks of us being little children of God] it is the *last time* [God wanted them, and He wants us to know, that it was the last time / days] and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

I John 2:26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

These words are spoken to the Church. I do not have the time to go into all of the times that Jesus warns of false prophets. It is a real easy Bible study to do, just type in “false prophets”. That is the most common term, but there are also “ministering spirits” and other examples that show that there are a lot of men who do not represent Christ correctly. We do need to be very, very careful. It is possible, brethren, to be seduced.

Do we want to believe that it is impossible for a false teacher to deceive us? We have to measure everything that is said, every action that is done, and even every attitude, against the Word of God.

It is possible to be deceived. Recently I heard a member say that there are no perfect ministers. That statement is absolutely correct – there are no perfect men – period! All men sin – sometimes grievously, as did King David and even the prophet Moses. But the problem with a member saying that there are no perfect ministers is that what the member is saying in effect is, “I am OK with mediocrity – I will sit tight in his congregation – and not go on to perfection. I will overlook my minister’s sins and shortcomings. It is not my responsibility to go to my minister and tell him that he missed the mark, and that his love of some of the brethren was incomplete.”

Brethren, that is the Biblical definition of “hate,” it means that you love less your brother.

When some people will say no one is perfect or no group has it all right, they are saying, “So I’ll stay where I am and take it easy.” That is not struggling with maximum effort to get into the Kingdom of God, brethren (Matthew 11:12).

Godly love demands that we turn a sinner from the error of his way.

James 5:20 Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

In the book of Galatians, Paul expresses his dismay that the Galatians had left the true gospel. Are we to deny that these Scriptures apply to us?

Where do I go when all the groups are off-base? This is a hard question.

During the course of the disciples' lives, and throughout the history of the church, and very much today, many false gospels would war against the true message that Jesus brought.

Brethren, do not be afraid to discern what the true Gospel message is all about. If a minister is abusing somebody, stand up to his face and tell him that it is ungodly. Pray and fast, as it says in Galatians so that you do not get consumed by this wrong spirit. But you tell him that he is wrong. We are to lay our lives down for the brethren. We are to go after the one and leave the ninety-nine who are doing okay. Will you get kicked out of the congregation? Probably so, but that is laying your life down. God is in charge of that. Do not be afraid to discern what the true Gospel message is all about, and who is faithfully preaching it and living it.

Brethren, live your **Personal Gospel**.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation.

This is what we are in the Church for: salvation.

Those who were called by God came into various congregations where they were met with members of varying degrees of conversion.

Most of us thought that our congregations were a model of what a healthy church should be. We had beautiful choirs, and sometimes we even had small orchestras, or a band, to provide accompaniment for the chorale. We had dances, we had summer camps, and we had sports programs.

Every man knew how long to wear his hair, and every woman how long to wear her skirt.

We kept the Holy Days and the Sabbath...

Everyone was an expert on the clean and unclean food laws, and which products contained animal shortening in them.

We were almost smug in our contentment that we had gone on to perfection already.

The apostasy was a wake-up call for some, and yet others are now rushing to replicate the former days of the Church. Some congregations today are no different today than they were at the height of the Worldwide Church of God's apostasy.

Jesus Christ rightly predicted that we would need to be awakened out of our self-satisfaction.

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, [we have all of the spiritual answers, we have all of the booklets, and we have all of the preachers and teachers] and have need of nothing; and know not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

That is God's perspective of us.

We have not gone on to perfection when we neglect to love the brethren with a godly love. We have not gone on to perfection when we neglect to live our **Personal Gospel**.

We have a job to do. We are to walk in Christ's footsteps. Christ sat down with sinners. I know ministers that will not anoint somebody unless they are in good standing in the church.

Jesus Christ did not, according to the scriptures, heal a single converted person. They were the sinners of the world. He loved every one of them, and He alleviated their troubles and pains.

This is what we must be doing whenever we can.

The sad thing is a lot of the Churches of God still have a wrong attitude towards the world. Even towards the members with God's spirit that are not in their group.

This is the training ground. We are to be living by the rules of the Kingdom even now.

We need to take care of people in the church, but also in the world. They are potential sons of God. We were not called out of the world just to be saved because "we are so special." We have a job to do, and we must live our personal Gospel.

For the most part, our congregations are weak, much like the brethren of the apostle Paul's day that he dealt with.

We need to realize that we are too much like the world. We must come out of the world all of the way. We are yet worldly in our conduct when there is envying among us, and strife, and divisions...

I Corinthians 3:3 Are we not carnal, and walk as men of the world?

In **Hebrews 5:12**, Paul says that we are dull of hearing the true Gospel message, when for the time we ought to be teachers, we have need that we be taught again what the first principles of the oracles of God are. He concludes that we cannot handle real spiritual understanding.

It behooves us to take serious stock of ourselves. And do not assume that we are doing everything so right – and that it is only the others who miss the mark. People in God's Church are scattered all over the map. Some are going on to perfection, while others are complacent.

The trouble is, as Paul dealt with the same problem – those who are complacent will not examine themselves against the Word of God.

It is not wise for us to compare ourselves to others. Let us compare ourselves to the Word of God, to the true Gospel that Jesus Christ brought.

II Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not join forces, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by their own standards, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise – but lack understanding.

Brethren, let us strive to take the Kingdom by force. Let us put on a mighty struggle. It is only those who are most diligent who will achieve the Kingdom. Let us understand what the Kingdom of God is, let us understand how it is going to work, and let us understand the love that Jesus Christ has lived and the love that we are going to live.

Let us go on to perfection in the Kingdom of God.

Here is a partial list of scriptures about false preachers, false prophets, and false ministers:

Matthew 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Matthew 16:11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

Mark 13:22 For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.

II Corinthians 11:13-15 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Galatians 2:4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

II Peter 2:1-4 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, even denying the Lord that bought them, 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. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you:

I John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

II Corinthians 4:2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Ezekiel 34:2 Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

Malachi 3:5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Romans 16:18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Matthew 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Acts 20:29-31 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

Jeremiah 23:1-3 Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.