
CHURCH OF THE
E T E R N A L

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all the nations; and then shall the end come." – Matthew 24:14

December 10, 2012

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Christians of the first century didn't know exactly WHEN, but many believed that Jesus Christ would return in their lifetimes. For a while, that anticipation created tremendous zeal!

The apostle Paul initially wrote in ways that seem to indicate he expected to be alive when Jesus returned (compare 1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; and 2 Thessalonians 1:7). However, later on, his writing reveals that he knew that he would die, and that meant he would live again to then meet Christ in the first resurrection—along with other faithful saints (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

As years turned into decades, and Jesus Christ did not appear, many lost their fervor, and some turned completely away from their incomparable calling. This is what Jesus said of that era of His Church: "...I have this against you, that you have left your FIRST LOVE" (Revelation 2:4).

He and God's Way of Life, as taught by Him, were their "first love," and they quit seeking Him and what He represented—no longer passionately looking forward to His return!

Jesus knew this would happen, and He warned both them and us about losing focus on God's Kingdom being established on the earth:

"And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, "My master is delaying his coming," and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:42-48).

Herbert W. Armstrong, along with those contemporary with him, zealously believed at one time that Jesus Christ's return was imminent—that it was about to happen very, very soon! Sermons were given; articles and letters were written; it became an underlying buzz among the membership; the "place of safety" was a hot topic—all were caught up earnestly assuming that theirs was the correct understanding.

However, that timeline was premature and Christ has not returned, yet. For some, the disappointment has proven catastrophic—just as it did in the first era of God's Church!

Peter came to understand that the timing of Jesus Christ's return would remain a problem for the Church when dates were set and the events would not take place at the expected times, and he warned:

“... knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

Peter also teaches us the proper approach while we wait for Jesus:

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless...

“You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...” (2 Peter 3:10-14, 17-18).

Nothing in the Word of God tells us to NOT rally in the knowledge that Jesus Christ will be sent back to the earth by the Father! The astonishing truth is that quite the opposite is the case!

Jesus, Himself, gave His disciples a framework within which to watch for and be prepared for His return:

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:32-35).

As Jesus so emphatically states, there is a generation—that is, a certain span of time—in which His return will culminate! A “generation” might include the full lifetime of an individual and his peers, but not necessarily so.

In one of our Q&A’s, we addressed this very question and stated:

“We might wonder how long a ‘generation’ lasts, according to the Bible. We find a biblical definition for the approximate length of a human life in this modern day and age in Psalm 90:10, where we read: ‘The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.’ We also read in God’s Word that God sometimes shortens or prolongs human life, and that bloodthirsty and deceitful men may not live out HALF their days (Psalm 55:23). This is an interesting statement in light of the fact that men will be so bloodthirsty and destructive in the end time that Christ will HAVE to come and SHORTEN the days of worldwide warfare, lest ANY man would be saved alive or survive (Matthew 24:22).

“At this moment in time, we have not yet seen the beginning of the Great Tribulation, but we have been witnessing ever-increasing religious deception, wars, earthquakes, famines and disease epidemics—events which are described by Christ as the ‘beginning of sorrows’ (Matthew

24:8). These will become more and more visible and frightening in the years to come. We do not know the exact time of Christ's return, but based on the parable of the fig tree, we CAN say that we ARE living today in the very last generation, and that Christ WILL return BEFORE this present generation has 'passed away.' It is therefore important for us to watch and pray, and to be 'ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an HOUR [we] do NOT expect' (Matthew 24:44)."

As His disciples, we are to remain vigilant and never let down in our role as Christians!

Paul urges and challenges us in Romans to continue in the love of God and His laws, saying:

"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:11-14).

If indeed Paul had the sense of Christ's return growing ever closer in his time (over nineteen-hundred years earlier), how much more applicable is this now, for us?

Here is a key approach and understanding—one which many have completely lost: Jesus Christ's return will seem to Paul and to all who have lived their lives and died as happening in their own times! The dead know nothing and have no consciousness (Ecclesiastes 9:5), but all of the righteous who died will be resurrected to immortality at the same time when those of the righteous who actually are living will be changed to eternal Spirit beings when Jesus returns!

The absolutely critical issue for us is to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5) and to know that we are faithfully doing those things which will allow us to be counted worthy to be in this better resurrection (Luke 21:34-36).

Brethren, much has been given to us. We have understanding that is from God! We have been called to succeed in the Work commissioned to ALL OF US—each fulfilling his or her part in the Body of Christ, the Church of God!

MUCH MORE is and will be required of us as we draw closer to the visible return of Jesus Christ to establish His rule over the entire earth! The world will fight Him at that time, and the societies of this generation will NOT accept our presentation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God here on earth.

Brethren, as never before, PRAY for this Work of God in which we all have a part. Pray that God may send more laborers into His harvest. Pray for one another. Grow in the love of God and Jesus Christ and for each other, and never lose sight of our goal—the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of God's glorious Kingdom on this war-weary earth!

In Christ's Service,



Dave Harris