

# Can You Stand Alone?

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## Scripture on the cover

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# Can You Stand Alone?

## The Plan of God

Jesus faced death all alone. David fought Goliath alone. Elijah confronted four hundred and fifty priests of Baal alone. Esther stood in the court of King Ahasuerus alone. Many early saints, like Stephen, faced martyrdom alone. Even God the Father was once all alone. What does it mean to stand alone? Is it possible that we, too, might be required to stand alone? Let's take a look at the overall picture.

In the beginning, there was only God the Father and the Word, Jesus Christ. They were the only two beings that existed. The relationship and bond between God the Father and Jesus Christ represented perfect love and harmony. The first act of God, of which we are aware, is this: in their brilliant Godly love, they came up with a magnificent plan – a perfect plan.

God the Father and Jesus Christ decided that they would invest themselves in the greatest venture imaginable. Before launching into their plan, they made absolutely certain that it was perfect and infallible. Their plan was to open their close-knit God-Family to others. They did not see it as an intrusion, but as an expansion of their love. For them, opening the God-Family to others was an act of sharing and giving of their Spiritual substance. They wished to share their Eternal God Life with an extended Family.

It was the most splendid design conceivable! They even had an alternative course of action in place to allow for interruptions, such as Satan's rebellion and the sin of Adam and Eve. They determined that their Godly relationship with others must always be perfect and unspoiled in every way; always directed by flawless, righteous character.

God started by creating the vast angelic realm (Hebrews 1:14) and then the immeasurable, physical universe – this earth, the sun, the moon and the billions of stars

(Colossians 1:16). It is so enormous that it is impossible to comprehend its size.

Why did God create so vast a universe with so much power and so much potential? It was certainly created for a purpose. God does nothing without purpose; no more than we would go out and build a barn which we have no use for. So, for what purpose was the universe created?

The vastness of the heavens not only points to His unlimited power to create, but it is also an indication of God's earnest intent to extend His Family. *"Of the increase of His empire and peace there shall be no end."* (Isaiah 9:7)

As you and I would measure progress, God's plan was moving along very well. Then something terrible happened! Iniquity, imperfection, sin, jealousy and rebellion were found within the angelic realm – horrible sin! It was a dreadful thing, but it happened before the character of those in the angelic realm was established.

Lucifer, an archangel, sinned; thereby becoming Satan, the adversary. He proved to be unfaithful to the plan of God. He revolted and led one third of the angels into rebellion. Lucifer and the angels who followed him were originally created as holy beings capable of making their own decisions and choices. They could choose to stand for God's way, or they could reject it. They rebelled against God's way of love that is outgoing concern for the good of others.

Those angels rejected the way of humility, of love for their Maker, of giving, serving, cooperating, and sharing. They turned instead to Satan's way of lust and greed, of competition, bitterness and destruction. As a result, God has reserved for them darkness forever. *"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [tartaroo] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment..."* (2 Peter 2:4).

Our earth was well on the way to completion when it was annihilated in the demonic battle that took place at the time that Satan attempted to seize God's throne. Everything

became *tohu, bohu* and *coshek*. In Genesis 1:2-3 we read, "*the earth became without form ['tohu'] and void ['bohu'], and darkness ['coshek'] was upon the face of the deep.* But Satan's rebellion and the ensuing war were unable to put a

stop to the inevitable plan of God. "*And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters... And the light shone forth...*" Continuing with His plan, God planted a breathtaking garden, the Garden of Eden, making a place of beauty, tranquility and comfort for His children. That magnificent garden contained two trees; a very spectacular tree – the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The tree of life represented the spiritual component missing in mankind, the very "*life*" of God. Mankind was created with short-term mortal life. Man does not have an immortal soul. That pagan concept comes from Satan's lie, "*You shall not surely die.*" Only God the Father and Jesus Christ now possess eternal life (1 Timothy 6:16). Through the tree of life, God was offering mankind the way to eternal life as members of the Family of God. God told Adam and Eve that they *would* die if they ate of the forbidden tree. (Compare Genesis 2:17 and 3:4). Therefore, the tree of life was an integral part of God's plan. God wanted Adam and Eve to freely choose His way; they were alone in the garden when Satan came to them. Neither Adam nor Eve was willing to stand up to Satan in defense of God's way of life.

Abel was the first man to stand alone. Abel brought the very best offering of the firstlings of his flock, and the Lord had respect for Abel and his offering. Jesus said that Abel was a righteous man (Matthew 23:35). In faith, Abel knew that God would provide for the future because he was placing God completely first in his life. Throughout the Bible, there is a common thread showing that the world loves its own. Contrariwise, those who stand for God, the righteous, are hated, persecuted and often killed. "*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous.*" (Hebrews 11:4)

*"All who live righteously will suffer persecution."*  
(2 Timothy 3:12) Cain martyred righteous Abel. Abel suffered the fate of those who fearlessly live the Truth. Abel had risen above the yardstick of man-kind and exhibited the attributes of the God-kind.

## **Kind after Kind**

There's a Godly principle that we see very early on in the scriptures – life begets life. Or, as we often say, kind begets kind. Genesis specifically shows that like kind begets like kind. This principle is applicable to all living things – to the grass, to the fruit trees, to the fish and everything we read of in Genesis 1:24. *"And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so."*

God created man-kind. He made them, man and woman, capable of reproducing their species, their kind, only as an embryonic step in His plan to reproduce Himself, the God-kind. God is in the process of reproducing Himself by creating children who are a part of His Family – the Family of God. In order for man to make that great leap, from man-kind to God-kind, God gives baptized Christians of His life – His Spirit, making us His Godly children. *"Even now, we are the children of God."* (1 John 3:2)

This inconceivable truth is lost on the world. They think "children of God" is a platitude meaning simply that God created us. They cannot grasp the awe-inspiring reality expressed in these words; that our mere humanity is being transformed into God-like-ness. When a human being undergoes the Christian conversion process, he enters a transformation from temporary, mortal life to eternal God Life.

Paul explained how the change in kind, from man-kind to God-kind, takes place. *"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God... you have received the Spirit of sonship [sons of God], whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."* (Romans 8:14-16)

God does not give His Spirit to everyone. At this time, the *promise of the Father* (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:14, Acts 2:1-4) is given only to those who are called by the Father. Jesus said, "*No one can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.*" (John 6:65)

God's Holy Spirit is given only to those who are repentant, have faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, and are baptized. God's Spirit is the gift of God unto eternal life (Romans 6:23).

In the same way that destruction followed the angelic rebellion, destruction also followed the sin of Adam and Eve. They were thrust from the Garden of Eden. When Adam sinned, it constituted the foundation of this present evil world. The plan of God had a setback. It came at great cost; God the Father would have to give up His Son, and Jesus would have to die to restore order and once again give man access to eternal life. "... *the Lamb [Jesus] slain from the foundation of the world.*" (Revelation 13:8) "*[Jesus] Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.*" (Galatians 1:4)

### **God's Gift**

Each Passover we remember the suffering of Jesus Christ, but sometimes we do not grasp the immense suffering that God the Father experienced. God the Father's sacrifice was greater than the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. When Jesus was in the grave, God the Father was utterly alone. We read of God's gift in John 3:16, "*God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.*"

God gave; the Father was willing to give up His only begotten son, Jesus Christ. As much as Jesus suffered in His passion and death, God the Father suffered more. Let's ask ourselves the question: who suffered more, Abraham or Isaac when Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac? The answer is that it is worse to lose a child. When we're young, we might say there is nothing worse than dying; but once we've become parents, we know that it is worse to suffer the loss of a child. For Abraham, who was a type of God the Father in this case, it

was a horrific thought to sacrifice his son! In his mind, Abraham was willing to go it alone without Isaac. God the Father actually made that sacrifice!

We are given this example of Abraham and Isaac for us to see what God the Father went through. God the Father could have lost Jesus Christ forever! If Jesus Christ had failed, if Jesus Christ had sinned even once – He would have died for His own sin. He would not have lived again! He would have been eternally dead, and God the Father would have been forever alone.

So, when we read John 3:16, let's understand to whatever degree we can, the magnitude of the sacrifice that God the Father was willing to make for us. Are you able to stand alone? As the end-time Church of God crosses the final threshold into the Laodicean era, there is no more important question that we can ask of ourselves than, "Am I willing to stand alone?"

God the Father and Jesus Christ, each, put everything on the line for our redemption and our salvation. A great price has been paid. We are to be different from the world. Unconverted worldly people serve themselves. Some feather their own nests. Some provide for themselves by whatever means is most expedient to them. Some take advantage of the poor to become rich, prominent and powerful. Some take unjust advantage of their station in life. As for Christians, God says, "*It shall not be so among you.*" (Luke 22:26)

What does it mean to "Stand Alone?" From the time of Adam until the time of Jesus Christ, no one was called to spiritual salvation except those few called to perform special missions. God offered His Holy Spirit (eternal life) only to the prophets and those called for special duty. From the time that Jesus established His Church to this present time, only an extremely small portion of humanity has been called. Even today, those called by God are singularly called for a very special and unique purpose according to His Will. "*You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a special people; that you should show forth the praises of Him who has*

*called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."*  
(1 Peter 2:9)

We who have been called during this church age have been called to qualify as rulers with Christ in the Kingdom of God. In addition to qualifying, we are chosen according to God's purpose to be ambassadors of Christ who will individually and faithfully represent God's Kingdom at this present time (2 Corinthians 5:20, Revelation 17:14). As ambassadors of Christ, we stand alone in exhibiting the holy, righteous character of God. *"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."* (Ephesians 1:11)

As ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we should be exhibiting the highest standards of Godly conduct. We are living in a time, however, when the principles within God's Church have been watered down to the point that they are not that much different from the world's standards. God prophesied that this lackadaisical condition would prevail in His end-time Church.

God has His perfect law, authority and government. God never violates His standards and principles. God's government and church government are not interchangeable. Some claim that their church government has the same authority over member's lives as Godly authority does. You will hear many ministers say that God's government is from the top down, and what they mean is "down to them." Then, as the supposed representative of God's government on earth, they believe that they possess the authority to do as they please.

Then, because of this presumed authority, much of the ministry thinks that it is okay to bend God's rules. They commonly violate Godly principles for their expediency. This complacency in the leadership has caused some to accept, or at least be comfortable in, lethargic congregations.

Everyone is directly under the authority of God – that should go without saying. Understand this: Whenever anyone contravenes God's perfect law, statutes and judgments, they automatically remove themselves from God's

authority and government. Do not be duped into believing that those who usurp and change God's Will somehow possess Godly authority.

Throughout history men have changed God's doctrines and laws, and persecuted His saints. They did not have God's tacit approval. In such situations, every Christian has the requirement to take a stand and uphold God's way.

What is a member without any particular church status or political standing to do? The Church of God is not a democracy where we must go along with the majority, right or wrong. God said, "*I counsel thee to buy of me gold [Godly character] tried in the fire.*" (Revelation 3:18)

Because it is not God's Will that any should perish, He insists that each and every one of us garner the courage to take a stand for what is right – even if everyone else *is* turning a blind eye; even if we must stand alone. Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve (Revelation 3:18). God says that is the only way to come out of sin and see clearly.

The Bible is filled with examples of those saints who have had to courageously stand alone for God's Word. What are we to do when Church unity disintegrates into apostasy? What do you do when the conduct of the ministry becomes political and they abuse God's people? Can you do what is right in God's eyes: **will you stand alone?** God says that when you see wrongdoing, and do not take a stand against it, that is the same as condoning the iniquity (Leviticus 5:1). Whenever God brings a sinful matter to anyone's attention, it is necessary for that individual to make every effort to restore his brother. We are "our brother's keeper."

## **Our Brother's Keeper**

What are we to do when a brother or sister strays from the Truth? Some would say, "God will correct any wrongdoing in the Church of God. It's not my responsibility. I'll put it in God's hands." That is a cop-out! God expects each individual Christian to stand up for the truth, and expose the lies. God tells us how to handle situations like these. The answer is

always the same. When push comes to shove – step up to the plate and be counted! We have a great responsibility to each other in the Church of God.

A great lie was perpetrated on humanity when Cain denied that he was in any way responsible for his brother, Abel. *"The Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I do not know: Am I my brother's keeper?"* (Genesis 4:9)

The truth is: Yes! **We are each our brother's keeper.** We are individually responsible for the spiritual welfare of the brethren. When an offense occurs, God tells us to go to the offending party alone (Matthew 18:15-17). No one is permitted to pass the buck. We are further instructed to bring the matter to the entire congregation, if necessary.

There has been an all-too-common practice in the Church for ministers to close their eyes to the wrongdoing of their fellow ministers in other church areas. Like Pontius Pilate, they try to wash their hands of their responsibility, not realizing that they are as guilty as the offending party (Leviticus 5:1). Some ministers say, "That is not my area," as though God allowed a dispensation for distance. They adopt the viewpoint that it is not their concern, or that headquarters is responsible for the monitoring of someone else's area.

No member of the Church of God is exempt when it comes to taking a stand to support and defend God's high standards, especially the ordained ministers of Jesus Christ. We have no choice but to take a stand. We all, even faithful ministers, need a nudge in the right direction sometimes. Or, it may be that you are now dealing with a false minister, as so many of us have had to do before. Whatever the situation, you and I cannot close our eyes to their harmful and sinful ways, or approve and support them in their wrongdoing. Closing your eyes to a sinful problem is an inexcusable act of cowardice – it is not Christian love. When humbly approached, a true Christian should be able to accept Godly correction, even if the Christian is the minister. Peter is a case in point.

## Peter was Wrong

It can happen to any one of us. God has given us the example of Peter, who long after his conversion, failed to stand alone. As prominent a figure in the New Testament Church as he was, as strong and spiritual as he was, Peter let his guard down and failed to stand on his own two feet. That is the exact meaning of *'orthopodeo'* in Galatians 2:14 – he “*walked not uprightly;*” he did not walk the straight and narrow path.

As influential as the apostle Peter was, his sin placed him in danger of losing his eternal salvation. Peter had been showing partiality to some Jewish men of reputation to the exclusion of the other Christians. Peter's improper conduct would have eventually cost him his eternal life – if he continued in it. Peter was being a “respector of persons.” God never approves of partiality! Peter had allowed himself to have a bad attitude, and he was headed out of the Church. Who would step up and save Peter?

Peter must have begun to believe that his position gave him some exclusive privileges because it was he who led the group in not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel (Galatians 2:14). Peter somehow let himself believe that his Jewish buddies were more equal than the Christian Gentiles. That is a non-sequitur, it does not follow. But, in his own mind, Peter probably justified his favoritism by saying, “There is absolutely nothing wrong with fellowshiping with my old friends; and after all, I'm not really rejecting those Gentiles.”

By respecting the Jews over the Gentiles, Peter was sinning – plain and simple – and it was a major problem among the brethren. Only Paul recognized the crisis. Peter's problem also became a test of Paul's faith – would he stand alone? It was necessary for Paul to ask himself how he was going to address the situation. Would Paul help Peter in Christian love, or would he stand idly by and watch Peter lose his salvation?

Paul could have been tempted to not get involved, and say to himself, “I'll just let God straighten this situation out – I'll put it in His hands.” Paul could have reasoned his way out of a face-to-face confrontation by saying, “Peter's been in the

Church longer than I have... I had better mind my own business... I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings... for the sake of peace, I'll just be quiet and let it go." Paul must have been tempted to do what was politically expedient and socially acceptable. However, Paul realized that his intervention in the matter was not optional.

Had Paul chosen to stand-down and not come to Peter's aid, it would have cost Paul his salvation, as well. But, because Peter was wrong, Paul took a courageous stand and corrected him face-to-face, "*before them all.*" "*I [Paul] withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed!*" (Galatians 2:11, 14) In a brave act of Christian concern for his brother, Paul dressed Peter down in front of everybody; it had to be done.

Peter already knew that there was neither Jew nor Greek in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed (Galatians 3:28-29). But what Peter was doing needed to be resisted. Paul openly withstood [Greek *anthistemi* - *took a stand against*] Peter and reiterated the fact that he and Peter were not better than the Gentile members. Paul used a bit of sarcasm to get the point across to Peter. Referring to the converted Gentile Christians, Paul said, "*We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles.*" (Galatians 2:15)

Paul, in Godly love, stepped in and set Peter straight. Paul was correct to admonish Peter. At first, Peter chafed at Paul's chastisement, but afterwards, he was thankful because he had been turned back to God's way. Later, Peter would refer to him as, "*Our beloved brother Paul.*" (2 Peter 3:15) Indeed, Paul was a courageous, unique man who helped insure Peter's salvation and spiritual life. If Paul had handled it any other way, it would not have turned Peter around.

There are ministers today who teach that Peter, because of his office and position, should have been upheld; that he was exempt from correction. They do not understand that **each of us shares the basic responsibility to convert the sinner from the error of his way** (James 5:20). When ministers support each other in wrongdoing or wrong doctrine, or just look the other way, it is dangerous to their spiritual health.

When ministers place themselves above the membership, that is spiritual arrogance. No one is ever right in supporting wrong teaching and practices at the expense of the Truth and/or the brethren.

It is loving and necessary for members to make an effort to turn those mistaken ministers around to a correct relationship with God. Everyone has the Christian obligation to address sin openly, just as Paul was correct in withstanding Peter to his face before them all. Ministers today are not exempt from the principles of Christ any more than Peter was in his day. They must be shown where they are wrong; it is our Christian obligation. *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converts [turns him around] the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death..."* (James 5:19-20) For anyone to side-step this clear, Christian obligation is tantamount to rejecting Godly authority over his or her life.

Are we easily swayed, or are we defenders of the faith down to the last man or woman? As Christians, are we strong enough to be able to live and to stand for our true faith? There is a tendency among many brethren to accept an ungodly outside dominion over their religious lives without hesitation and without question. This is a serious problem. Scripture is clear – the ministry does not have dominion over a Christian's faith (2 Corinthians 1:24). The apostle John was faced with such a situation, where some of the congregation willingly went along with a self-willed minister. *"...Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them... Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that does good is of God: but he that does evil has not seen God."* (3 John 1:9, 11)

It is easy for some to justify not taking a stand. They chalk up sin and misconduct as personality traits to be overlooked. They say, "God can use them in spite of their sins." They have a wide variety of excuses, "I can't change others; I can only change myself." "We are not supposed to judge." "I don't like to put people down." "If I didn't overlook faults, I would have

no friends at all." "We are supposed to love one another, and not be confrontational."

Godly love is helping one another into the Kingdom of God. Non-intervention on our part is the same as approving of people's sin, and ensures that they will not inherit the better resurrection. In troubled church areas, some people will justify their inaction by saying, "We are supposed to be peacemakers, fellowshiping in unity." They will concede that their minister is wrong and has his problems, but, "That's the only place to go to church, and the Bible does say we must assemble!" Why are we instructed to assemble, and with whom?

### **Why Assemble with Others?**

Are we supposed to assemble with other Christians? Absolutely, we are! (Please read the booklet about Church unity, *"That They May Be One"*). We do not, however, assemble at the expense of God's other principles. How do we find the balance between assembling with others and standing alone in defense of Godliness? Some brethren believe there is safety in numbers, as though God were judging groups of people rather than judging each of us as individuals. There is a dangerous phenomenon in the Church today, wherein some brethren have been programmed to believe that it is safe and expedient to meet only with a large group of people. But were we ever safe in large groups and big congregations?

We have seen terrible heresy sweep through the Church of God. Satan's attacks are not over. We must ask ourselves, "From God's point of view, what is the primary purpose that we assemble?" Do you go to receive the hugs you need? Do you go because the choir needs you? Do you go to a big church so that your children will find marriageable mates? Do you not have faith that God will provide as He promised? Should you work it out for yourself? If you do work it out for yourself instead of allowing God to provide, you will live with the results of your own actions, and you may be disappointed.

Some members will only attend with a large group because they believe that Hebrews 10:25 commands them to do so. *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the*

*manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*

This word "exhorting" means imploring, or provoking, or interacting with, or entreating one another. This verse is not about *where* we keep the Sabbath – in a big group or a small group. Likewise, this verse is not examining whether or not *we are to keep* the Sabbath. As we so often see in the scriptures, the focus of this verse is on a specific problem that is being addressed here.

In Hebrews 10:25 Paul is addressing a situation in which men and women were not interacting with Christian care for one another. The question is, "Why are brethren to meet with one another?" Read the answer in context, "Let us consider [katanoeo] one another to provoke unto love and to good works." (Hebrews 10:24)

This verse tells us what we are to do when we assemble together. "Let us consider one another to provoke..."; this is not talking about relationships of a superficial nature. Just the opposite – it means getting close, spurring one another on, and interacting with each other on a warm, friendly and personally intimate level, "unto [Godly] love... and to good works."

So, why do we assemble ourselves together? When we get together with brethren, do we take a stand for what is right, or do we slink away refusing to make a difference? "...they that turn many to righteousness will be made like the stars... bright and brilliant forever." (Daniel 12:3)

That's why we assemble ourselves. That is why those who respect the plan of God speak often to one another (Malachi 3:16). We meet to provoke one another to love and to good works. Each of us is to stand up and be counted while there is yet time; always remembering that time is short!

The intent of these verses in Hebrews 10 is that we be "holding fast to the profession of our faith." In other words, these verses show us how to be good Christians. (Hebrews 10:23) The point is that we are to get together in order to put

our faith into practice with each other. Does God want lip service? Does He recognize some large gatherings while rejecting little flocks? No! The Church of God has become scattered and splintered, but Jesus said that He is present even where only *"two or three are gathered in My name."* (Matthew 18:20)

## **Provoke One Another to Good Works**

Do we thank God for each other *every day*? Do Christians consider one another only on the Sabbath, or does our Godly care for one another continue throughout the week as well? The world's religions "do their duty" for about an hour on Sunday, but our faith is not like that – we are Christians 24/7. We are to always be considering one another and provoking each other unto love and to good works.

When this verse says, "consider" [*'katanoeo'*], it means to observe fully, to perceive, to behold, to discover, to know them. "Consider," means to get into the lives of others, to be caring and giving of ourselves in heart-to-heart encounters. *"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works."* That is what God expects of Christians. We do not just put in our time – just make a show for appearance. Our faith is not ritualistic; it must have substance.

Our faith is not about the place of church meetings, or with which organization we meet; it's about experiencing true Christian fellowship. When we get together, are we truly considering one another to provoke unto love and good works? We must ask ourselves, "Is the group where we attend aspiring to Godly practices, is their performance Godly, and are they frequently and regularly provoking one another unto love and good works?"

That is why we are to assemble. That is why we pull together with like-minded brethren – the ekklesia. We are not to meet with those whose conduct is unbecoming of God's people (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). We interact with brethren who trust and forgive each other, and who share the same hope of eternal life. We are to congregate with those who put their Christianity into practice in the things that they say, and

in the things that they do, and in the way that they look out for each other. Is iron sharpening iron? Are they a true Christian congregation? Do they cry together, laugh together and pray together? We interact with each other in a real way and a substantive way when we consider one another's spiritual and physical needs.

We do not go to church to fulfill a role call, to pay our dues, or to be seen by the minister and somehow stay in his good graces. Neither do we go to church to stay in some far off headquarters' good graces. It is ungodly to fear being disfellowshipped for not being faithful to some earthly corporation. Rather, we must make sure that we are in good stead with God, and with His saints. We are to be faithful to the Body of Christ, the Church of God, the called out ones. That is the only organization that Jesus recognizes. We must put all the scriptures together to understand what God is saying.

We do not go to services only for social fellowship, but to love one another by actions and in reality. That's provoking one another as we should. John sums up what we must be doing. *"Whosoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; **but in deed and in truth.**"* (1 John 3:17-18)

## **A Matter of Salvation**

Brethren, you and I are warned of the seriousness of our Christian calling. John tells us that genuine involvement with one another is a matter of salvation. It is not a salvational issue whether the organization is a big splinter group or a small splinter group (because splinters are all that are left today). We're all scattered; we're all shattered. But this question of our Christian practice, interaction, love and concern for one another is a major salvational issue. *"We know that we have passed from **death unto life**, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death."* (1 John 3:14)

This love is Godly care. It is not mere sentiment. This is not the kind of "love" which is sung about in teenagers' music. This "love" is coming to the spiritual aid of everyone in God's Church. You know, if we do not love our brother, if we do not provoke him to good works, we abide in death. *"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to **lay down our lives** for the brethren."* (1 John 3:16) These are such soft words, but so strong.

We are not laying down our lives for the brethren if we do not reconcile, if we do not come to their aid, if we do not open our hearts and minds to them, if we do not share our deepest concerns with them, or when we do not provoke them to good works. We need to awaken a desire in others to tear down the walls that separate brethren. Being open and involved with others is difficult at first for some because it makes us vulnerable; but Jesus set the example for us by sharing of Himself. It is also the little things – phone calls, prayers, flowers, comfort for those who have lost a loved one, helping someone with a sick child, etc. That, too, is laying down our lives for the brethren!

Interacting with the brethren as though they were truly "family" members is a good reason to assemble. We should assemble and interrelate as often as possible, and not just for an hour or two at Sabbath services. God desires sincerity, and He desires truth. He is not fooling around! God has gone through a great deal to bring about His magnificent plan. We must not be afraid to plunge right into each other's hearts and minds. Look at the example of the first-century Church brethren after just having received God's Holy Spirit. *"The multitude of them that believed was of one heart and of one soul."* (Acts 4:32)

That was Godly love in action! It's as though they were all family. Lately, in the greater Church of God, we have not been oriented in that direction. We are not as on-target, as we should be. We know that God's plan is coming to fruition. God through His Spirit is bringing it about. We know that it is going to be worked out – but will we personally meet Christ's standard of loving one another? *"This commandment have we*

*from Him, That he who loves God **love his brother also.**"*  
(1 John 4:21)

## **Adam Failed to Take a Stand**

The first man, Adam, sinned because he did not avail himself of that spiritual component represented by the tree of life – the Spirit of God. When he sinned, the plan of God was again sidetracked, but only for a time, just as it was delayed at the time of Satan's rebellion. God's plan had to go through – call it a phase – because of Adam's sin. Adam was a potential son of God. Had he been obedient to God and taken of the tree of life, he would have become a child of God right then and there. He would have become a son of God. Had Adam taken of the tree of life, he would have come to possess everything imaginable.

Adam would have been king over all the earth! He would have been the lawgiver for the population of the entire earth just as Moses was later on for Israel. He would have been the high priest. Had Adam stood up to Satan in the Garden of Eden, he would have been the overcomer of Satan. Adam would have qualified to rule the earth, and he would have ushered in the Kingdom of God at that time. That is what God set before him. That was real, that was legal, that was deliberate on God's part.

Instead of this seven thousand year time span that we are in now, God's plan would have been accomplished in only one thousand years. The Garden of Eden would have been the beginning of the millennium. However, since Adam failed to put God first in his life and overcome Satan, it was left to Jesus Christ to be the Overcomer (Matthew 4:4). Adam failed to stand alone. Now, it is going to be up to Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God on this earth. That will occur at the beginning of the one thousand year millennium. Because Jesus Christ victoriously performed these functions, while the original Adam did not adhere to the plan of God, Jesus Christ is called the second or final Adam.

## Fear is an Enemy of Faith

Needless to say, there were terrible consequences as a result of Adam's disappointing performance in the Garden of Eden. However, what does need to be reiterated is the fact that when we fail to take a stand for God's Way, we hamper the progress of the plan of God. Not only that, we jeopardize our own salvation. Some will say, "You take too much upon yourself – God does not expect such stellar performances from us." Yes, He does. He has called us specifically to achieve certain goals.

Look at what the Scriptures reveal about the ordeal in which Queen Esther stood alone and prevailed. Had Esther declined to take a stand, destruction and ruin would have been the result for her and her family; but God's plan would prevail. *"For if you altogether hold your peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but you and your father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether you art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14)

Esther overcame her fear. Exhibiting great courage, she approached the king to whom she had not been summoned. The penalty for such an unwelcomed advance on the throne carried the possibility of an immediate death penalty. In faith, Esther said, *"If I perish, I perish."* (Esther 4:11, 16) As a result of Esther's stand, the Jewish ancestors of our Savior were delivered from genocide. For those people with whom God is working, tests and trials will come because He has specifically designed and allowed unique situations for His purposes (Romans 8:28).

You may say, "Nothing earthshaking like that ever happens to me." Perhaps you have become accustomed to sidestepping every controversy, thinking, "After all, isn't someone in charge supposed to take care of the problems?" The answer is that in these end-time days, those in charge sometimes fail to address serious sin among God's people. What is a member to do when obvious abuse and gaping sin are ongoing, and no one

does anything about it? The answer is that a Christian has no choice but to take a stand.

We should ask ourselves these questions. Why do so many in leadership positions today lack the courage to take a stand and tackle the problems? Are they, themselves, dictatorial and abrasive? Are they examples of caring servants, laying their lives down for the brethren? Do they go after that one lost sheep, or do they derive their security from the ninety-nine (Luke 15:4)? Jesus Christ warned us to be careful of hirelings (John 10:12). Do they truly consider the brethren – encouraging them to love and good works by example; or are they arrogant and aloof? Do they frequently hurt people knowingly, and not care enough to change their approach, much less their hearts?

What is a Christian to do when ministers do not represent Godly principles in their teachings and conduct? What do you do if you find out about a couple living in sin in your congregation? What would you do if your minister refused to help a widow in need? How would you respond if an innocent member were disfellowshipped from your congregation? What would you do if you found out about a minister who is molesting a young person?

Those things do happen in God's Church, and there is no statute of limitations on sin except Godly repentance. Getting involved in one of those situations could get you into "big trouble" quickly. Do you fear to take a stand? Are you satisfied with saying to yourself, "I don't know what I'd do"? Some fearful brethren take the easy way out by saying, "Perhaps he has repented," or, "He is not my pastor," or, "I don't have any hard evidence to present – like photos." How courageous would you be if no one recognized the problem, except you? Would you be afraid to take action? *Jesus said unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?* (Matthew 8:26)

### **Many Others Stood Alone**

Can we stand alone? Elijah felt like he stood totally alone when he confronted the four hundred and fifty priests of Baal.

He was not aware of the 7,000 who had not bowed their knee to Baal. *"Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men."* (1 Kings 18:22)

David stood alone against the Philistine, Goliath. What was everybody else doing? What was the whole army of Israel doing? They were hunkering down, unwilling to face the enemy. What made David different? How was he able to stand alone against the enemy?

While it may be cozy to sit in a large congregation, surrounded, seemingly protected in a cocoon of safety; we need to remember that our safety comes from faith in God, not from lots of people. If on the other hand, someone seeks anonymity and obscurity for the very purpose of not having to take a stand, there exists a serious spiritual problem. We need to ask ourselves, "Are we in the best place to work out our own salvation?" *"... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* (Philippians 2:12)

Is this concept of working out our own salvation a group action... or do we qualify for the Kingdom of God individually? The answer is that we separately stand before Jesus Christ to give an answer for ourselves (Romans 14:10, 12). You might respond with the question, "Then what's the use of having a church at all?" Again, we "go to church" for the purpose of considering one another to provoke unto love and to good works. We honor and serve God as we serve and care for others (Matthew 25:40).

Here is the question you must ask of yourself when you see God's principles being violated, "Am I not taking a stand because I need the approval of others... because I fear being reprimanded... because I fear breaking rank... because I am afraid to take a stand for what is right in God's eyes?" Today is our only opportunity to take a stand for God's Truth; we may never have another chance.

During the millennium, those who will be reigning and ruling with Jesus Christ will be saying to others, *"This is the way, walk you in it."* (Isaiah 30:21) When do we learn to stand

alone on our own two feet? The answer is, we are to be learning now! Some brethren have gotten the idea that all the "work" is being done by some central organization. They forget that we must each, alone, carry our own work load. ***"Let everyone prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, without depending on the approval of others. For every man shall bear his own burden."*** (Galatians 6:4-5) *"Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?"* (1 Corinthians 6:2)

When do we expect to learn to make decisions? Right now is our opportunity to develop discernment and to learn to judge. We must learn to discern! *"Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?"* (1 Corinthians 6:3)

Who today has the valor of Phinehas? He stood alone! The people of Moab invited the Israelites over for sacrifices to their gods, and the Israelites accepted. It turned out to be a dreadful party. *"They called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods."* (Numbers 25:2)

The great, great majority of Israel went along with the crowd, joining in idolatrous whoredom with Baalpeor. They all felt that there was safety in numbers because they figured that God was certainly not going to wipe out all of Israel. One man stood alone for God; notice what Phinehas did. He took a javelin and put a stop to the sordid mess (Numbers 25:7-13).

Do we ever take a stand for God's righteousness today, or do we close our eyes? Are we crowd-pleasers, preferring not to rock the boat or make waves? Are we too fearful to make a decision for righteousness? Or are we, like Phinehas, courageously willing to stand up? Here's the question: is there a Phinehas in the Church of God today?

What about Daniel or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? It was incredibly terrifying for them to take a stand against Nebuchadnezzar and face the burning, fiery furnace. They had

to make up their minds: either take a stand for God or go along with the crowd. They did as they had always done. Even when it meant disregarding an order from the King, they continued honoring God. Facing death, they did what God said, not what a man wanted.

Through his ethical and excellent attitude, Daniel rose in prominence. When King Darius planned to set Daniel over the entire kingdom, the jealous presidents and princes sought to ruin Daniel's reputation. They knew that Daniel was uncompromising and faithful to God. They concocted a scheme whereby Daniel would have to choose between King Darius and God. At that point, Daniel could have sought some middle ground – he could have compromised a little. He could have easily reasoned that he could do so much more good alive than dead. Daniel stood alone, and God delivered him from the mouths of the lions.

Can we, too, stand alone? Here's an even more important question that we must consider: Will we *have to* stand alone? Will the circumstances be such that we have no choice but to stand alone or lose our salvation, as in the case of the young men mentioned above? *"Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."* (Daniel 12:2) Some have failed the test that God sent to them. They must repent now and cry out to God, *"Do not take your Holy Spirit from me."* (Psalms 51:11)

*"Some will awake to everlasting life..."* What a great resurrection! Some of us awakening to everlasting life, to be a part of the Family of God, is what the plan of God is all about. But... notice this... *"some [are going to awake] to shame and everlasting contempt."*

Being able to stand alone is necessary, but taking pride in being an "independent Christian" is wrong. There are those with a lack of understanding who are selfishly independent simply for the sake of not being committed and involved. Those independent Christians are failing to consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works (Hebrews

10:24). That self-sufficient posture is not taking a stand for the Truth of God. "Standing alone" means that we fully represent God's way, especially when others fail to do so.

We will not go into the Kingdom of God until God knows that we will always take a positive stand for Him. When church organizations or church leaders are not living up to the high standards and calling of Christ, that is a specific time for us to demonstrate to God that we will always remain faithful – if necessary, by standing alone.

God appreciated Daniel's stand. The same thing was true of Joseph, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Sara, Rahab and many, many other men and women of faith, "*of whom the world was not worthy.*" (Hebrews 11:38) The Bible is filled with examples of strong and courageous men, women, and young people standing alone in faith. At the time of their captivity, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were very young men of twelve to fourteen years of age; even so, they had the bravery to refuse the king's unclean dainties. David was very young when he faced Goliath, perhaps only seventeen years old. God wants us to be able to stand alone for His priorities in any situation.

Are we willing to stand alone? When we "put it all on the line" for God's Truth, it is likely to cost us a great deal. We must be willing to pay a big price. Sometimes the prophets would say, "Even if God does not deliver me, I am going to stand in faith." That is what we have to say; we must be willing to lay down our lives. Christ says we cannot even be His disciples until we make that determination, till we make that decision.

From where does that strength and faith come? From where does that courage and determination to stand alone come? Do we have a pure faith and trust in the plan of God – that it will be fulfilled – that it is being worked out in us? Nothing can stand between us and God – not country, not fraternity, not even family. Can a woman find the courage to stand alone for the Truth of God even though her husband or father departs from it? She may be tempted to say, "I'll keep

my mouth shut for the sake of peace in the family." Jesus did not teach peace at any cost – but exactly the opposite.

Jesus taught, "*Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven. Do not think that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*" (Matthew 10:33-37) We will not go into the Kingdom of God until we have shown that we will allow nothing to stand between God and us.

It is a wonderful blessing for Christians to be able to fellowship in peace, unity and Truth. "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*" (Psalm 133:1) However, God calls upon each one of us in times of crises to stand up and be counted – even if we must stand alone! It was no accident that Queen Esther stood alone; it was by God's design. God placed her in a unique position. He wanted her to take a stand – alone. In the exact same way, God gives each of us the opportunity to stand alone for what is right and true, to be an example to others, and to let our light shine. Yes, it is difficult. For Esther, it was *almost* overwhelming.

### **Does God Ask Too Much of Us?**

Sometimes it does seem that our trials are more than we can handle, and we certainly do not want to take on any more problems than we already have. We may make excuses to not take a stand because we feel that we already have too much on our plate. It is so easy to say, "I don't want to stick my nose in where it doesn't belong." We may naturally (but wrongly) wish to defer to powerful and influential men – the movers and shakers in church organizations. Why? It's because the formidable men, like the powerful Pharisees of Christ's day, are the ones who usually control things. Either

way, if they get involved with the trouble or not, we can always say, "The blood is on their heads – my hands are clean." And that way we are able to feel justified while we shirk our responsibility to take a real strong stand.

God will not allow us to be tempted, or tried, or tested past our breaking point, and He will also provide a way that we will be able to handle it. That's the Truth of God! *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Those who are willing to "take the bull by the horns" and help set things back on track are doing a good work. *"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and **they that turn many to righteousness** as the stars for ever and ever."* (Daniel 12:3) *"... when He shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished."* (Daniel 12:7) This word *scatter* is the Hebrew word 'naphats,' meaning to dash to pieces, like when a coffee cup is dropped on a concrete floor. That is happening now to the power of the holy people; soon there will be no more large groups, no more big churches!!!

The power of the Holy People is being shattered! The weak are shoved aside, but we are heartened by the Scripture, *"Your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."* (1 Corinthians 2:5) We stand alone in trials and tests of our faith, while we meet together with brethren to provoke unto love and to good works.

God is not well-pleased with the overall conduct of His end-time Church. Daniel makes it abundantly clear that there is only a portion of the brethren who will understand. *"I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand."* (Daniel 12:8, 10)

## The Wise Shall Understand

Who are the wise? The wise are "*they that turn many to righteousness.*" (Daniel 12:3) Yes, we have our trials, our temptations, our tests that we go through. "*... the wicked shall do wickedly.*" Yes, that's going to happen. "*... but the wise shall understand.*" Do we understand what our Christianity is all about? Do we understand when we must take a stand for righteousness' sake?

Do you think that when the beast power begins to rise they are going to allow groups to exist with whom we can openly attend Sabbath services? Will the beast power allow that? People will have to stand alone. During the tribulation, standing for the Truth will be a matter of life or death. Will we be defenders of the faith down to the last man or woman?

Jesus Christ says to each of us specifically, "*If any come unto Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross...*" Our faith is an individual thing. This is not about being independent Christians. We need each other. All of the Church brethren are essential to our faith and spiritual growth. We learn and mature together, but we are tested separately. Still the Church remains integral in our development. It is absolutely necessary.

Jesus Christ's one True Church was founded and exists primarily for our Christian development. It's the "womb" in which we are to mature spiritually. The Church is necessary; but that does not negate the fact that we must be willing to stand alone, be tested alone, and be tried alone. Notice how this scripture says it so clearly, "*...for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... so then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*" (Romans 14:10, 12)

We are individually accountable to God. **We learn collectively, but we are tested individually,** just as we were in high school. We all studied the same classes together, but we had to qualify for graduation individually. It's not what the group does; there will be no group amnesty! God does not work that way.

In the Scriptures, we see many examples of standing alone in the face of trials and tests, but we do not find so many examples of Christian teamwork or group participation when the greatest trials came. We do try to be there as a group for a parent with a sick child. We do try to be there for brethren who have lost a loved one. There is a purpose for the Church – an extremely important purpose. We are all a part of the body of Christ, and each part is important to everyone's spiritual welfare (1 Corinthians 12:7). But, by and large, we qualify for the Kingdom of God one-by-one. We repent individually. We build our faith, and we believe individually. We are tried and tested often in a very individual way.

### **God Is With Us**

Our greatest trials and tests usually come upon each of us all of a sudden. Oftentimes, it seems we are all by ourselves. The spiritual reality is that we are not alone – God is with us. Even though Elijah said, "I am all alone," he knew that God was very much involved in his confrontation with the priests of Baal (1 Kings 19:14). He was not alone as far as knowing that God was a part of what he was doing.

The fact is this: We never walk alone – like Elijah, like Daniel, like David who so clearly proclaimed, "*The Lord is with me.*" Yes, from our physical standpoint and from our human standpoint, we have to step up to the plate; but we are not alone. Just as a parent does not abandon a child, our loving Father does not abandon His children. The plan of God will come to pass in His People. Jesus, the Son of God, was not alone, as He said in John 16:32, "*...and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.*"

In death, Jesus Christ had to stand completely alone – something we will never have to do. Jesus bore our sins (Hebrews 9:28), "*in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.*" (1 Peter 2:24) Jesus became sin. God the Father had to turn His back on sin, represented by Jesus, and allow Him to stand alone (Isaiah 59:2); Jesus Christ willingly did that. Hanging on the stake,

Jesus said, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*"

God the Father turned away from Jesus to let Him stand alone and die alone. Why did God the Father forsake Jesus on the stake? Understand this: Our sins separate us from God because no sin can come into His presence. "*Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you.*" (Isaiah 59:2). But Jesus *became sin* in our stead, and our sin caused Jesus' Father to have to forsake Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21) Jesus Christ was tempted in all points just like we are, and yet, He did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). So Jesus Christ suffered the ultimate sacrifice in that He died alone on the stake without His Father.

For us mere men, it is unimaginable what God the Father went through at the loss of His Son – the excruciating hurt, the pain, and the absolute loneliness. Jesus Christ was dead, and *for the only time* in all of existence, God the Father was all alone.

Here is the good news: **God the Father stood alone, and Jesus Christ stood alone, so that we do not have to ever stand alone.** In times of testing, "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*" (Psalms 46:1) When we think we have it tough, think about that example. When we look to God, knowing that God is with us, it gives us the courage and maturity to step out in faith and stand alone. Jesus Christ wants to know if we will always represent His Truth in the face of adversity, no matter what. Are we able to stand alone when the attacks come against His True Way? Jesus Christ said in Hebrews 13:5, "*...I will never leave you or forsake you.*" So, when all is said and done, He is with us in our Christian battle.

When Paul had to stand alone in the serious matter against Peter, it was certainly not the only time Paul stood alone. As a matter of fact, it was Paul's custom to go it alone when no one else was willing to stand up. A perfect case in point is when Alexander the Coppersmith openly opposed Paul. Please notice that although Paul stood alone – the Lord was with him!

*"At my first defense no man stood with me, but all men forsook me... Notwithstanding **the Lord stood with me.**"*  
(2 Timothy 4:16-17)

There is no safety in numbers or in befriending the powerful. We should have learned in the apostasy that began in the late 1980's, that there is no security in being in large groups. Standing alone will not make you popular with the majority of people. Will you excuse yourself and follow along with the crowd, being a part of what is clearly wrong in God's eyes simply because no one else is willing to stand alone? Or, will you stand on your own two feet and follow Christ no matter what? Jesus says to us, *"Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."* (Mark 8:34)

Some people use the excuse that it is God's responsibility, not ours, to make corrections in His Church. They are demonstrating that they lack the courage to stand for what is right. Others, however, will courageously take a stand, showing God that they will implement His way; not only now – but in the millennium as well. This is what God is finding out about us right now, and this is why He does not intervene to make "wrongs" right. It is so important that He sees what we will do under adverse circumstances. How will we respond?

We do not have the option of whether or not to take a stand. **We must take a stand.** No one qualifies for the Kingdom of God without standing strong. We must prove ourselves and qualify. We must overcome. We have to walk in faith. Moses' advice in Exodus 14:13, some 3,500 years ago, is still perfectly valid today. *"Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, **stand** forth, and see the salvation of the Lord..."*

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