

A Part of Something Larger

(Sermon Notes)

By Warren Zehrung – January 1, 2011

Brethren, as we end the year, 2010, the state of the Church of God is not good.

Let's begin in **Jeremiah 50** – Please turn with me.

The United Church of God, *aia* is being split in two, and the brethren are once again being scattered.

The options for those brethren are not good at all.

The brethren are not being apprised of the fundamental cause of the break-up. Why is the United Church of God breaking up?

One by one, break-a-way Pastors and Elders are leading their local congregations out of United. Seventy have already departed.

One by one, the United Pastors and Elders are asking their members to remain loyal to the Council of Elders in Cincinnati, OH.

It is a strange phenomenon, but it was prophesied long ago by Jeremiah that the Church of God would continue to splinter into smaller and smaller fragments. God says:

*“My people have been lost [straying, unsettled] sheep: their shepherds [ministers] have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away [spiritual danger] on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to foot-hill [ever smaller scattered flocks], they have forgotten **their resting-place**.” (Jeremiah 50:6)*

Resting-place = where are we to rest assured?

There is a spiritual danger for the brethren because they are not under the protection of a caring Pastor.

Psalm 37

The only place that we can rest assured is in Jesus Christ – in His teachings – in His standards and principles – **everything** else is quicksand or quagmire.

The ministry of God's Church is **not** pointing the brethren to Jesus Christ, their proper *resting-place*, as Jeremiah said they should.

“Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.” (Psalm 37:7)

Psalm 116:7 Return unto **thy rest**, O my soul; for **the LORD** hath dealt bountifully.

None of this church-splitting would have happened if all were all looking to God and loving all the brethren as we have been commanded.

Brethren, This split would not be taking place if **either side** was willing to lay down their lives for one another (1 John 3:16).

It is like in a marriage of two **converted** people. God knows it will work – therefore divorce is never permitted. A marriage is not a 50% / 50% proposition – both the husband and the wife are committed to laying down their lives 100%.

Then if one falls or is weak – the other **one** spouse can carry the marriage through until healing comes.

It is not only United and COGWA that are at fault in this matter.

Other Church of God corporate groups looking on may think they are faring much better, but as a matter of fact, they are just as **guilty** of divisiveness, if not more so.

Let me give an example:

A small bunch of brethren in a remote little town – they've been together forever...

Back in Worldwide Church of God days - They always kept Passover together and went to the Feast together.

When the Worldwide Church of God broke up in apostasy, half the brethren there in that little group went with the United Church of God and half went with the Living Church of God.

When Passover was coming near, they each asked their respective headquarters if they could **take Passover together** as they always had, as there was a little church hall there where they could wash one another's feet and take of the Passover together.

United said, "No."

Living said, "It's out of the question."

The corporate organizations did not consider Scriptural doctrine in making their decision.

They may have considered numbers of members, money, control, - but they did not consider the **"Spiritual Welfare of the brethren"** as God through Jeremiah has warned. That was wrong.

Jesus says we are to wash one another's feet.

Jesus says we are to consider a weaker brother.

Jesus said there is to be **no division** – especially at Passover – among His brethren... (**1 Corinthians 10 and 11**).

Those men who made the decisions to divide the brethren **are not** following the “Doctrine of Christ.”

Those ministers who are aware of the party politics – and they do nothing to help – or say nothing - **are not** following the “Doctrine of Christ.”

Leviticus 5:1 says... if you see – hear – or know about a fault like this and you don't take a stand – you are complicit in the violation of Christ's doctrine, and will bear the iniquity.

Their glossy publications come out with very clear delineated doctrine correct to a “T.”

They say it correctly – they print it correctly ...

But brethren, can we understand this: Doctrine that is not put into practice is **no doctrine at all**.

There are ministers who will not visit those brethren in prison. Does Christ mean that we are only to visit the innocent prisoners?

Let me go back – for a moment – to over 15 years ago... I attended the organizational meeting in the summer of 1995 of United in Indianapolis, IN.

The Worldwide Church of God had gone off into terrible doctrinal error and the church leadership needed badly to set doctrine back in order for the confused brethren.

I attempted to bring some doctrinal clarification into the talks. I was told in no uncertain terms that we were “not there to discuss doctrine,” but to get **organized**. Everything else (like true doctrine) can come later...

We were told at the end of that conference to...

Go back to our local church areas and **incorporate and charter** with the state government as independent local churches...

We were to open a bank account... And they asked us, “Oh, by the way, how many members do you have?”

We were to select board members for the corporation...

And it was decided that we would just be **associated** together as the United Church of God, *an international association*.

John Jewell (London England) and I were both there at that organizational meeting – He and I helped chose the name, “**United**.”

We both felt strongly that the **one** Body of Christ should be united in spirit as one people.

But there were men appointed to the United council who held decidedly false doctrinal beliefs – like for example the Trinity Doctrine which was being promoted at the time by the Joseph Tkach administration.

There was a highly placed United leader who was teaching that the Trinity Doctrine should be spoon-fed to the brethren – so as not to scare them off.

At that conference, I asked that we repudiate the false Trinity Doctrine – and I was told **by a current** highly placed United Council member, and I quote, “We are not going to repudiate anything. We are going forward from here.”

That was a low point for me – I realized that I would be unable to work with those who believe that way.

About 10 years ago I went back to United a second time with a dozen or so men to see if we could safely merge the brethren.

This time, the meeting was in Cincinnati, OH where the two Councils of Elders met together after a series of **Task Force** meetings to see if two corporate organizations could come together. (I was a member of the Task Force.)

I felt it necessary to work for right doctrine and the **unity of the brethren** – which God desires us to have.

I'll use a few other examples in my sermon today of what I call "**spiritual abuse**" where the members were practicing true Christianity, and suffered the wrath of the **corporate church** for doing so.

In this **example**, members were living according to the Truth – and yet they were persecuted and put out of the Worldwide Church of God for political expedient reasons.

Many members had been disfellowshipped as the WCG apostasy came to the full – and, by some of the ministers sitting around our conference table.

I was asked to be the first speaker at that ministerial conference: I put a resolution on the table to invite those scattered members back into the fellowship, because:

Those Council members had disfellowshipped brethren – **not for sin or heresy** – but for not going along with the false doctrines and excesses of the Joseph Tkach administration.

Jesus had said in **John 16:2**: They shall put you out of the *synagogues* (meeting assemblies).

Those abused members had been disfellowshipped for holding fast to the true doctrine that had once been delivered to the Church.

Jude :3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the **faith which was once delivered** unto the saints.

Those true members had not caused any problems what-so-ever, if fact they were staying away and searching our old blue booklets for the Truth they had once received – and those ministers had sought them out for the very purpose of making examples of them – by marking them and disfellowshipping them from the Church of God.

Back then when someone was disfellowshipped – it was terrible, a person was shunned by all those whom they knew and loved. Everyone turned a cold-shoulder toward them as though they were publicans or heathens.

Another minister – who is also a current member of United’s Council said, It would have been **unethical** to go against the Tkach’s because, “We worked for them – and they paid our salaries.”

Now this Council meeting was taking place 5 -6 years later – and the **innocent faithful members** had not yet been invited back to church.

There was not **one man** on that Council of Elders who was humble enough to support my resolution to extend an open invitation to those faithful brethren who had stood for **True Doctrine** in the face of the apostasy.

I was told by the president of the council, “Obviously those members could find their way back to our door if they wanted to.”

Let me give you **another example** of violated doctrine:

Understand this, brethren: If doctrine is not lived and put into practice in our lives – it is **no doctrine at all**.

When United was being formed they put all the doctrine “**on the table**” for examination and consideration because they felt **it all** needed to be looked at again.

Many of their ministers were so confused that they did not know what they believed. Some were so deceived that they taught the pagan Trinity doctrine.

Brethren, when we came into God’s Church we proved the doctrine of Jesus Christ for ourselves (**Hebrews 6:1-2**) – it should have become **a part** of who we are – we had no reason to put all the doctrine “**on the table**” to see if we still believed it.

While on the Task Force to see if our doctrine matched, we had opportunity to intercede for a man and his wife who had been put out of United – again **not** for sin or heresy.

The man we interceded for had gone back to his local church area after the organizational meeting. As instructed by United at their inception, he **incorporated and chartered** with the state government as an independent local church, associated with United.

But United quickly consolidated the local congregations back into **central headquarters' control**. It was never written about or legally put into practice – it was just put into force by the powers that be.

The local man was told by a United Pastor to walk away from the State Charter – and just to forget about it. He was told, “Do not close it down according to state law; do not liquidate the assets according to state law – just walk away from your civic duties.”

Brethren, ask yourself the question, is the church a law unto itself that would allow a minister to supersede state law and the principles of Jesus Christ? The answer to that question is, “No.”

But Jesus has given us the principle to submit to man's government.

Luke 20:25 And [Jesus] said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the **things which be Caesar's**, and unto God the things which be God's.

The local man said that he would have to shut the local United charter down **legally** because it was formed under a State Charter --- just as United had directed him to do.

The local man said, “We must have one last board meeting to close it down – it is Scriptural: It is doctrinal – here is what we are to do:”

1 Peter 2:13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the [sovereign authority], as supreme.

This man figured, “I've got to follow the state law as long as it does not violate God's Law. I've got to follow every ordinance of man and close down this corporate organization according to law that the United Church of God instructed me to establish. I've got to comply with the word of God.”

But, United kicked him and his wife too, out of the church and he was not reinstated.

In the Task Force meetings we asked United why they had put them out of the church when, for all we could see, they were led by God's Holy Spirit, and they had **not sinned**?

I quote United's reason for putting them out of the church, and he was not welcomed back, “For all the trouble he caused.”

You see brethren, corporate organizations forget their purpose. They should exist to **defend sound doctrine** --- by practicing it, by living it, and by teaching it to others.

There are many worse examples that could be relayed to you – but I chose that particular example for a special reason that I'll come to in a moment.

Sure, we need a corporate organization to set up Feasts around the country, to publish, and defend the brethren when there is conflict with the government over church issues - things like that.

Here's a red flag warning: Here is what is happening in the Church of God right now:

Instead of returning to the Lord – and His basic Christian principles – His Way – His doctrine – **something else** is happening...

...The confused members in this church split are again **being scattered** at the same time that those heavy-handed ministers try to direct them back into the same wrong **mind-set** that does not primarily look to God and His unifying way.

Yesterday, one member described to me the on-going antics or tactics of one side of the division -- as "sounding like a used car salesman trying to sell you a hot deal."

We are not supposed to "sell" the truth of God that way.

Brethren, we must understand that fundamental doctrine -- God's desire – God's wish, is the **unity of the brethren** – not wrong corporate policy.

Jesus said that His people would be put out of the assemblies (synagogues) for trying to live up to His standards - and that is happening over and over.

If standing up for what **is right** is divisive - then we must be strong enough to believe what God desires for us.

The break-a-way scattered congregations may be sensing a feeling of freedom and euphoria right now, but in fact they are again vulnerable to exploitation and spiritual abuse.

In a Question & Answer session in COGWA last Sabbath a minister was explaining that there are all these little independent local groups that are forming everywhere – like United instructed the congregations to do 15 years ago.

And in the same way that all the local congregations were force to come back under corporate control back then,

There are men now going from location to location saying to the scattered and separated brethren, "**Would you like to be a part of something larger?**" That's the title for today's sermon.

**One of the ministers in the new corporate organization is the same Pastor who put the man out of United who had followed United's instructions on how to form local corporate groups the first time.

He's the same Pastor who demanded that the man violate state law -- --

He somehow believes that he has that right and the authority and control and dominion over people's faith. He does not!

2 Corinthians 1:24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

I once heard a definition of insanity – – – It is doing the same thing – and expecting a **different** result!

When will we ever learn?

Now they are promoting a **new** corporate organization that will have winter weekends and summer camps. How much good is that going to do?

In the Worldwide Church of God we had the Youth Education Services and Youth Opportunities United programs for the youth. They did not train our children up in the way that they should go – that's the parents' responsibility when it comes to what we believe.

At considerable expense, the Little Rock, AR YOU was the National Basketball Champ in Pasadena, CA – they had won District and Regional competitions before that. Not a one of those boys came to church a year later!

They learned basketball and social skills – but no spiritual basis.

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

1 Corinthians 2

More programs! Those are enticing words – nice programs for our children.

Who **wouldn't** want to be a part of something bigger and better?

Brethren, beware.

If we would understand the words of Jesus Christ, **we are already** a part of something much, much greater – and something **much better** – **the Body of Christ** – and we cannot imagine what all that entails.

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Please understand that all the church members **are already** intricately interwoven into something **much greater** – we need to remember that.

We are fellow citizens with **all of the saints**; (already)

We are of the **household of God**; (no need to join something else)

We are the **temple of the living God**,

And our **citizenship is in heaven**.

That is what we want to be a part of – not something **less** (**Ephesians 2:19, Philippians 3:20, 2 Corinthians 6:16**).

We are not to consider ourselves a part of corporate organizations that exclude other spirit led brethren – that would be unscriptural.

It is false doctrine to say, “We’re a part of this corporate organization – and we will not have anything to do with those other brethren.” That would be un-scriptural.

We all know that Jesus would never be a part of a group that was **not inclusive of all the saints. Think about it. *“There is...**One** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism.”*

People better think twice when setting up competitive corporate organizations.

1 John 3

We are by Scriptural definition **already a part of something much, much larger.

We are already members of the eternal family of God in that we are now the Children of God

1 John 3:2 Beloved, **now are we the sons of God**, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

We were called into **one** Body – that is Christ’s body, the Church of God. (**Colossians 3:15**)

We answer to God – not to any corporate organization’s administration.

Definition: *“...The Body of Christ... is the Church [the Brethren].”* (**Colossians 1:24**)

And the Church **is the brethren** – not any of these corporate organizations.

Where in these corporations, is the true **Godly concern for all the others? That is what our Christianity is about!!!

Do not let someone else redefine what your Christian duty is.

Our Christian duty is not about paying some ministers to make videos.

The new United Church of God break-a-way group, COGWA, is saying they will **now** “Preach the Gospel.”

They had a great 15 year opportunity in a bigger corporate organization to do that in a powerful way - and they never got around to it in any meaningful way – though they had more than ample resources in manpower and finances and resources...

The minister's responsibility is to expound on Godly concepts.

Titus 1:9 “Holding fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine [God’s Way] *both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*”

The function of the ministry is to teach brethren how to walk in God’s way and how to apply God’s principles in every aspect our lives - according to the Scriptures.

When a question arises – you search the Scriptures to find God’s inspired direction in the matter.

In the case of the man that United put out of the church, United should have gone to the Bible and found that they were required to submit to the ordinances of men’s law. Apply God’s principles according to the Bible.

So, one corporate church organization would be **quite enough** if men weren't seeking the power, money, control, and to be the **big cheese** at the head of it.

**Our Christian Faith asks us to feed the hungry, forgive, reconcile with the offended, worship God in spirit and truth, encourage the sick and imprisoned, and to love the brethren with a Godly love according to the teachings of God - things like that.

That is what we are to be teaching and doing – the principles of God.

The answer is to stand firm in the **direct and clear** teachings of Jesus Christ.

Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

Our Faith is not to support un-Christian **antics** of run-away corporations.

Yes, we are a small flock - but Jesus Christ will not forsake us.

Brethren, Do not lightly discard this second half to Jesus’ Great Commandment to **love our fellow man**, that defines what a Christian is to be. (**Matthew 22:39**).

It is decidedly against the will of God when these corporate organizations will not let brethren fellowship together, keep Passover together, or keep the Feast together.

Does Christ ever want the Christian brethren to exclude some saints in favor of others? Of course not!

God is not a respecter of persons – neither can we be.

Joining opposing corporate organizations, - - giving loyalty to one corporate organization over another is ungodly **division**, pure and simple.

Ephesians 4

Why aren't the brethren being made to understand that **our citizenship in heaven** comes before participation in corporate organizations?

Jesus Christ is not divided. Jesus hates division.

By definition, Jesus Christ has only one Church, one Body, and one Spirit.

Therefore, there is **only one True Church of God**.

From God's point of view – there is only **ONE** group of brethren!

Ephesians 4:4 There is **one** body [us], and **one** Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

There is only **one** Spirit that flows through us all.

Ephesians 4:5 **One** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, (not multiple choice)

Ephesians 4:6 **One** God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and **in you all**.

Ephesians 5:30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

That is a picture of the One bride of Christ.

Jesus will have only One Bride [us] – not a bride in every port, like the scattered church groups we see today.

Are we a part of that one Bride?

When Paul comes to **1 Corinthians 12**, he has just finished in chapter 10 and 11 where he says clearly that it is **so wrong** to find a **divided** brethren.

1 Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is **one**, and hath many members, and all the members of that **one** body, being many, are **one body**: so also is Christ.

That is a miracle – all the true members are in one body.

Do not approve of the division – do not support it.

It is not divisive to speak against the division – it is **unifying** to speak of the unity of all the brethren.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into **one** body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

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

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

If God has put us where He wants us, who then do some of the leaders think they are to say, "You cannot keep Passover with your sister in Christ; you cannot fellowship with the other brethren."

1 Corinthians 12:20 But now are they many members, yet but **one** body.

It does not get any bigger than that – Christ's one Body – we do not have to be **a part of something larger** [title] – that is not right thinking.

The corporate organizations who lift themselves up – like they were something special are saying that **they are better than the others** – so they show the members not to fellowship, visit, love, or care for all the brethren.

1 Corinthians 12:23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

God's way is for the strong to help the weak, the able bodied to facilitate the physically challenged, the mature to assist the youth and the elderly.

1 Corinthians 12:24 For our comely parts have no need: [the pretty face, the brilliant mind, the great hair, the big muscles, would have the advantage]: but **God has tempered the body together**, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:

Since God has assimilated us all together – to work and stay together.

Can we then think of ourselves as **one people**?

...**One people** led by God's Holy Spirit?

1 Corinthians 12:25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the **same care** one for another.

**Brethren, that is the doctrine that is being violated.

Old or young, blind or sighted, strong or weak, here or there, we are to have the **same care** one for another.

Here is the way it is supposed to work:

1 Corinthians 12:26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.

1 Corinthians 10

The fundamental cause of church break-ups is this: **God is not first.

If God were first, the brethren would be taught to love one another – with a Godly love, with a Biblical love, with a Scriptural love – and all that necessitates – forgiveness, reconciliation, and humbly serving one another by laying down their lives for each other (**John 15:13**).

Paul asked the question, “*Is Christ divided?*” (**1 Corinthians 1:13**)

“I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and that there **be no divisions** among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”
(**1 Corinthians 10:16**)

That is the **doctrine of Christ** – that there **be no divisions** among you.

Brethren, we probably will not **change them** very much I suppose – not United, COGWA, Living, Philadelphia, Restored, or any of the many varied groups.

But, as far as you and I are individually concerned, in our prayers, in our thinking, in our lives, in our encouragement – let there **be no divisions** among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” [no grudges, but good reconciliation]

“*Is Christ divided?*”

We should know what the answer is to that rhetorical question. “No, Christ is not divided.”

Jeremiah 23

We need to wake up to the harshness of these times.

Brethren, time is short. I do not wish to appear harsh, but if we would **honestly**, and wholeheartedly look at the **divided** condition of the Church today, we would be forced to come to one of two conclusions:

**Either, Christ’s Body is divided, [that is what I see] or, not all of us are of Christ. We certainly not doing what Christ said.

Now, that is a scary scenario, no matter **which one** you choose.

And, Paul would agree with either scenario..

He wrote that if we are not properly discerning the Lord's body, we are eating and drinking damnation to ourselves (**1 Corinthians 11:29**).

If we have not decided how to treat each and every member who has God's Holy Spirit with proper Godly concern and appreciation, we are eating and drinking damnation to ourselves.

"Woe be unto the Pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! Saith the Lord." (**Jeremiah 23:1**)

Brethren, this is a time for prayer, fasting, and reflection.