

July 1, 2015

Dear Members and Friends,

Some of us who were around in our former Church association in the 60's will remember the growth and the zeal people had. The Church was constantly expanding in growth and in the distribution of the literature. There was a sense of urgency in the air because most of us thought that the Work would end in 1972 and Christ would return in 1975. Well, 1972 came and went. Other dates were put forth and they came and went. By the mid 70's, there was a shift in priorities in regard to the first commission of preaching the gospel to the world, and certain doctrinal errors began to creep into the Church. In the words of our former leader, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, the Church went off track. Great effort was put into getting the Church back on track, and in the early 80's Mr. Armstrong felt the Church was indeed back on track.

One observation is that it is easier to keep the train on track than to put it back on, once it jumps off the tracks. After the death of Mr. Armstrong, apostasy set in, and the Church split into many groups and what is left of our former association is no longer a part of God's Church. The original sense of zeal and anticipation had all but dissipated, yet was carried forward by some true followers of Christ.

The same happened at the beginning of the New Testament Church. On its inception on the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people were baptized:

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41).

Talk about instant growth! A little later, 5,000 men were baptized and added to the Church, not even mentioning the women:

"However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand" (Acts 4:4).

So the Church was growing and there was great anticipation and the belief that Christ would return in their lifetime, as expressed by Paul in the first letter to the Thessalonians:

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

As time went by, the realization that it was not going to happen in his lifetime set in, and we can see the reflection of this in his thoughts towards the end of his life:

"But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:5-8).

The whole Church went through a transition at the time, from being really zealous for the Work to becoming somewhat less zealous which Christ reminded them of in the book of Revelation, when He addressed the Church congregation in Ephesus and the very first Church era in existence at the time of John:

*"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent!" (Revelation 2:1-5).*

The admonition was, get your zeal back and complete the task at hand for you. Some of us have been in the Church a long time, and we have seen dates come and go. We have seen faithful servants of God die, while others whom we thought to be faithful, came and left, and Christ still has not returned.

What we can learn from the history of the New Testament Church and our own past history in this age is that we must remain focused on the job at hand and not worry about when Christ will come back. Some of us may not be alive when He returns, but that is not what is important. Our critical challenge and responsibility is to remain faithful to the end; then we will receive the crown reserved for us, which Paul was talking about.

Let us not allow trials and tests which we all must go through detract us nor discourage us from doing what we have been commissioned to do, because in due time our reward will be given to us. Setting dates for Christ's return and being tied up with all kinds of speculation is only a distraction, preventing or at least hindering us from doing the Work given to us by Christ.

Please be mindful of the ministry to pray for them, so that God will protect us from dissenters and enemies and allow us to walk through the doors that He opens to us. This way of life is not a cake walk, but in the end, it does have a great reward, so let us not lose the zeal we need to finish the Work!

In Christian love,



Rene Messier