

This is an open letter to my brethren both in the Living Church of God, and those in other fellowships who recognize our common bond. The entirety of this letter is merely my personal commentary and opinion, as things appear to me. It's written in humility, love and deep concern for all God's people. It is hoped that the readers will pray and study God's Word in order to rightly discern for themselves (from God's point of view) the accuracy and applicability of this letter.

A WAKE UP CALL TO A HOUSE IN MOURNING

Wednesday, March 16th, 2005

My Dear Friends and Family in Christ;

Solomon said "Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart." (Eccl 7:2)

Certainly all our hearts are very heavy now over the loss and injuries of so many of our dear brethren and of a fine minister and his son in the previously unimaginable tragedy of horrible murder of the innocent; by a deranged, sick man in a satanic attack— right in the sanctity of our Sabbath services. We feel deep compassion for all those affected by this horrible tragedy. Our prayers, for comfort, help and peace from God go out to all those hurt by this terrible attack. Certainly, as Solomon said, we ought to indeed "take it to heart." WHY did God allow this to happen within His Church?

It is with faithful care and loving concern that I have decided to write you ALL this open letter. Many have called and asked the question, "Why did God allow this to happen TO and IN His Church...?" Is "WHY" an appropriate question? Of course it is. That's "taking it to heart", like Solomon said. When there was a famine in the land, David inquired of the Lord as to WHY. It was because of the sins of the house of Saul, against the Gibeonites, which had not been rectified. (2 Sam.21)

When Israel was routed at Ai, Joshua cried out to the Lord asking WHY? It was because of the sins of Achan. (Joshua 7)

In addition, Josiah recognized because of Israel's sins, they were NOT SECURE or exempt from the punishments that God was pouring out on His people nationally. But through deep and sincere repentance and HUMBLING THEMSELVES, God said: "because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD...", they were promised peace during Josiah's days (2 Ki.22)

I am NOT suggesting in ANY WAY that my brethren in Milwaukee were bigger sinners than the rest of us in God's Church – PLEASE don't misunderstand. Perhaps they were actually BETTER than the rest of us? God knows. Sometimes God takes the righteous through death in His love and wisdom, to protect them from a future evil, and to teach those who remain vital lessons. (Isa.57:1) So I am NOT accusing anyone. I am saying that perhaps some of us have been a bit over confident, as Israel was after the fall of Jericho. Perhaps many of us have grown complacent, and too self-assured in our stand with God? "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor 10:12)

God's Church has taken a big "hit". Can we be honest enough and humble enough to recognize that? Paul said, there should be no schism in the body, that each should have the same care one for another, and that when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. (1 Cor.12:25-26)

Why did God allow this? Would God have allowed this IF we were ALL really right with Him? Many have pointed out various prophetic reasons for the tragedies our nation suffered on 9/11. Now the Living Church of God has suffered a tragedy as well. As with 9/11, God could have prevented it – but He didn't. Why? Once again we're reminded that life is fleeting. Are we walking closely with God?

I hear some claim we're the "best church" -or- that we're the "MAIN" place God is working –or- that we are more perfectly practicing the correct "government of God" – or - that "we're preaching the gospel more perfectly and zealously than any other branch of the Church of God." Everyone should want to join with us, because "WE are the ONES"... the ones who are the "SPEAR POINT" of God's efforts on this earth! Oh, "we're not perfect"–we'll admit– "we're just the best there is today".....

Many groups boast a quality or reason why they are the "best", be it size, government, variety of programs and literature, zeal, or, as judges - because "all the others are Laodiceans." But are these condescending comparisons Godly, wise or humble? Can ANY OF US in ANY branch or fellowship of God's Church REALLY afford to make such self-aggrandizing statements that are clearly disdainful to our

brethren in other fellowships of the Church of God? Especially given our own recent church history, that has been such a despicable display of conduct by character assassination and counter attack between brethren and church groups over the last decade? Can any of us afford to claim to be better than anyone else? How about just proclaiming the Truth by expounding God's Word – feeding God's sheep – living in peace - while taking the focus OFF of ourselves?

This is very difficult for me to say! Like many, I have put my heart into the support of the gospel. It's humbling to realize, but some have noticed that many of us have been changing from the HUMBLE and hungry-for-Truth people we used to be, to becoming more increasingly condescending and judgmental. We're often too quick to judge those in this church, those in other churches, and even those in the world. Sometimes we're quick to judge and label each world event, in a tone that gives the impression that we think we are speaking on behalf of God Himself. But things don't always go as we thought they would. One would think we would have learned from our past mistakes and become more cautious with our "proclamations"!

We need to be careful that we do not arrogate too much to ourselves. God gave His Church a commission to preach the GOSPEL. Gospel literally means GOOD NEWS. Perhaps we ought to try to FOCUS a little more on the POSITIVE HOPE and ENCOURAGING COMFORT in God's Word? God's Word is also beautifully encouraging - painting pictures of hope, healing, happiness, love and eternal life. Sure God's Word is corrective and has warnings, given in love. These things must also be taught. Prophetic warnings are an aspect of the gospel, but it is also full of HOPE, ENCOURAGING COMFORT, and how to practice God's law of love! Perhaps the balance of our focus needs to be addressed, which could make us more accurate, and more likely to attract others?

Let this horrible tragedy be a WAKE UP CALL for us, bringing us HUMBLY to God! This tragedy is evidence, that not only the world needs correction. Jesus revealed that those with a Laodicean attitude are the ones who boast and are self-confident and think they see things clearly. But they are BLINDED about themselves and need repentance. (Rev.3:17-19) Does this apply to us?

When I joyfully agreed to help Mr. Meredith "revive the work" when he called me in January of 1993, I wrote Mr. Meredith encouraging him to take the "high road" – the approach of humility, and to avoid making comparative or negative statements about other fellowships of the Church of God. I expressed to him that in good conscience, I would not take part in maligning others, as Satan is the accuser of our brethren. (Rev 12:10) A few days later, to my joy I received a letter from him encouraging me, in essence, to do the same. The postmark date of our letters indicated that they had crossed in the mail. We both independently thought the same thing.

In early 1993, Mr. Meredith wrote one of the best booklet to date on the subject of church governance titled Church Government and Church Unity. That booklet was an inspiring example of humility. Yet why are so many now engaging in judgmental comparative statements?

The implications of the many, condescending statements that we all hear in various congregations and in various forms of media, strikes many people as being very presumptuous, self-righteous – and is offensive to many, both in Living and in other fellowships.

Come my brethren, let us reason together. When we make a statement that God is using us as the main "thrust" of His Work, or being the "main" ones ...does this not also seem to limit God and make God look weak? It strikes me as being blasphemous! Really – if the tiny work of preaching the gospel by any and all of the COG's today is the best God can do in His efforts to warn His people Israel and the whole world - then God's strength would be small indeed! How can any of us be so presumptuous to describe ourselves as the "best" or "spear point" etc. in God's efforts or His works on earth? "Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts." (Zech.4:6)

This is not an attack against anyone. This is a PLEA for ALL OF US TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR – EACH OF US (including the author of this letter), and to be HUMBLE and beseech God to restore to us a better spirit of humility, love and respect to each of our other scattered brethren, in hopes that we can see peace, joy and the protection of God's favorable presence fully restored to us all.

Do you think yours is the "BEST" group – the main focus God's work? Perhaps God's ability to work through us is limited by our lack of humility? How do we know if God is not working much more powerfully in other ways that we may not recognize? Such was the case with Elijah! God had 7,000 other godly people that Elijah didn't know about or acknowledge. (1 Ki.19:18) Perhaps the "spear point" is God's Spirit

moving and preparing many people for a great repentance, which may be independent of anything we are doing or even know about? Each time someone does something wrong and that still small voice inside of them nags them and causes them out of guilt to consider God and His Word... Couldn't God be preparing many thousands of others to repent and come to Him in various ways that we cannot see, as we cannot see the hearts of men? There are many Bibles in the land – not just ours. Each one contains the gospel of the KOG! Even HWA was often surprised at finding new little groups that were keeping God's commands, Holy Days, Sabbaths, and accepting Christ as their Messiah – and he often considered them part of the Church.

We all know there are differences between many of the various fellowships of God's Church. Each person needs to make a prayerful investigation as to where they feel they can best grow and serve God. So do it! But do we all have to be "better" than each other? Do we need to proclaim ourselves to be the "MAIN" ones, to feel better about ourselves? Perhaps God's greatest work on earth is His "still small voice?" Perhaps God's "spear point" now is His preparations to overthrow the Devil? Perhaps it is in how His Spirit is working in people's minds and controlling world events to bring people to Him, to repentance and Truth, as He did with king Cyrus? Perhaps God's Spirit is now laying a foundation for a great harvest through men's conscience or through their recognizing their need for Him or in any number of ways that God has, independent of any group of His little flock? Perhaps God's "spear point" is His written word? Perhaps the "spear point" is Christ? Yes the Church has been given the commission to preach the good-news of the KOG unto the end. But is it being humble or presumptuous to assume that we are the best that God has to offer at this time by setting ourselves up - with self appointed titles as God's "main" church or effort today. I exhort us ALL – let's be very careful about making presumptive statements, and yield to God's warning:

Ezek 13:6 "They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, 'Thus says the LORD!' But the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed."

7 "Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, 'The LORD says,' but I have not spoken."

8 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you," says the Lord GOD.

If we really are the best, let's wait and let God tell us if it is so. Let's not impute to God. Let's be very careful with sounding like we "speak on God's behalf" in setting dates or applying scripture to specific events or to others in such a way that we then have to sit by nervously and "hope that the word may be confirmed." What damage to credibility and people is caused when those who do this are proven wrong?

Is it wise or humble to take to ourselves that "chief seat" among God's elect? How did Jesus say to handle matters of status or position in the church and world?

8 "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;

9 and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.

10 But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'friend go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.

11 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."(Lk.14:8-11)

That's pretty clear! So wouldn't it be better to simply preach powerfully the full TRUTH IN HUMILITY, serve God's flocks, and let God appoint and title us? Furthermore, do all the condescending words of comparison and "competition" attract our scattered brethren at home or in the various scattered churches of God to come join us? Or do these kinds of statements repel people? The fact is that if we use these kinds of terms, IT REPELS our brethren and appears arrogant, judgmental and self-righteous, as it SETS US UP (exalts us) and PUTS THEM DOWN.

None of us want to repel our scattered brethren. Most deeply desire to help as many of our scattered brethren as possible. However, I know of several people both in the congregations I serve and others who have left our fellowship because of the use of such terms and other negative comparisons made on a local basis and in various media efforts on tape and in print. They left because they have close friends and families in other COG fellowships whom they feel have the same zeal and love for God as we do. Is this the conduct of one being humble - or vain and judgmental? Does it draw others toward us when we attempt to magnify our strengths while simultaneously magnifying the weaknesses of other groups? Are bees attracted with honey or gall?

On page 32 of our 1993 version of the Global Church of God, Church Government and Church Unity booklet we state: "Down through history, Christ has guided His Church so that often – in fact most of the time – there were different "branches" of the true Church co-existing at the same time. Sometimes it was a geographical necessity. But often, as in the Sardis Era, Christ allowed His people a certain freedom of choice. Which Seventh Day Church of God would they worship with?"

Since we believe Mr. Armstrong came from another Church of God, then he was one of many in his day. Yes he was the main man that God used to teach us all. For that we are all very thankful. But think - was Mr. HWA's fellowship in those early days, the ONLY place where God's people were located? To think this way is judgmental and wrong! Are we too quick to preclude others from being part of God's Church who perhaps shared Mr. Armstrong's roots, but NEVER followed him out of the Oregon conference? (See Mr. Armstrong Autobiography)

Did Jesus say they ought to leave and join others? NO! But what did Jesus say and do? "He who is not against us, is on our part" (Mk.9:38-40) He did not say to leave and go follow others. They just left them alone! Jesus had others who were also on their part. They were not to "compete" or set themselves up over each other. Jesus also told the disciples that He had "other sheep who were not of this fold." (Jn.10:16) We may not always be aware of where all of God's other people are or what He is also doing through them in any given location or era of time. "By their fruits, you shall know them." (Mt.7:20) We need to really consider - do we come off as arrogant or humble? This latest tragic satanic attack, ought to encourage us to EXAMINE OURSELVES and to really BE HUMBLE, and not to at all exalt ourselves! This may not be what we're "used to" hearing, but Jesus said: "The truth shall make you free" (Jn.8:32) Are we free?

Since in our 1993 booklet "Church Government and Church Unity", and in HWA's autobiography, the church has previously recognized this freedom of choice in fellowship that Christ has granted, then WHY would we want to make belittling statements about God's other sheep in other folds? Why not all of us learn to show each other more love and respect or not mention each other at all? Is it Godly and humble to make statements that by their very nature PUT OTHERS DOWN in an attempt to make oneself look better? Is that not being vain like the Laodiceans?

How did God inspire Paul to put it? "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves." (Phil.2:3) I would rather be the sinner beating on his chest in humility, than the judgmental Pharisee looking down on others he considered less righteous than himself! (Lk.18:9-14) I'm sure we all feel the same way. LET'S BEGIN TO SHOW IT!

Why should we be "comparing ourselves among ourselves"? Paul said that's not wise! (2 Cor.10:12) Doesn't it make us sound like carnal little children? Such comparative statements lead to DIVISION, not love and unity, and they repel – not attract people.

In dealing with a division among God's people, Paul noted that some were saying they were "of Paul." Paul was their leader. He was mighty in pen. Others favored Apollos who was mighty in word. Others preferred Peter. So Paul said:

1 Cor 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

7 So then neither is he that plants any thing, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase.

Paul said he was nothing. He said Peter was nothing. He said Apollos was nothing. He said Christ IS something. I implore us all to consider Paul's words. Today people say, "I am of Meredith", or "I am of Holliday", or "I am of Ritenbaugh", or I am of "____"! If our focus is TOO centered upon ourselves or upon which physical leader, or fellowship we support or "follow"- instead of simply preaching the gospel, loving and respecting one another and leading by example – we actually perpetuate the division! Some may feel they attend where a more powerful doctrine and zeal to do the work is, that's fine! So let us preach it powerfully, while showing love and respect for one another. Then we will be recognized as Christ's disciples! (Jn.13:35) We can "let our feet do the voting, and let our feet proclaim our preferred 'alliances'!" But do we need to repeatedly compare?

Let's say only "I am of Christ," and NOT put any emphasis upon ourselves – especially not in any kind of a comparative nature. Paul warned that in the end time, people would rise up from within the Church seeking to draw disciples after THEMSELVES. But to protect them and keep them in the right way, Paul commended them not to men, or to any one church leader, but to the "WORD OF GOD" (Acts.20:28-32) We definitely need church leadership, which is one reason why I have supported Mr. Meredith and LCG. But we must BE HUMBLE AND CAREFUL, or we will also go awry and take too much to ourselves. Better to be humble than to be humiliated! (Mt.23:12)

People often think of the Church as being the mother. This is true with Catholics as well, where some place the importance of the mother of Jesus (Mary) over that of God or Christ. So it has become for some in our fellowships as well. Some in ours and other fellowships have placed the words of the church (mother) and leading ministers, (including Mr. HWA) OVER that of the Bible's! This is idolatry! Is the church and some in its leadership becoming an idol once again? True humility and the approach we set out so very well in the booklet "Church Government and Church Unity" can prevent this. The one thing that kept Moses from entering the promised land was when he put the focus upon himself and Aaron instead of glorifying God, when he said; "ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Num.20:10) Do our words and deeds represent humility?

Brethren, I beseech you as a true friend to consider this in a spirit of love, and in no way think of it as an attack upon anyone or their motives. Obviously there are several things of concern mentioned herein – all of which seem to stem from a spirit of good intentions, but appear presumptuous and condescending in nature. This horrific tragedy and the loss of our faithful minister and members ought to be a serious wake up call to us all, to EXAMINE OURSELVES IN HUMILITY BEFORE PASSOVER! Again I ask - WHY did God allow this tragic event to happen to us?

Are any of the words here trying to say it is our "fault" or trying to blame the leadership or anyone? NO! However we ALL ought to examine ourselves and ask ourselves some hard questions about our faith and personal walk with God! Are any of the words here trying to say or imply that ANYTHING that has been said, taught from the pulpit, or done otherwise in ANYWAY could have driven or led the killer to commit such murder? ABSOLUTELY NOT! He was sick! It was not ANY of our doing – let's be clear on that! What these words simply say is that many of us have drifted from the level of God's graces that we need to be in, for God to protect us from these kinds of heart-rending terrors, or adversities.

Paul said we cannot be an easy "yes man" and please God. "If I seek to please men, I cannot be the servant of God." (Gal.1:10) Not everything helpful is easy to say. I fear for you my dear brethren, more than I do for the flack I expect to get from some who don't have ears to hear, and who disagree. Solomon said; "There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak". (Eccl.3:7) Now is a time when I fear before God my silence; more than I fear before men to speak.

Those who set themselves up as being the "best" or "main" or exclusive group through which Jesus Christ is working, ought to ask themselves a few hard questions: Will those in other church fellowships think of the tragic attack on the Living Church of God as evidence that they are better than us? (What if something (God forbid) later then happened to them?) After this tragic attack on us in Living, can we afford not to be humble; can we afford to make condescending statements as if we are better than everyone else? (If so, then why are WE the ones suffering so and why was it OUR Sabbath services and members that were so violated?) Either way you look at it, the only possible answer is to be HUMBLE and to COMFORT and LOVE one another, letting God judge. Job's friends attached blame to him during his time of trial, but God said they were wrong! The evidence is we must now be VERY CAREFUL not to label each tragedy in this world as a WARNING or CORRECTION from God – especially unless WE ALSO are prepared to view our own terror with the same eyes!

The fact is WE are suffering now. This happened to US – to each one of US! Can we look in the mirror and be COLLECTIVELY HUMBLED, and increase in LOVE, RESPECT AND APPRECIATION for ALL our dear brethren wherever they are, without setting ourselves above them?

If someone from the world - wondering about this "strange little church" were to go onto our web site, they could read many warnings; detailing how the terrorism and disasters around the world were to bring us to national and personal repentance, for breaking "God's spiritual laws!" Will we now practice what we preach? Will WE TOO now look at ourselves and ask ourselves; "How might we have drifted away from God to the point that He did not protect us from our own personal terrorism?"

THIS WAS RIGHT IN THE SANCTITY OF OUR SABBATH CHURCH SERVICE! If we're not safe in our Sabbath services, how can we expect to be specially protected in a place of safety from the Great Tribulation?

BRETHREN, CAN WE SEE? OR ARE SOME OF US SO LAODICEAN THAT WE CANNOT SEE, and so will not grow close enough to God to survive and indeed be protected from the many things coming to try the world – the Great Tribulation which will be much worse? A hard question – yes. Not PC (politically correct), I know. Would you rather I told you how everything is OK, and that God is pleased with us? It would be smoother, but would it be true? As a minister, should I “cry aloud”, or hold my peace? (Isa.58:1) Should I only speak smooth things? (Isa.30:10) The wise preacher said, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Pr.27:6) Each will have to judge if these words are faithful for themselves.

Obviously there are some that wish I would not speak so openly with you all, like this. But I seek first to please God not man. Yet I believe that this will also please many of you, for we share that same true love for God and His Word - first and foremost. Those of you who truly know me, know that I am seeking to help you as a genuinely, faithful friend and confidant. Will some now consider me an opponent because of open honesty and straight talk? I hope not, for I love you and do not seek the parting of our company.

MANY are beginning to ask themselves WHY? “Why God?” This has shaken the faith of some. As we look to God with many questions, what will we do with this attention and energy? We can't say it was because we were being persecuted by the world for the gospel or for our righteousness sake. This did not come from the world! This was not martyrdom. This was a pure evil from which we were not protected. Let's all begin to fast and beseech God in humility to help us draw closer to Him in obedient faith, for understanding as to where we may have gone astray– for truly it is WE who need to change, not God! As a church we have suffered a big loss. But our faith is not to be in any church or leader – but in God our Father and His Son Jesus! So let's now FOCUS ON CHRIST, and ON OUR MISSION (Mt.28:19), and NOT focus upon ourselves – comparing ourselves among ourselves – or judging ANY other church. God is the judge.

One other subject we need to consider at this time – that being the lax way some of us have gotten into of keeping the Sabbath. Remember breaking the Sabbath was one of the MAIN reasons given for Israel and Judah being removed from God's sight, causing them to incur God's wrath and to go into slavery. Therefore, out of deep concern for us all, I feel compelled to address this topic at this time. It seems appropriate. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel and others repeatedly warned Israel that it was their Sabbath breaking that would cause them to go into captivity – their “tribulation.” (Jer.17:21-27, and Ezek.20) Later, Nehemiah had to contend with the nobles of his day concerning their lax Sabbath observance, as they were repeating the same mistakes.

Neh 13:17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?

18 "Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

Too many of us believe and practice what we have been taught at some point concerning the keeping of the Sabbath – with NO scriptural proof offered. Some yet play sports on the Sabbath. Some entertain themselves with T.V. on the Sabbath. Some are not careful that their words are appropriate Sabbath conversation. (Isa.58:13-14) Many stay home too often, even though the Sabbath is a commanded assembly. (Lev.23 & Heb.10:25) Especially we would ALL do well to consider the frequency and reasons for our habitually eating in restaurants on the Sabbath, in light of the two references in Nehemiah that portray buying meats, breads and wine on the Sabbath Day as profaning the Sabbath.

Neh 13:15 In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals.

16 There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, what evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day?

18 Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath.

19 And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the

Sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day.

20 So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.

21 Then I testified against them, and said unto them, why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath.

22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

Nehemiah restored proper Sabbath observance to avoid once again falling out of God's graces, and he closed the gates on the Sabbath. He then asked God to "remember" him and to "spare" him for doing these things. Sadly though many today, open their gates wide on the Sabbath as it is their "custom and tradition" – just like the forefathers in Nehemiah's day did.

Some say that: "Nehemiah had control over the gates, and that today the merchants will be open whether we trade with them or not – so it's OK." Should doctrine be based upon what OTHERS will or will not do? If so, we could say the same thing about our jobs. Our employers will have their businesses open whether we work or not. Does that make it OK to work on the Sabbath? Nehemiah 10 is NOT directed at the selling on the Sabbath, but at purchasing!

Neh 10:31 "If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day;"

The Gentiles and unconverted always did business on the Sabbath. Clearly God's people were not to trade with the food merchants on the Sabbaths. Does our Sabbath observance constitute sound doctrine? There are a few extreme reasons to justify occasional departure from normal Sabbath behavior. For example, on the Sabbath, 'saving an ox from the ditch' principle, could also apply to going out on the Sabbath during certain extreme circumstances. But is our "ox in the ditch" too often? If so, perhaps we need to mend our fences? How can we justify leaving a church potluck to go to a restaurant on the Sabbath, or going out regularly as a habit to trade with the food merchants on the Sabbath, when we have good cooking facilities and other options if we were to use the day of preparation? (Ex.16:23)

When we use the preparation day (Friday) according to God's instruction, we are better able to serve and fellowship with others. We can potluck at church or invite brethren over to our home like they did so often in Acts 2 – 5! Church and home environments provide a much better, quality atmosphere for Godly conversation, than restaurants. Proper preparation greatly reduces the need to go to the merchants on God's Sabbath days! When we keep the preparation day, as the church used to teach, we are better able to keep the Sabbath! How are we doing?

Christ said He was Lord of the Sabbath, and He was sinless. He said He did not come to take away the smallest thing from the law. (Mt.5:17-19) Therefore God's laws governing the Sabbath HAVE NOT CHANGED! When His disciples who were traveling with Him were accused of breaking the Sabbath by picking grain and eating it on the way, He responded by using two examples to prove that they were not breaking the Sabbath. (Matt.12:3-8) Let's see:

When David was traveling away from home, and was literally running for his life. He and his men were famished so they ate the shew bread, which was put out on the Sabbath. The point being David did not sin, because of the extreme circumstances and needs involved (wherein David COULD NOT utilize the preparation day). These extreme circumstances dictated that God's supreme law of love overrode for that specific instance, the technical points of the Sabbath and showbread laws, as the Sabbath was made FOR man. Christ and the Bible showed David did NOT break the Sabbath.

In His second example, Jesus referred to the law wherein the priests would work on the Sabbath and are blameless. (Num.28:9) Christ is our High Priest! He and the apostles were TRAVELING and doing the work of God – the work of the priesthood on the Sabbath – so again there was NO SIN! (Are we also doing the work of Christ when we go to the restaurants on the Sabbath? If so, it's OK. You judge.) If the priests could do the necessary work in the temple on the Sabbath and be blameless – how much more could His disciples do the same, for He said "One greater than the temple is here" (Mt.12:6)! They were traveling, healing, preaching, serving and being trained by the One that the temple itself was there to serve. Christ was not changing or loosening the Sabbath – but EXPOUNDING SCRIPTURE and (exposing the Pharisees judgmental attitudes toward the "guiltless" – verse 7). So the principles are clear,

and are not to be altered at our leisure or by tradition of men! (Mk.7:7) Have we granted ourselves "license?" What is your Sabbath habit?

Many will disagree with me about this. I already realize my opinion is NOT important. But neither is any mans opinion important – ONLY GOD'S OPINION AND WORDS COUNT. (So I am not going to engage in "striving DEBATE" with anyone about this topic.) Obeying God is always for our good, and is part of how we show love to God! (Duet.10:12-13)

Why am I saying this to you, because I don't love you? No! It is because I DO love you ALL, and feel responsible to encourage us to examine ourselves before Passover. Willful, habitual Sabbath breaking has historically brought on severe punishments. We have mercy, not license. (Jn.5:14)

What ever you do, we should not engage in judging others for how they keep the Sabbath! I do not judge others who do not keep the Sabbath as I do, nor do I "contend" with them about it. I am a teacher not a judge. We need to judge less and love more. I am trying, by the love of God, to simply encourage us to EXAMINE OURSELVES on this vitally important covenant sign of God's true people. (Ex.31:13)

Passover is coming soon – very soon. We are told in 2 Cor.13:15 to "examine yourselves" to see whether or not we are in the faith. Are we living a life that demonstrates that we are in the faith?

Do we fast to draw closer to God, as Christ said His disciples would? (Luke 5:33-35)

Do we STUDY God's Statutes and commandments, as God commands us to? (Deut.6:4-9)

Do we love God with ALL our heart and show it? (Deut.6:4-6) (Mk.12:29-30)

Have we learned to forgive and love our neighbor as yourself? (Lev.19:18) (Mk.12:31-33)

Are we lax in our Sabbath observance? (Neh.10:31, Neh.13:17-22, Isa.58:13-14)

Have we learned to humble ourselves so that we are not debased, knowing God will exalt us in due time? (1 Pet.5:6)

Do we know that ONLY God can be exalted today? (Isa.2:11)

Do we know that NO FLESH SHOULD GLORY in His presence? (1 Cor.1:29)

Are we kind, compassionate, gentle, forgiving, and esteeming each other better than ourselves, both to those in the church and those who are not?

Can we be recognized by all men as Christ's disciples by the loving fruits of our lives and WORDS toward all of our brethren? (Jn.13:35)

Do we like to strive and argue with our brethren (and others), to our ruin? (2 Tim.2:14)

Are we truly seeking FIRST the Kingdom of God AND His righteousness? (Mt.6:33)

This horrible loss we as a church have suffered is great indeed. But we need not let our sorrow take our minds off the beautiful hope and promises we all have from God. Our God who keeps our soul WILL bring back the lives of our loved ones again in His glorious Kingdom (Ps.66:9). The sick individual did not kill the soul of any of our brethren! He only murdered their bodies! Only God can kill the soul! Through Jesus Christ and the resurrection from the dead, He has promised to save our souls. The dead saints now wait in a sleeplike state for the resurrection. (1 Thes.4:14) Remember Jesus' encouraging words: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."(Matt 10:28)

I lost my grandmother to death when I was 10 years old, my father to a sudden and unexpected death when I was 11, my oldest brother to suicide when I was about 13, and my next oldest brother and his fiancé to a drunk driver when I was 15. I understand the fear and pain of losing a loved one. Our God became my Father and has provided and protected me ever since I responded to his calling at age 16 (even before that really) – and (like many) I have come to love Him DEEPLY! He has always been very kind and gracious. He is our Father, and as a loving, merciful Father- He will save us! He sent His Son to prove it! Our dead will live again! They did not live nor die in vain!

God spoke to Job about having the control over the gates of death where the dead wait for their resurrection. Remember, Paul said if in this life only we have hope, we are of all people most pitiable."(1 Cor.15:19) But the trump will sound, and the dead will rise as surely as Jesus the Firstborn was raised! (1 Cor.15:52) Let us proclaim this fantastic Truth to our young people and dwell and meditate on these comforting promises from our Father. Our God is a merciful Father, and His promises are great. I am not great. Follow God!

So let's live our lives to God's glory and live them in HUMILITY. Let's be POSITIVE and focus upon the Good News of the soon coming Kingdom of God; and upon the healing and type of life it will bring. Remember God's beautiful Statutes and Commandments, which show love toward God and love toward

fellow man! (Deut.7 & 1 Jn.5:3) While ignoring them is foolish, too much focus upon the negative “end time” prophecies is a focus upon FEAR, instead of the hope and love God offers us. Look to the promises! The lion and the lamb will dwell together and a little child will lead them. Remember Love Joy and Peace are the first three fruits of God’s spirit!

As true servant-hearted leaders, let’s encourage everyone to look to God and His Word, not us! Let’s cease comparing ourselves among ourselves. Let’s properly utilize the God appointed offices of the ministry – NOT to have dominion over others – but to serve, build, expound scripture and be helpers of their joy. (Neh.8:8 & 2 Cor.1:24) For if we in the ministry are without true humility and we allow or encourage the people to look to us more than to the Word of God; OR if any of us allow ourselves to act and teach presumptuously, and if any of us are lukewarm and blind - WE WILL SURELY FALL AGAIN! (Ps.127:1) By the grace of God we stand! Our King and Hope is coming soon! Keep the faith, and don’t waiver in this time of trial. God is our Strength and Deliverer! My love and God speed to all.

Your faithful brother, friend, and fellow servant of the Lord,

Don E. Haney