

Learning from History (or, What Have We Learned?)

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It's been roughly fifty-six years since I started attempting to take the word of God seriously, and as I look back over the landscape of those fifty-six years, I have to say that the way things have turned out wasn't anything like what I expected fifty-six years ago. From time to time you get into the process—half a century or more—and you say, maybe I'd better reflect on what has happened, and see if I can make sense of where we are and what's taking place. So the title for today's sermon is:

Learning from History

We are talking about our church of God history primarily, and trying to make some kind of sense out of what we've done and hopefully learned. Back in the day, my first assignment was in Boise, Idaho, as a young elder—there's an oxymoron for you. I was all of twenty-seven years old when I landed in Boise. At that time there was considerable interest from prospective members; a lot of letters coming to Pasadena, requesting visits. I spent forty months in Portland before going to Boise and it seemed we always had a stack of what we called new "PMs"—prospective members—and their letters. One of the questions that would come up at some point in the discussion would be about the true church of God. Where is it? Is the Worldwide Church of God the true church of God? Of course it was a serious question and deserved a serious answer. I thought about the proper way to answer such a question. I would answer the question with a question. The question would be this: What do you think? Does the Pope believe he is in the one true church? That's one of those questions where the answer is obvious—of course he believes he's in the one true church. Why shouldn't I believe I'm in the one true church then? That would start the discussion and then we would go into, how is it that you've come to understand this?

Back in 1963, my brother and I had begun listening to The World Tomorrow broadcast, and we were subscribing to The Plain Truth magazine and other church literature, and we were beginning the process. We had grown up in a mainstream Protestant denomination and we were beginning to see, as we looked closer, that many of the basic beliefs of our Protestant background were based on the traditions of men rather than on a proper reading of scripture. We began looking for evidence. What does the Bible say about God's church? Of course, one of the obvious things to begin with was the Sabbath day. I grew up keeping Sunday and going to Sunday school, and nobody explained why we did that, we just did it. Maybe it had something to do with celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, which supposedly took place on Sunday. Later we would learn that that wasn't the case either. At any rate, here was the Sabbath, so we discovered that the Bible was indeed quite clear that the seventh day is the Sabbath, not the first day of the week. We looked around and asked, how many churches do we know that keep the Sabbath?—let's start there.

We knew about the Seventh Day Adventists and we knew about the Jews, and that was before the Internet, so you couldn't just go google other Sabbath-keeping churches. There were some out there, I'm sure, but we didn't know about them. The Jews didn't believe in Christ, that He was the Messiah, so we didn't look into them. The Seventh Day Adventists—well, okay, they keep the Sabbath—but why do they call themselves Seventh Day Adventists? Is that a scriptural name? Is that what Jesus said He wanted His church to be called? That seemed like a good place to go next; you do the study and there are twelve times in the New Testament that are references to the church of God, and one time there's a reference to the church of Christ—it's His church in the sense that He's the head of God's church.

So, Church of God, Sabbath keepers—where are we? Who goes by the right name, the New Testament name, and keeps the Sabbath, the same day that Jesus kept it? We're narrowing the field down considerably, so we're on our way to finding the one and only true church. What happened next? We had this passage that described the only sign that Jesus gave to show that He was the Messiah. They came to Him asking for a sign. He said the only sign that an adulterous generation will get is the sign of the prophet Jonas. Jonas (or Jonah) was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the grave. That pretty well knocked in the head the Good Friday/Easter Sunday tradition. So now we're beginning to whittle away and separate off the manmade stuff—at least that's how it appeared to us—and we're beginning to focus on what the scripture actually said.

What are the implications then for practice? What are we going to do? We're out there, all by ourselves, essentially; we didn't know what else was going on. Of course the long and short of it was, we both ended up at Ambassador College and then in the ministry of the Worldwide Church of God, but nevertheless, we're focusing here and we're going to work, trying to identify what scripture says about the church of God. In this regard, let's turn to Luke 24; there's an interesting discussion here. These two fellows, walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus—immediately following the crucifixion and resurrection—are discussing the events that had taken place, and, lo and behold, Jesus appears to them, and walks with them, but they don't recognize Him. So Jesus says to them,

Luke 24:17 ... *“What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?”* (NKJV)

Evidently the news of the resurrection hadn't fully settled in yet or I wouldn't think they'd have been sad had they known, sad because He was crucified, obviously, but I would think if they had fully understood that the resurrection had already taken place, they probably wouldn't have been sad. So it was interesting, their response in verse 18.

18) *Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have you not known the things which happened there in these days?”* (NKJV)

19) *And He [Jesus, playing along with them] said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,*
20) *and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.*
21) *But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. (NKJV)*

Their expectation was for the redemption of Israel—the establishment of the Kingdom of God through Israel—to restore Israel and its greatness.

21 continued) *... Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.*

Then in verse 25, Jesus said to them:

25) *"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!*

Evidently they knew what the prophets had spoken or He wouldn't have said that.

26) *Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"*
27) *And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*

Not knowing that they are actually walking alongside and listening to Jesus expound these things.

28) *Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther.*
29) *But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them.*
30) *Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.*
31) *Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. (NKJV)*

Interesting experience. Once they do recognize Him, He's gone, just like that. Notice what they say in verse 32.

32) *And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (NKJV)*

I think those of us who have been around the church of God community for any length of time will have experienced something similar.

I don't recall from my time in Sunday school having my heart burn with anything because of what was covered in Sunday school. I'll tell you for sure, as I was coming to understand, as the scriptures were being opened to us—concerning the Sabbath and some of the most basic things that we take for granted in the church of God today—our heart burned within us as the scriptures were being unveiled, and we were coming to a better understanding. We came to that point where we said, okay, we have found the true church of God and it's located at P.O. Box 111, Pasadena, California, zip code 91123. Now, as I look back on the experience, what other conclusion could we have come to? We couldn't find another church fellowship of any kind (not that we did extensive research, or had access to a way we *could* have done that research), but if you put together the basics, of how the church is described, you can't go just anywhere—you want to be where the truth of God is being taught, don't you? Of course you do.

Let's consider for a moment some of the important characteristics of the church of God, seen in John, chapter 14. Chapters 13 through 16 essentially are the final farewell address, if you will, of Jesus before He was arrested and crucified. Some interesting insights are given to His disciples about what to expect. These passages are instructive for us in our day as well.

John 14:15 *If you love Me, keep My commandments.* (NKJV)

So there's something to this business that requires that we do something. Then He says,

16) *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper [or, a Comforter], that He may abide with you forever—*

So we can anticipate some help coming from the Father because Jesus prayed to the Father and asked for it.

17) *the Spirit of truth [this is what this Helper is], whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.* (NKJV)

Here is this Spirit of truth and it's going to come to you, and it will assist you in coming to an understanding of what's going on. Now notice verse 25.

25) *These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.*

26) *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.* (NKJV)

Part of the dynamic of the church of God is that there will be a spiritual association here between God and the church, and God and individuals, for that matter. Through the Holy Spirit we'll be led to a fuller and deeper understanding of the knowledge of God and of His plan and purpose. He will teach us all things. Do we know all things now?

Probably not. We have more teaching to come, more learning to follow. Let's notice chapter 16, in a similar vein.

John 16:12 *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.*

Many things. Jesus has been with them for three and half years, and He has shared many things with them already. There is more yet to come.

13) *However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.* (NKJV)

One of the dynamics seen in the church of God is that of coming to a deeper understanding; being led, eventually, to all truth. I don't think I've ever been in a situation where I felt confident of having all the truth; no, probably not. In this same vein, let's turn to 2 Peter. This is not unfamiliar territory, but I want to establish the dynamic that takes place between God, God's Spirit, and the church of God—the assembly, the saints—who are called into the congregation of God. In 2 Peter, he's closing his second letter to the church, which is for us as well:

2 Peter 3:17 *You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness ...*

Beware, he said; there will be those who fall from steadfastness, and you don't want to do that. This is a long race that we have to go through.

17 continued) *... being led away with the error of the wicked;*

So there's always somebody out there trying to lead us away, trying to get us to abandon our own steadfastness. Beware of that, take warning.

18) *but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.* (NKJV)

We have to grow in grace and knowledge, in this case, specifically, of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So the presence of the Holy Spirit leads us to grow in grace and knowledge, leads us to a deeper understanding of what God is doing. We are also familiar with, going back to John 17 ever so briefly, something we've touched on so many times already but it's an extremely important point. Jesus, in His prayer prior to being arrested, points out that this is eternal life:

John 17:3 *And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.* (NKJV)

The thing about coming to a deeper understanding of the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ is that it leads you to a deeper understanding of the relationship of Jesus Christ to His Father. In Ephesians 1, verse 3, Paul says to the Ephesians,

Ephesians 1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ...*
(NKJV)

You see, Jesus Christ has a God and Father, as we do. When you get to know Jesus Christ better, you're going to come to a better understanding of the relationship He has with His Father, and vice versa. The essential element that leads to eternal life is to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent. So we get a sense that what's happening in the church of God is a continual process of education, of growth, of spiritual development; it doesn't stop. We have plenty of evidence, from the weekly announcements we share with you, that as we get older, the body doesn't respond too well. The old body stops growing, and we start going the other way. You've heard this statement: He's over the hill, or, it's downhill from here. Spiritually that doesn't happen. Spiritually, regardless of the state of the body (and, frankly, in my own experience with my declining physical prowess) is the fact that I'm inclined to be a little more careful to pursue the spiritual side of things, knowing that youthful vigor doesn't get the job done anymore. There isn't any youthful vigor. Those of you that have a little, be careful how you use it because once it's used up, it's gone forever. Nevertheless, the whole point is, it's a continual, dynamic process—a relationship—between the called-out ones, and God and Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. It's important that we understand that.

Given that this is a continual process of learning, growth, and development, know this: The understanding that we have now, at any given moment, is, at the very best, incomplete, right? Because tomorrow, next day, next week, next Feast of Tabernacles, God is going to be continually increasing our understanding. We also need to know—and our history tells us and instructs us—that not only is our understanding incomplete, sometimes it's downright incorrect. We have had serious situations where we were incorrect. For example, Pentecost: There was a long-held belief that counting fifty to Pentecost would take us to Monday. I had an interesting experience with that. The very week that the decision was made to change it, I was in Caldwell, Idaho, visiting a member of the Seventh Day Church of God, and we were talking about Pentecost, and I was arguing for Monday and he was arguing for Sunday, and I had a correspondence course that said Monday. That very week—within two or three days—it was announced from Pasadena that we had corrected the error and would begin keeping Pentecost on Sunday. Oh dear. There were errors, right?

There were other things that had to be corrected. Divorce and remarriage—our understanding and application of that—put a stumbling block in the path of who knows how many people, as they were trying to become part of the church of God. There have been times for growth.

I would like to spend a little time with our understanding of 19-year time cycles because this plays into the current situation, perhaps, in a way we haven't realized.

I've been thinking through these things. After fifty-six years, we're nowhere near I thought we would be fifty years ago, as I imagined the coming of the Kingdom of God and all these things that were going to happen. We were going to take the gospel to the entire world. In my current stage in life, I try to make sense out of all this. Was it all worth it? Or was it just in vain? It's worth it, but we have to run the whole race.

With regard to 19-year time cycles, there was a time when we put a great deal of emphasis on them and their significance in prophecy. The story goes something like this: Mr. Armstrong noted, as the church was beginning, Christ was crucified and resurrected—best we can figure is about 31 A.D.—so the gospel went to the eastern Mediterranean and the Anatolian Peninsula and so forth for nineteen years. At the end of the 19-year time cycle (this would bring us up to 50 A.D.), the door opened for Paul to take the gospel to Europe. So over into Greece he goes and he takes the gospel to Europe for another 19-year time cycle. Then what happened?

Now we're at 69 A.D. The Romans got tired of the Jews rebelling so they sent in their legions and destroyed the city, destroyed God's temple—God's temple! Destroyed it, just like Jesus said—not a stone would be left on top of another. Then the church had to flee, and as it turned out, the mystery of iniquity has pretty well dominated ever since. That was then, what about now? Fast forward one hundred 19-year time cycles—that number seemed significant at the time. One hundred 19-year time cycles, not ninety-nine, not one hundred and one. Can you quote the scripture, chapter, and verse that supports that method of counting? No. Why? Because that was one of the things we added. But, you know, it's *one hundred* 19-year time cycles! Well, okay, it was, as it turned out, but how significant was it, when all was said and done?

In the modern era, in 1934, what happened? The Plain Truth magazine began, The World Tomorrow broadcast was on the air, and for nineteen years it essentially went to North America. It started out very small, from a 100-watt station in Eugene, Oregon, with a \$2.50 budget. By the end of the first 19-year time cycle, some of these big, 50,000-watt, clear-signal radio stations were opening up. North America was essentially blanketed with The World Tomorrow broadcast. So what happened after the first 19-year time cycle? In 1953, nineteen years later, Radio Luxembourg opened up.

The gospel was going to Europe. It grew and expanded; the numbers were growing significantly there for a while. We were opening up offices in Canada and Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Mexico; things were really hopping, there was a lot of activity. What would happen at the end of the second 19-year time cycle? What were we anticipating would happen at the end of the second 19-year time cycle? About that time would be time for the Great Tribulation to begin, three and half years later—1975 was to be the Second Coming, Christ was going to come back—we were anticipating this.

Well, what did happen? Even before we got to 1972 it seemed rather obvious that things weren't going to deteriorate quite as rapidly as we thought they might, and of course they didn't. The Great Tribulation didn't happen, the church wasn't taken to a

place of safety, the Second Coming didn't happen. What did happen? Not at all what we expected.

I think back on it, and in my own experience at that point in time—what I experienced personally and I think was universal—was a general letdown. The growth, in sheer numbers, and the number of prospective member letters that we were getting, slowed down, paused, stopped, and then started to tail off. What was going on here? Growth stopped, there came a pinch in the income; we had three college campuses at one point, remember? First, Bricket Wood was gone. Mr. Armstrong's desire was to combine Big Sandy with Pasadena—to combine the two campuses—but he died in 1986 and that didn't happen. The new Pastor General, Joe Tkach Sr., decided to combine them into one in Big Sandy. In summary, the Pasadena campus closed, later Big Sandy closed, and we found ourselves without a college.

There were some who could smell the roses, as it were, or see the handwriting on the wall, and there were significant divisions that split off from the home body, even in the 1970s.

We are now into the '80s and early '90s and it was the era of the Y.O.U. weekends, and things were going crazy. Not that there wasn't any activity but you have to understand something. Effectiveness is not measured by the size of the dust cloud you stir up as you're running to and fro across the face of the earth. Then again, there were conditions in the '80s and '90s, for those who knew, who were in the know (I've never been in the know, ever; I was just out there doing what a church pastor ought to be doing) that indicated that a serious decay had set in. Things were really going south, so to speak, and, as I've said, I don't know all the details of that sort of thing but there were difficulties, nevertheless, that were setting in, as well as outright scandals in certain areas. By the early '90s there were significant splits—Mr. Armstrong died in 1986 and there was a move towards liberalization—and then of course in 1994 and '95 there was an out-and-out hostile takeover. The Sabbath, the holy days, and other things, that were distinctive of the church of God as we understood it, were all abandoned.

We had all become a part of the Worldwide Church of God voluntarily. Nobody came knocking on my door unless I asked. Same thing as a minister; I didn't knock on anybody's door if they didn't ask me to come. Then we wake up one morning and we're told we are Evangelical Protestants. Most of us didn't even know what that was and yet there we were. That was an interesting turn of events as I think back to where I was at the time, pastoring two churches up here in Caldwell, Washington, and Castleguard, British Columbia, and suddenly, here we were. Now we have trouble—I mean big trouble. It was interesting to take a look at the response of various people to this hostile takeover—that's the way I characterize it. It was similar to the Gordon Gecko-like stuff of the '80s: take over the organization, sell off the assets; that's exactly what happened. So here we are—how do people respond?

There was a sizable percentage of people in the Worldwide Church of God whose attitude was "Free at Last": I'm free, I don't have to worry about doing all this stuff

anymore—whatever their concept of “stuff” was; they were free! A lot of them went back to their previous church affiliation, joyfully put up their Christmas trees and went to church on Sunday. In effect (and I remember processing this at the time, and saying to myself), what I’m being asked to do is repent of what I had repented of. That didn’t make too much sense to me. There were others who just abandoned religion altogether: That’s it, I’ve had enough—I’ve put up with enough nonsense from this association, and if this is the way it is, forget it; I don’t want anything to do with organized religion whatsoever.

There was a third group—I don’t know how to process it in terms of numbers—who were serious about preserving the doctrines that they understood to be distinctive of the church of God. So other organizations, from the rubble, rose up to try and pick up the pieces and carry on—any number of them—new branches of the church of God trying to preserve some semblance of the truth, as they understood it. There were splits and schisms even within those divisions, and it didn’t take long. I thought to myself, I don’t know how God is going to sort this out and make sense of it all, because I don’t pretend to know all the answers, but there’s a disturbing prophecy in the book of Daniel, chapter 12; let’s turn there for a moment. When I read this, I think, whoa, are we living through this? Is this a one-time affair? Does this happen regularly? And of course Daniel is dealing with prophecies at the end of the age. It’s talking about the time of the end; chapter 11, verse 40, says that; at the time of the end, various events will take place. Then in chapter 12, it says,

Daniel 12:1 *At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. (NKJV)*

This we understand to be the Great Tribulation—there’s a reference in the margin of my Bible to Matthew 24:21.

1 continued) *And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.*

This isn’t just about going to a place of safety, because “written in the book” is a reference to the Book of Life, and we’re talking about a resurrection here.

2) *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

3) *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.*

4) *But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase. (NKJV)*

If you’ve ever seen a computerized depiction of nighttime airline flights across the country, or if you’ve ever seen a blown-up version of the highway system running all over the place, you realize people are running to and fro in a way they never have. How many thousands of miles do you suppose Abraham put on the back of a camel? Not

many. With regard to the automobile my wife and I have been driving, since the beginning of 2013—and I think it now reads 69,000 miles on the odometer—I would dare say Abraham didn't do a tenth of that. When we think of running to and fro, we also have the Internet, and you can get an answer to any question you want in a matter of seconds—just ask and it will talk back to you.

5) Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank.

6) And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?" (NKJV)

How long? "How long, oh Lord, do we have to hang on here—isn't it enough?" Every generation, it seems, asks the same question.

7) Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; (NKJV)

How much speculation has gone on about how much "time, times, and half a time" is? At any rate, that's how long it's going to be. Here's the point that's sobering:

7 continued) and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished. (NKJV)

My understanding initially was, we preach the gospel to the entire world, right? Matthew 24:14—and this gospel shall be preached unto the entire world and then the end shall come. (That was a primary memory verse—I still know it.) I don't think that's exactly what God had in mind—using the Worldwide Church of God to fully complete that commission, as we can see.

Who are the holy people? When has the power of the holy people ever been much to write home about, when you get right down to it? How is God going to work this out? What is the power of the holy people? How shattered and scattered does it have to get before it becomes of little consequence? There aren't any large branches of the church of God anymore, in the tens of thousands, so what influence do we have? As far as I can see, not a whole lot. What's the status in the church of God today relative to spiritual growth? Relative to being led to all truth? Relative to coming to understand and to know the only true God, to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? What's the current status? From our current experience, there is underway, if you haven't noticed, a focus that is causing considerable ruckus in certain church of God circles, and it is the actual record of God and Christ in scripture. That's where the focus is, that's where the growth is coming from, that is the record from which new understanding is coming to us.

At this point, I want to pause for a moment and focus your attention on the Pacific Church of God website. On the website—pacificcog.org—under the "Updates" heading,

near the bottom of the page, there's a link shown as "The God of the Old Testament' doctrine: Frequently Asked Questions". When you click on that link you will find various written materials (and, in another link, "Sermon Archives", with titles to sermons) for those of you who are coming along and maybe haven't studied these subjects a great deal, and are wondering what's going on. A lot of attention and time has been given in sermons and in written material—study material to help you to dig in and fact-check it. Do like the Bereans did, go find out if it's true or not, take a look and see. Nobody is trying to hide anything. Nobody is trying to force-feed anything. Brethren, those of us who have the obligation to teach the truth, have the obligation to teach the truth! So let's go about it.

I bring that to your attention so that you can have access. There are other materials available as well, and more will be added as time goes on. The long-held belief in the church of God—I'm going to summarize it, reduce it down to just a little kernel, to illustrate the point—was that Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament. We would quote 1 Corinthians 10:4; that rock which followed them (the Israelites) was Jesus Christ—that was it. That was the long-held belief. In the last four or five years, when the first inclinations of what we might call an intervention—or a revelation leading to new understanding—began to happen, we began to look more closely at the actual scriptural record.

I've determined that when somebody wants to discuss these issues, the first thing I say is, let's agree on a couple of things. Can we agree, for example, that the testimonies of Peter, John, Paul, Stephen, and Jesus Himself, are authentic and trustworthy? If we can't, then forget it—end of discussion—there's no point in going any further. Let's take their witness and take it seriously. For me, personally, as I share my experience, I went through the example in Luke 24, where Cleopas and his friend described the response to Jesus expounding the scripture to them—it burned within them. It was like setting a fire. I don't ever recall "burning within" over anything I was taught in Sunday school. That was probably because I was just a child, and it's hard to stir up such zeal in a child sometimes. But nevertheless I want to share with you a couple of the examples of scriptures that set the fire ablaze again, burning within me. Acts, chapter 3.

Again, what does the record of scripture say about who is the God of the Old Testament? There has been a lot of material devoted to this. I'm going to give you a brief summary of my own personal experience, how it got me started studying the project a little more thoroughly. A lot of material has been devoted to this. In Acts 3 we have the example of the lame man being healed, and it draws a lot of attention, as you can understand. In verse 11 of chapter 3, we read,

Acts 3:11 *Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.*

12) *So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"*

13) *The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, [here's the God of the Old Testament, clearly; what did He do? He] glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. (NKJV)*

Who is the God of the Old Testament? It's not Jesus—Jesus is the Servant, the glorified Servant of the God of our fathers. Talk about striking a match! It wasn't just a match, it was an earthquake! I read that and said to myself, you've been a minister for how long, and you're just now coming to see this? How did this happen? Dull of hearing, I suppose; that has as much to do with it as anything. You just accept what comes to you and unfortunately that's not good enough. So we began to examine the actual scriptural record. That's enough right there—Jesus is not, nor ever was, the God of the Old Testament. Chapter 24—here's the Apostle Paul; he's being tried for various crimes and misdemeanors as brought forth by the Jews and he is before Felix. They have accused him of various crimes and this gives Paul the opportunity to speak for himself. In verse 13 of Acts 24, he denies the charges.

Acts 24:13 *Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. (NKJV)*

There's no basis for their accusations.

14) *But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect [a sect, in this case, was not a compliment], so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. (NKJV)*

Who is the God of the fathers? God is the God of the fathers. Paul knows Jesus Christ personally, so he's not talking about Jesus Christ here. He's talking about the God of the fathers. God—the God, the Father God—is who he is talking about. Why didn't I see that before? 1 Corinthians, Paul later writing to churches. 1 Corinthians 8—again, you begin to put two and two together, and you say, wait a second. This is just a tiny little slice of the overall picture, but this is how it got started for me personally, how it fired up the old furnace again. Verse 5 of 1 Corinthians 8.

1 Corinthians 8:5 *For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords) ... (NKJV)*

People worship just about anything.

6) *... yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. (NKJV)*

It all came from God through Jesus Christ; They are always working together. All you have to do is read John 1:1 and know that They have worked together forever. In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. That goes way back there to the beginning. We've come to understand that. And from the record

of scripture, we see that the Father has preeminence. Let's turn to 2 Corinthians 4. There are those that claim Jesus is the Creator when in actual fact it is God who is the Creator. Yes, They worked together on the project.

2 Corinthians 4:5 *For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.*

6) *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (NKJV)*

Who called light out of darkness? Who said, let there be light, and there was light? Was Paul confused? Is his testimony credible?

6 repeated) *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Again, Jesus is an example of what it means to know God in the flesh.

Let's look at another scripture. There's a lot of controversy, or seems to be, over what happened at the burning bush. Let's turn to Mark 12. There's no need for controversy, it's very clear; it's the testimony of Jesus Himself.

Mark 12:24 *Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?"*

The Sadducees had confronted Him with this fantasy they'd dreamed up about these seven brothers who in turn were married to this one woman, and one died and the next one married her, then he died, then the third one; and by the time they get to the fourth one, he has doubts about marrying this woman. It's just this fantasy that the Jews put together. So they ask Him, in the resurrection, who will be married to her? Jesus then answers,

24 repeated) ... *"Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?" (NKJV)*

Oh dear me! There are those times when I've had to answer the question, do you not know the scriptures nor the power of God? Where were you? What has your attention most of the time?

25) *For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.*

26) *But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, [here we are, this is Jesus speaking of] how God spoke to him [Moses], saying, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,*

and the God of Jacob' ? [Jesus is saying, it was God, not Himself—Jesus—who spoke to Moses.]

27) He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken.” (NKJV)

These scriptures, among others, are ones that caused my heart to burn within—right?—when coming to a fuller understanding of this very basic principle: The record of God and Christ in scripture. Where have I been all these years? (Don't beat yourself up too much about that. When God opens your eyes and the scales fall off, you can begin to see it.) I give God credit for it. Thank God that He hasn't held me as responsible as He might have for what I should have been saying.

There is a danger here, when we get to this point. When using scripture to defend our long held-beliefs and our perceived doctrinal integrity, we want to be careful about that; there seems to be a transition period, from a time where we're looking for the truth (and as I go back to my early experience, coming to understand the distinctions of the church of God), as revealed in scripture, and, wow!—new truths! Well, there are no new truths, brethren; the truth is the truth, it's always been the truth, always will be the truth. What changes is you and me. Our understanding improves. We mature in our understanding and knowledge and relationship to God. The truth is always the truth. God reveals it to us a little bit at a time.

If we ever find ourselves in a position where we use the scripture, simply to defend our long-held beliefs and our perceived doctrinal integrity, then we are in trouble. Remember, it was put to me just this way, when I began to bring up some of these things and ask questions, such as, don't you think we're in order to make some changes here? I was frankly told I was wrong, and I quote, word for word, the individual responding to me, who said, "I intend to fight to defend the doctrinal integrity of my branch of the corporate church of God!" Think about that for a minute. What does that say? If I say, I am going to fight to defend the doctrinal integrity of my branch of the church of God, what does that mean? It means that I am no longer looking for a deeper understanding, am I? I am content with the current church documents; they are complete; nothing need be added, they need only be defended. Now, if on the other hand, I understand that this is a process, whereby God is going to reveal additional information, deeper understanding, a closer relationship to Himself and to Jesus Christ, then I'm using the scripture to find additional understanding, not to defend my long-held beliefs. It's a serious business, it really is.

Given that at any moment, the status quo relative to our spiritual understanding is incomplete—because we're supposed to be growing in grace and knowledge; the Holy Spirit is going to lead us into all truth; it's a dynamic situation—in light of all that, then at any given moment, my understanding is incomplete. Tomorrow, God is going to add something new, or next week or next month, or next year. History tells us that there might even be some areas where not only is it incomplete, it's incorrect. History tells us that we've been in that situation, where we pounded the podium or the lectern, and

claimed this, that, and the other thing, and maybe we were just barking up the wrong tree, so to speak. It's a sobering thing to come to grips with some of these things.

With a better understanding of the relationship between God and Christ in scripture, now what we have are the unintended consequences, as we begin to see the downstream implications of what this means, especially with regard to our understanding of prophetic events revolving around the fall holy days. We've got some changes to make. We've been teaching error and it's time to make some changes. Who did what, when and where? At the Feast this year, we're going to make the attempt to begin addressing those issues, to begin the process of getting it right, to stop teaching error. It's a rather sobering situation.

I look back over my own personal experience and here we are. We're moving along, and I'm thinking, this is what happens if we ever get into a situation where we're intent on defending the status quo. What does that mean? If we're just trying to defend the status quo, what we've done then is we've said that everything is complete. We don't need any additional information. Then what? We've pretty well terminated any possibility of spiritual growth. Now we're stuck with whatever the status quo is, whatever the booklet says, whatever the initial corporate document says. That is it and we're going to defend it to the death! End of spiritual growth. You will not grow any further. That is a danger that is replete, it's true today, true anywhere. That's one thing we have to keep in mind as we go forward, whether as a body or whether as an individual studying, we must strive to come to a better understanding of God, who He is, what He's all about—*that* we have to recognize. We must use the scripture honestly, to yield ourselves humbly to God and to God's Spirit, to be led to additional truth. When we get to that place where we feel we must defend the status quo then it's trouble.

It's interesting, my personal experience with those who would defend the status quo and do it vigorously, it starts to take on a hint of hostility even. Once again, we have to be very careful. The takeaway—what's the takeaway in all this? Personally, I'm trying to make sense of my Christian experience, if you will, of more than fifty-six years. How did we end up here, doing this? You eventually come to that place where you quit asking why, and simply say, what is the proper response? That's what God wants to know. How are you going to respond? Again, the takeaway: We must be growing as led by the Holy Spirit. Thus, at any moment, our knowledge and understanding, again, is incomplete.

Finally, brethren, whether individually or as a body, we must not use scripture to defend the current position but rather to strive to follow the narrow path under God's guidance. It is this that will lead us to eternal life.