

CHURCH OF THE  
G O D

---

*"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*

July 13, 2004

Dear Brethren, Co-workers and Friends!

At the very beginning of this letter, my wife Johanna and I would like to thank all of you, from the very bottom of our hearts, for the generous outpouring of love extended by you to my family and me, in regard to the death of my father. My dad died on June 13, 2004, and I was able to attend the funeral in Germany on June 18. Although my dad lived a long life of 95 years, it is still very difficult to accept his death, especially for my mother who is suffering tremendously because of this loss. She is presently visiting with us at our place in Ramona, until the end of the month, and I know how much she would appreciate your prayers for strength in these difficult times.

While in Germany, I reflected on the awesome job, which God gave His Church—the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God in all the world as a witness or testimony—so that Jesus Christ can return to this earth. Do we realize how much this world needs to hear the good news or gospel message—the same message that Jesus Christ preached, when He was here on the earth?

The true gospel message gives us hope. It includes the understanding as to what happens to us when we die. The religions of this world do not provide an answer. They are ignorant about this all-important question, and their teachings are inconsistent and confusing. Although some Christian churches teach the resurrection from the dead, they believe that at the time of one's death, the soul of the dead person continues to live. They are unable to answer why there should be, then, a resurrection. (Martin Luther posed this very same question and concluded that the "soul" does not go to heaven or hell, when man dies, but awaits a resurrection from the dead.) Loved ones mourn for their "departed ones" and some still talk to them, thinking—but not really knowing—that the dead might still hear them. Others are uncertain whether they will ever see them again. What tragedy and unnecessary grief, pain and sorrow.

At the same time, we see how the different "branches" of the Christian churches of this world—in spite of their inconsistent and contradictory teachings—are recognized as belonging together. Although there are many "Protestant" churches, they all feel somewhat united as Protestants, based on several "core" teachings. And although there are many orders and archdioceses within the Catholic Church, holding different teachings to an extent, they clearly understand themselves as belonging to the Catholic faith.

Non-Christian observers analyzing the two big Christian churches—the Catholic and the Protestant Church—immediately note common denominators even between the two, identifying those as similar religions. Some have pointed out that the main distinguishing factor between the Catholic and the Protestant Churches is their belief as to what occurs during the administration of the bread and the wine at the time of the communion or Last Supper. This—seemingly theoretical—question has been declared as more important than even the issue of the

role and function of the Pope and church government, the Virgin Mary, purgatory, or other doctrinal issues. It is safe to say that in regard to most questions, both church groupings are united—whether it is in their belief of the Trinity; the immortal soul; heaven and hell; Sunday; Christmas or Easter.

When contemplating this fact, I had to wonder about the Sabbath-keeping churches of God. There was a time when many of us were united within one big organization—the Worldwide Church of God. However, there have always been those, even under Herbert W. Armstrong, the late leader of the Worldwide Church of God, who had separated themselves, many times in rebellion against Church government, and had formed their own little groups—but these were few, small and insignificant, by comparison.

After Mr. Armstrong died in January of 1986, the prophesied apostasy set in (compare 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1-3), and we witnessed a scattering of God’s people in many countries around the world. This scattering and regrouping has resulted in a weakening of the ability to preach the gospel by one somewhat powerful and recognizable organization, but, at the same time, it might have added, in some way, to the preaching of the gospel.

We read in Matthew 26:31 that when Christ, the Shepherd, was stricken, the sheep of the flock were scattered. This was primarily fulfilled when Christ was arrested and the apostles fled, but there is also a secondary meaning implied in this passage. Every time when Satan strikes powerfully against the Church of God—the body of the Shepherd, Jesus Christ—scatterings of the flock oftentimes occur as a consequence. But God allows such scatterings to happen for a reason. When Saul persecuted the church in Jerusalem, “they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1). But notice what happened next. We read in verse 4: “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” We also notice a similar occurrence in Acts 11:19-20. We find that today, too, some, who are scattered, preach the word of truth all over the world.

Many of God’s people are scattered today, belonging to different organizations, but as long as God’s Spirit dwells within them, they are a part of the body of Christ—which is a spiritual organism, consisting of all those in whom God’s Spirit dwells. Christ is not limited or restricted to just one corporate organization. At the same time, every member of the body of Christ does have the responsibility to decide what human organization to be affiliated with, based on right and proper Scriptural reasons. Everyone should be “fair-minded,” searching the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things—as taught by the ministry of a particular organization—are true (compare Acts 17:11). Members are to judge, discern, evaluate, based on Scripture, what is being preached (1 Corinthians 14:29). In order to do so correctly, members need to have God’s wisdom to discern properly (1 Corinthians 10:15). This requires that brethren dig deep (compare Luke 6:48) into the truth—it does make a difference to them whether and where the truth is preached fully—and when trials and obstacles occur, we all must be wise, not giving up these precious truths of God which have been received through the inspiration of God’s Spirit. We must hold fast to the pattern of sound words (compare 2 Timothy 1:13), rejecting and avoiding strange or useless teachings (Hebrews 13:9).

There is a reason why we are not all united at this time in one human organization. Some smaller organizations might be able to preach the gospel message in a more powerful way than they would be able to, if they were part of another organization (which might have procedures in

place that require a common denominator of teachings acceptable by all or the majority, or that bestow on just one person the right for a—more or less—autocratic determination as to what to preach).

At the same time, in spite of certain differences between corporate organizations and entities within the Church of God, we need to realize that members of those different organizations are part of the body of Christ, as long as God's Spirit dwells within them. All of us are to faithfully hold to the truths revealed in Scripture through God's Holy Spirit, so that Christ does not vomit us out of His mouth (Revelation 3:17). In addition, an outsider should be able to look at the fundamental teachings and clearly see a common uniting body of beliefs—just as he should be able to designate someone as a Catholic or a Protestant, or a Hindu, a Buddhist or a Muslim. He should be able to find within such organizations comprising the Sabbath-keeping Churches of God that they believe in the Sabbath and the Holy Days; the Family of God; the human potential; the return of Jesus Christ to restore the government of God here on this earth; the Millennium; the spirit in man; the non-existence of an immortal soul; life after death through the resurrections; the rejection of unclean meats and pagan festivals; etc.

Although there are reasons for the existence of different organizations within the body of Christ, all should be united in one goal of preaching the gospel message to this dying world, so that Christ can return to this earth soon to restore the Kingdom of God on this earth. The Church must be ready for this awesome event. The unifying beliefs of true Christians should be reflected in what they say and do in their lives. We must all be doers of the Word. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:9: “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another”—which, of course, is a reflection of God's Commandments.

Christ said that all would know that we are His disciples if we have love for one another (John 13:35). And He was not just talking about love for brethren in our particular fellowship or organization. Christ warned that the love of many within the Church would grow cold (compare Matthew 24:12). Paul warned us not to devour each other (Galatians 5:15). He said that if we do, we are carnal (compare 1 Corinthians 3:1-3)—more carnal, perhaps, than some of those who have not yet understood the truth, but who do show natural affection for others.

There is never a reason for a Christian in one human fellowship or organization within the body of Christ to look down on, condemn or shun other Christians in different fellowships within Christ's body. Christ told us that if someone is not against us, he is for us—on our side (Mark 9:40; Luke 9:50). On the other hand, we must use discretion to avoid being deceived by false teachings. But even then, we must not allow ourselves to assume a self-righteous approach when dealing with the people of God outside our own fellowship. We must let our light shine before all, and that includes even speaking to those who may now be cast in adversarial roles. However, that would not include, of course, listening to false teachings, including via literature or tape, or spiritually fellowshiping with those who have chosen to follow and promote wrong doctrines. Paul warned the church at Corinth: “...that a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6).

Although we might (have to) operate in different human organizations at this time, all true believers are still to be united by the bond of peace and love and respect for each other and by

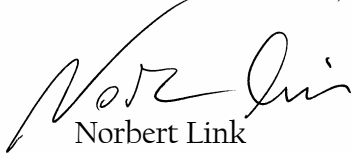
the Truth which God has revealed to us. How can we reject those and refuse to have any social contact with them, when God has accepted them (compare Romans 14:4)?

If problems between Christians exist, they need to be resolved. Sometimes, it may appear easier to just ignore a problem, to avoid the other person, and to go our separate ways. But that would not be in accordance with the wisdom of God. And without the wisdom of God we will—in time—fall for and accept wrong teachings, concepts and practices.

As I said at the beginning of this letter, my family and I were greatly moved by the numerous e-mail messages, cards and phone calls from our relatives, friends and brethren, expressing to us their condolences for the death of my dad. When he was still alive, many had prayed for him, my mother and our family. This showed out-flowing love for the welfare and benefit of others—and this manifestation of love came from many members belonging to a number of different organizations within the body of Christ. This is how it should be. Love—true, genuine love—transcends man-made borders and limitations.

May God bless you all.

With Christian love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Norbert Link". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and a long, sweeping underline that extends across the first name.

Norbert Link