

CHURCH OF THE
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“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” —Matthew 24:14

December 10, 2002

Dear Brethren and Friends,

When Jesus Christ neared the completion of the work God had given Him to do, He focused on what lay immediately ahead. Those called at this time have the extraordinary blessing of understanding that the ongoing work of the church for this age will soon culminate with the return of Jesus Christ. That return will be ushered in against the backdrop of the most terrifying and tumultuous times in all of human history.

We must, in addition to the great hope for God’s rule of peace, focus on those clear admonitions and instructions we have been given from God’s word. Some of these things we need to be reminded of on a regular basis—they are things we must not turn away from. Yet, some have wandered from the truth, as they have been unwilling to truly heed the resolute and unchanging teachings from God.

Nonetheless, we are to complete the job God has given to us. We have been called and entrusted with the truth of God. This is the truth that has set us free. Note Christ’s testimony: “‘And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” (John 8:32). Proclaiming this truth was part of the work given to Jesus.

These words were not well received by the self-righteous religious leaders in Christ’s day—in fact, they eventually so incited those who heard them that Jesus was rejected and murdered! Jesus fully understood the consequences of the work He was completing.

When we read in Matthew 24:14, “‘and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations,’” we understand that the church has been given a job to complete—a task for which we are accountable to God. Jesus was able to say at the end of His life, “‘I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.’” (John 17:4). After His resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples, “‘As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’” (John 20:21).

He promised His disciples, “‘Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father.’” (John 14:12).

Has Jesus Christ sent us—not only those earlier disciples—but also those of us in the church at the present time? We can know! Consider the following: “‘But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me TO FINISH—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.’” (John 5:36).

And so it is with us, brethren. We have been given the ongoing work of Jesus Christ—the work of God—to finish. That work and our commitment to it bear witness of our calling, and God’s continued hand in leading His church. Furthermore, Jesus showed us how we could evaluate our relationship with God: “‘By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.’” (John 15:8).

The foundation of our role in the body of Christ is for us to be Christians—converted people through the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit. By this we can have the very mind, that is, the very same strength and outlook as our Savior. (Compare Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 4:1). Paul challenges each of us, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified (*do not stand the test*).” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

As we examine and test ourselves, let us consider what we are doing. In the spirit of the encouraging words of Christ in Revelation 3, we have struggled against compromise—and that even though we are by most standards a small and weak group. Verse 8 says,

“‘...for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.’”

Furthermore, we have followed the charter established in Amos 3:3, “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” That has meant some really difficult choices have been made by each one of us, as we encountered these examinations and tests—both on our own part and from God.

We can also know from scripture that it is God Who is able to open doors for us to glorify Him even more. When we consider the traumatic events surrounding the sacrifice of Christ, we see disciples who were the talk of the nation suddenly being scattered in confusion. However, their story moves forward to the Day of Pentecost and the empowering of God’s Holy Spirit. Just as for them, we must remember that for us to finish the work God has given to us, it is “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the LORD of hosts.” (Zechariah 4:6).

As we all proceed in fulfilling our various responsibilities within God's church, we need to continually look to God's word for guidance. In Hebrews 10, verse 22, we are told, "...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Continuing, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (verses 23-25). And, in verses 35-36, these words: "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise."

In every generation of God's church, the message to those called was to finish their calling all the way to the end—whether that end is physical death or the end of this age and our being alive at Christ's return. (Compare Matthew 24:13 and Matthew 10:22). We are admonished in Ephesians 6:9: "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."

Paul addressed these issues in his second letter to Timothy. Here we find Timothy, who evidently grew up in the church to then serve in the ministry, needing to focus on the work of God that was imparted to him. In chapter 1, verses 6 and 7, Paul tells Timothy, "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, he was a prisoner in Rome, and many who had been called had departed the faith. False ministers teaching false doctrines had gained a foothold within the church. Apparently, it was the few who really were overcoming and persevering in the faith. The great times of miracles, of the powerful witness of the original disciples who were taught by Jesus and of the remarkable commitment that grew out of "first love" had all but disappeared.

Paul felt it necessary to admonish and to encourage Timothy, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, DO THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST, fulfill your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

Now, in the beginning years of this century, the recent history of God's people reflects much the same kind of rise and fall in terms of love for the truth and an attitude of unrelenting commitment to finishing OUR PART in the work of God!

Brethren, you are part of the exception to those who have turned back into the world and who have compromised by letting the light of God's Holy Spirit to become darkened and unfruitful. You have sustained your part in the work of God.

And God is examining and testing us—as well as blessing our efforts to both hold on to the truth and to begin to once again bear fruit in the work of God! The door is open for us to be even more productive, and for the Church of the Eternal God to reach out with the proclamation of the gospel. Among the various efforts of CEG, and in particular through weekly Updates, sermons and booklets via the remarkable tool of the Internet, God is allowing our work to move forward. Each Sabbath, we can "meet together" through live Internet broadcasts and participation in the "chat room." These astounding and remarkable facilities were not available to the people of God just a few years ago. Now, we literally are able to assemble together in spite of our small size and widely separated locations.

Finally, in addition to reminding us of our role in the ongoing work of God—and let each of us in no way diminish the importance God places on our individual parts—let us also fervently stir up the gift of God's Spirit to do individually what we are able, in whatever way we can!

In particular, we can follow the example of David in Psalm 62:8: "Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us."

Brethren, our focus must remain on those things yet to be accomplished in the work, which God has given to us to complete. Our opportunities are boundless if we stay close to God—always seeking to obey Him and to do those things that are pleasing in His sight!

With all attentiveness, let us all heed these striking words from Jude, verses 20 and 21: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

In Christ's Service,



David J. Harris