

The Others

I must be getting old! I'm getting nostalgic and thinking about the good old days! I was thinking recently about one warm sunny September afternoon – the last time Trish and I attended the Highlands Fall Fair. When our family lived in the Highlands, a country suburb of Victoria, British Columbia, we usually attended the community's local, peaceful, low-key, rural fall fair.

Although the fair was always very well organized, it was also always very amateurish – probably as corny as Kansas in August! But that was part of its appeal, with its old-fashioned music and food, children's talent shows; art, hat-making and photography contests.

But noteworthy to me at this fair was its super-nice, country people – many of whom seem to maintain relatively moral, old-fashioned, family values.

So as I sat on my lawn chair on that Sunday afternoon in the warm September sunshine, listening to the pleasant music and laughing at the little children dancing, I looked around at the people there, and I thought to myself: “What a crying shame! What a pity that these lovely, peaceful people don't have the wonderful knowledge that we have been blessed with; that they must live their lives with little or no hope for the long-range future; that they might even harbour nagging fears of what lurks ahead for their families; that some of them must, perhaps, eventually suffer in the great tribulation.”

What about “the others”? What about the people of what we refer to as “the world”? What about all these non-Church-of-God people? What about the billions, both alive and dead, who have never been blessed with the great opportunity that we have – to know the truth of God?

Has God given up on them totally? Should *we* give up on them? Should we selfishly turn in upon ourselves? Is this what we mean when we say that one of our priorities is to “Prepare Christians for the Kingdom of God”?

Now, please don't get me wrong! I am not for even one moment advocating acceptance of the ideas that we should go out and make close friends with the world (James 4:4). Nor am I saying that all professing Christians are, in fact, true Christians (Romans 8:9). Many of our fellows fell for that line of reasoning back in the late eighties and early nineties; and you remember where that led.

In this article, I would like to ask and answer a few questions:

What should we *do* about “the others”? What should we do about all those people in “the world”? How should we treat them? How should we relate to them – if at all?

Love-hate relationship

For instance, should we snub them – perhaps with thoughts such as these?:

God says in Romans 9:13 and Malachi 1:2-3, “Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated.” We are spiritual Jacob, and they are spiritual Esau; so this must mean that it is O.K. for us to hate them too! They are spiritual Gentiles! Even worse, spiritual Babylonians! So, “Come out of her, my people. Be not partakers of her sins”! Stay as far away from them as possible! Don’t get infected by them!”

Is this really what God wants us to do? Is this what our Elder Brother, Jesus did during His human sojourn? Does God the Father *really* hate or detest every spiritual Gentile?

Oh yes, it is true that God the Father loves us as He loves His Son Jesus (John 17:23). And that is a lot! It is also true that, in comparison with the love He has for His one born Son and for His begotten children, He does “hate” the others at this time. Or rather, as we understand the Greek word “miseo” to mean, He loves them much less than He loves us – at this time!

Please look at a few scriptures with me – three scriptures which are so very appropriate and meaningful on the Last Great Day of the Feast:

I Timothy 2:3-4:

3: For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

4: who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

II Peter 3:9:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

I John 2:2:

And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Our Saviour is the Propitiation – the Appeaser and the Peace-maker – not just for the privileged few who have been blessed to be called into the true church today, but for the whole world! He wants *all* men – and all women too, of course – to come to repentance and to the knowledge of His truth. He does not want even one person to perish! Think about it! If He hated “the others” so very much, He would be sitting up there, just waiting for the opportunity to zap them all!

A time for all

Leonard Bernstein's "West Side Story" features a very beautiful ballad with these thought-provoking words: "There's a place for us – a time and a place for us." What is *our* time? And what is the time for "the others"? The apostle Peter partially answered these same questions in one, simple verse:

I Peter 5:

17: For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

The time for us – for God's people – has come. The time for our repentance, conversion, training and judgment is today! Now! Our change from physical to spirit will be at the time of the First Resurrection.

But there is also a time for "the others" – those who have not yet been called during this six thousand year age of man. Their time for repentance, conversion, training and judgement will be at one of two possible times:

For those unconverted people who will still be alive at the return of Jesus Christ – and this would include our own church children and our unbaptized young people – their opportunity for repentance and conversion will be during the early years of the Millennium.

The billions who have died unconverted during the six thousand-year age of man will have their time too. The time of the Second Resurrection, which will come at the end of the Millennium. The time referred to in the book of Revelation as the Great White Throne Judgment period. At that time, these billions will be given their first opportunity for repentance, conversion and salvation.

Due to the absence of Satan and his demons, and due to the presence of Jesus Christ, His spirit-born brothers and sisters, and His angels, there will be little excuse *not* to accept God's way of life.

Even though God's Word tells us that Satan will deceive many people when he is temporarily released from his prison at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:7-9), I still believe that, compared with the vast population, comparatively very few will reject God's calling during the Millennium and Great White Throne Judgement periods.

But for those who *do* foolishly reject it, they will also have "a time." No, not an eternity of agony in an ever-burning hell. Rather, according to God's abundant mercy, the time of the Third Resurrection and the Second Death.

How should we look upon “the others”?

With all this in mind, how should we look upon “the others”? How should we look upon all of the unconverted people with whom we deal every day?

The answer is simple! We should look upon them in the same way as God does. In the same way as the human Jesus Christ did.

We should look at them as unconverted people whom God expects to convert – in the future – at their particular time. We should look at them as potential children of God the Father; potential brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ – and of us!

It is interesting to consider that, at some time in the past, God looked at you and me in a similar way as He now looks at them. Perhaps not *quite* the same, because His Firstfruits are something very special to Him. But once upon a time, God really did look at us as unconverted people waiting to be converted!

I sometimes think of all people I have known in my past – and in some cases of the poor example I have been to them. When I think of this, I am ashamed of myself, and I hope and pray that I have effectively confessed and repented of these sins; that God has forgiven these sins and that He will blot these bad examples out of His memory, and out of the memories of those I have wronged in this way.

Now is also the time for me and for you to try to make up for lost time, and to start trying to be better examples to those “others” we contact each day. Who knows? Perhaps God will work through us, to bring others to repentance conversion in *our* time! Possible? Yes! But, of course, we know that we are not to proselyte.

What was *your* first contact with God’s church? For many, it was a magazine, a booklet, a radio or TV broadcast, or an Internet web-page. But for many others, it was the good example of an existing member.

Now this does not mean, of course, that we should write off all of our other methods of preaching the gospel. This is where the practical value of our Holy Day offerings and tithes comes in. It is true that one of our priorities must continue to be that of “preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God.” However, we are not to be selfish with all that God gives us. And, in practice, we have *not* historically been selfish with it! Most Church of God groups have never limited to their members only the distribution of our magazines and booklets, access to our web-sites, or access to our live Sabbath, Feast and Holy Day sermons and Bible studies.

All these have valuable, spin-off benefits which can serve to magnify the preparing of Christians for the Kingdom of God into the broadcasting and preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom to the whole world – in obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

As you pay your tithes throughout the year, and as you give your offerings on each Holy Day, please consider that those funds will be put to good use, yes, preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God, feeding God's existing flock. But also, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom to the whole world; making the truth of God freely available to "the others."

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