

# One in Ninety-nine

(Sermon Notes) By Warren Zehrung 5/18/2019

We've come to the time when many of the "Old-timers" in the Church of God are dying off. We remember back in fondness when there were thousands and thousands at the Feast of Tabernacles. Sometimes 15,000! Incredible!

There were big tents and small tents... There were large choirs and orchestras... Hymns – Praising God... Beautiful Special Music... There was laughter, camaraderie and fellowship... Everyone was seeking more Truth... Everyone was doing all they could to bring the Gospel to the world...

Why did God let that pass? Why did it all come to an end? Now, hardly a week goes by when we do not hear of one of our friends from years ago dying of illness and old age.

We are writing the legacy of our Church era - and the Church is dying. Jesus tells us that we will not die out completely, but like the first century Church of God, soon there will **not be many** who retain the True Faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). Jesus promised:

Matthew 16:18 ... the gates of **the grave** shall not prevail against His Church.

This means that the Church will not die out completely, however, it does give us some idea that God's Church will be very sparse at times. History tells us that the Church **almost died out** at times

Most Church members think that their congregations are models of pure religion and Christianity—which is the practice of caring for the fatherless and widows in their burdened lives, while keeping themselves pure from this defiled world.

There are only a few young people coming along – but they do **not** seem to possess the zeal of the generation gone by.

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

The specific purpose of today's sermon is to stir-up an awareness that there are yet many **displaced brethren** who need to be drawn back into the fold – the Spirit of unity and oneness of the brethren.

I'm speaking of a Spirit of unity and oneness that **transcends** what has become today – separate church organizations. Jesus Christ does not recognize any separate corporate organization as His Church... He has One Body.

The 5 or 6 fair sized groups of a few thousand members or so – do not nearly represent the many, many much smaller scattered sheep that abound all over the earth! And that is because Jesus has only One Body – One Church and it is made up of those who walk according to the lead of His Holy Spirit.

And there are many scattered elderly brethren who have – shamefully – been forgotten. After the death of Herbert W. Armstrong, things in the Church of God began to unravel.

It is not that everyone was on the same page – But there was a **freedom to fellowship** with all the brethren wherever they might be. We all had Church brethren all over the country that were **closer** than family.

We need to understand that the brethren in the Churches of God are still being tested by God to see if He will be able to use us to serve with Him in the Millennium – as He establishes the Kingdom of God over all the Earth. Let's recognize that typical church congregations **do not** represent what the Millennial the Kingdom of God will be like.

That may come as a surprise to some. The Church of God was **not perfect** when Herbert W. Armstrong died – and the Church of God is certainly far from being **prepared** for Jesus' return today.

There were already signs of deterioration, but changes began to take place where all the brethren would have to make a decision about their faith. At first, those in authority began to make **subtle** changes to our long held doctrine.

Then the obvious and impudent destruction of our belief system rapidly came under **attack** by doing away with the Holy Sabbath and the Ten Commandments.

All of the brethren were affected without exception. Some left early and others left later. It was a shattering time. For a few faithful brethren it proved not to be so difficult an ordeal, for they were able to retain their meeting halls, song books, their seat at services, and many of their closest friends.

But then there were the other faithful brethren who had to stand alone. They were marked, and disfellowshipped – not for sin or heresy, but for political expediency (Romans 16:17).

The ministers who **did** the disfellowshipping and **marking** did so because the True Brethren would not go along with the apostasy. Today those same ministers **claim** to hold the **same true doctrine** that those who were put out – were holding fast to. Those same ministers profess to believe what the faithful brethren **held on to** then – and were put out of the church for standing strong.

Those same ministers **did not** go back and say, "I was wrong for kicking you out." They seem to possess a way of thinking that says, "The ministry is always right – even when we were wrong." They still say, "Don't you dare question my authority!" Why? Because they did not want to give Headquarters a black eye. They did not want to tarnish what they pretend should remain an **impeccable reputation**. They were caught in a trap of their own making.

When the apostasy swept the church, they endeavored to show themselves in the most positive light possible in order to put on a façade of perfection. And for the heavy-handed ministers to admit that when they were **running rough-shod** over the brethren – they were wrong – it would somehow diminish the honor due to their office. They seem to think that God only cares about those who are as bold and brazen as they are. That is not true:

Psalms 146:9 The LORD preserves the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked He turns upside down. [That verse is saying]:

Psalms 146:9 The Lord protects the displaced brethren; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He overturns the evil way of the wicked.

Who today even cares **where** the displaced brethren have been scattered to? God expects His true servants to:

Proverbs 31:8-9 Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

**Thirty years** of Church division have shown that those **harsh ministers** are not going to change – and this sermon is **not** about those wayward ministers...

This sermon is about the affected Church brethren who suffered oppression and cruel coercion at their hands. Let's go **way back** and talk about the Church brethren who make up the Church of God.

Matthew 26:11 For ye have the poor/stressed always with you; but me ye have not always. [Quoting Deuteronomy 15:11]

Deuteronomy 15:11 For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and **to thy needy**, in thy land.

Some of those brethren came from strong families and communities – and they grew up with a great deal of **confidence** – and that inner strength helped them to get past the difficult days that came with the break-up of the Church.

But, and this is who I want to focus on today, some of the Church brethren are naturally weaker. They lacked a support group of peers, friends, and brethren to help support them when the storm hit the Church. They had no support when iron fisted ministers descended upon them. They were driven from the flock of God's people. God needs them and wants them back!

The Organized Church Corporations did not have a lot of use for those "frail troublemakers" – as they would view them – who stood for the Truth above political expediency.

Brethren, picture an elderly woman without the support of her family, children, and in some cases – no backing from her husband either... What chance did she have against a tough bully, political minister? Those unsupported brethren were shunned, rejected, ridiculed, and attacked and drummed out of church. Their name and reputation was besmirched, and yet they continued to stand for the doctrine of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 6:1-2).

We live in an era in which the true brethren must be allowed to **patiently heal** – it is only proper and right. Brethren are reluctant to trust again after being hurt repeatedly by a harsh ministry.

Believe it or not, there are many brethren today who **live in fear** of those men and the supposed authority they profess to exert and wield over everyone. The bigger church groups **do not ever hear** from the **wounded** brethren – trying to be connected with those they were once able to love. The bigger church groups **do not ever hear** from those who were **driven away** because the abused, bruised and battered brethren **still fear them**.

There are brethren who continue seeking for others with whom to fellowship – who are living according to God's truth. It is God's Will that all the brethren, including those that were driven away, be fed and nourished – that's a good work.

How many of us were driven away by harsh ministers who remain in the larger groups? How many of us were disfellowshipped and marked for holding fast to God's Word? We had our names read from the pulpit for the express purpose that the brethren whom we loved would stop speaking to us! We had to look all around – all over – to find like-minded brethren.

The big organizations did not send **search parties** out to look for us. And, sadly, most of the Church of God brethren did not come looking for us either. God knows that many were **driven away** – and it remains that way today.

Ezekiel 34:4 Thus says the Lord God unto the shepherds; ... neither have ye brought again that which was **driven away**, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.

Brethren, I do not believe that we have the prerogative to wash our hands and say, "Let the ministers recover those who were scattered." It is our responsibility to recover our like-minded brethren. Since the apostasy, I do not know of any of the leading ministers of the larger groups who has mounted a concerted effort to recover any of those who they drove away.

Those people are our brothers and sisters – and **pure religion** tells us what we must do. They had left everything behind – home, family, profession, and security – devoting themselves entirely to the service of God's people.

One of the last things **Jesus told** His disciples was to expect that kind of treatment, even from the church rulers and powers that be:

John 16:1-3 These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the assembly places of worship: yes, the time comes that whosoever kills you will think that he does God a service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

Some brethren were resilient and able to bounce back, but to this day, many of the brethren are separated, hiding, scattered and living in trepidation. Many are hurt and fearful of the heavy-handed leaders who abused them and their families—who before God they were sworn to protect and defend.

Some brethren went through really harsh things in childhood at the hands of family or authorities who adversely affected them for the rest of their lives. Other brethren were not strong enough to withstand the assault of the apostasy.

Sadly, in many cases their antagonists were the well-known leaders in high church positions with all those years of training – all the big titles – big cars – big salaries – big reputations – with the red carpet always laid out for them... They were secure in their positions of leadership.

And **not a single one** of those church leaders took a stand for the Truth of God or the weak brethren when the apostasy came. The people of God had no man on earth willing or able to shepherd them in their time of great confusion and oppression. Those trained and leading men should have pulled together in defense of our faith. They should have descended on the office of the impostor, Joseph Tkach, and barred the door – putting him out on the street.

Those leading men's responsibility before God, and the brethren, was to stand strong in the faith. Their responsibility was to stomp out the fires of division and heresy that were sweeping through the church. But, those ministerial leaders lacked the will and fortitude to take a stand.

Where were they when the church was becoming watered down and lukewarm? There were brethren that needed to be rescued, and that is still true to this day. And, so, the true Church brethren are shattered and scattered. Today, too many of the brethren of the Church of God accept our current division as an acceptable **status quo**. But it is not acceptable to Jesus Christ whose strong desire is that His people be one, **not** in corporate organization, but in **Spirit and unity of the faith** (John 17:11).

**In spite** of those leading ministers who wish to maintain a tight rein on all the Church brethren in their organizations – and keep them separated from the other scattered Church brethren, there is a growing **development** among the True Church brethren to **recognize** and **accept** ALL the Church brethren—wherever they are.

It is a nebulous Church web that **recognizes** the scattered brethren who look to God. There are **Prayer Lists** that are being disseminated widely – across artificial church lines. More and more, **Funerals** provide a venue wherein widely divergent brethren are able to traverse manmade restrictions that prohibit solidarity – and come together in Christian fellowship. Even the far reaching **internet** can provide a method for re-establishing the bonds of unity. Good **sermons** are being shared across rigid church lines.

However, some displaced brethren have seemingly disappeared – and need to be sought out! The problem is: Too many members are smug and complacent. The saddest part of all is that most groups today, either openly or subtly, discourage contact with brethren in other groups. This is our time of testing.

Prominent people within God's Church hob-knob among themselves to the exclusion of the **lost and scattered** brethren. The apostasy should have been a wake-up call for all – and yet, many rushed to replicate the practices of a corporate organization that had forgotten to put God and His ways first in their lives.

Jesus rightly predicted that His people would need to be awakened out of their contentment and self-satisfaction:

Revelation 3:17 Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and you do not know that **you are wretched**, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

There are church brethren who are sitting **comfortable** and **content**, while their brothers and sisters in the faith still cower in fear and rejection these many years later. The apostle James warns the Church of having an elevated concept of superiority.

Those brethren who were driven away are considered by the brethren in secure congregations to be the riff-raff, the dregs of church society, the undesirables—all because they did not end up in some of the more acceptable and affluent congregations. It is a fact: Some secure brethren love their own socially acceptable church congregants much more than they love those who were driven away over the years. James' warnings fall on deaf ears today. This is an attitude that God despises:

James 2:1-6 My brethren, you do not have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, if you have respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in old clothes; vs:3 and ye have respect to him that wears fine clothes and say, "Here is a seat of honor," and say to the poor person, Stand aside, or sit there on the floor: vs:4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? vs:5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Has not God **chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him?** vs:6 But ye have despised the poor.

James is not speaking of those who are lacking financially, but those who are poor in spirit – lacking the connections and acceptance of the larger groups. It is a **lame excuse** to say the scattered brethren could have found their way back if they really wanted to. Do we possess the attitude of forgiveness and acceptance that the Father of the prodigal son exhibits (Luke 15:24)?

SPS: There is a need for Church brethren to **seek** after that **one lost sheep** – not the ninety-nine who are safe. God intends that His people fellowship together – because there is a **vulnerability** when members are not protected.

Jesus says, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. Seeking the fellowship of the scattered brethren is a message that applies to **every member**.

The Church of God has been remiss in rescuing the lost sheep. Jesus said in the Parable of the Lost Sheep:

Matthew 18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 18:11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

Matthew 18:12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goes into the mountains, and seeks that which is gone astray?

Matthew 18:13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

Matthew 18:14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

God cares for every last one of His sheep.

Brethren, think of God's true people in a universal setting:

John 10:15 As the Father knows me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

John 10:16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be **one fold**, and one shepherd.

"One fold" – that sure does not represent the Church today! Does it? Jesus is telling us – not some ministry somewhere – that it is our responsibility to locate and to return those brethren who have been hurt and driven away.

Luke 15:4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

Luke 15:5 And when he hath found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

Luke 15:6 And when he cometh home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

Luke 15:7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Too many brethren do not take this admonishment seriously enough. It is easy to get into a rut – and forget **pure religion**, or the weightier matters of the Law – Justice, mercifulness, faithfulness and love of the brethren (Matthew 23:23).

Jesus Christ also makes it clear that interpretation of prophecy is not the number one priority of a true Christian. Sure, God's prophecies are meant to inform, to comfort, and to encourage us.

Prophecy is given for our assurance of what will shortly come to pass – not so that we will spend all of our energies trying to figure out the "when, where, and how." Having prophetic understanding, in and of itself, does not qualify us for the Kingdom or get us into the place of safety.

I believe that when we **reach out** to a lost brother or sister in Christ – God rejoices more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. That is a ticket to His Kingdom.

We have seen the kind of **unity and oneness** Jesus Christ indicates we should have with all members - everywhere. Without an unseen hand from somewhere – or a great charismatic leader literally ushering various church leaders into a collective enterprise – it falls to the **individual members** to fulfill the role of the end-time Church to become one in unity. The biblical evidence is that God's Will is for **individual members** of the Body of Christ to work together to create a unity that transcends all obstacles.

There are **two kinds** of people in God's Church. There are the **scattered** and oppressed. And then there are those who are **well organized** and loyal to their groups.

Brethren, did you ever stop and consider **what kind** of church people will be serving in the Millennium with Jesus Christ?

Again, there are two kinds of people in the Church. There are those who are catered to - served - pampered - invited to everything special... And then, there are those who actually visit the sick in hospitals and old aged facilities. Bring them some flowers or a snack. They call to check on you and to see if you need anything They invite people over. They do the travelling... They go out of their way to make things go smoothly. They literally send cards, call, email and send small gifts. They encourage, forgive, reconcile, and help you in many different ways.

When you put the **two kinds** of church people together in a congregation - everything runs fairly **smoothly**.

Almost no one notices who is doing all the **giving** and who is doing all the **receiving**. Those being served and waited on hand and foot are so used to it - they find it completely expected and natural. They receive the praise, the accolades and the honor - and they think, "rightly so," "Who better than me."

Luke 17:1 Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!

Luke 17:2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

Luke 17:3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

Luke 17:4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

Luke 17:5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

Luke 17:6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamore tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

### **Unworthy Servants**

Luke 17:7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

Luke 17:8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready my supper wherewith I may eat, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?

Luke 17:9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I do not think so.

Luke 17:10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

Witch of those **two kinds** of people will Jesus Christ pick to work with Him in the Millennium? The upper crust of Church society think that they will be naturally to shoo-ins - because they've received the privileges all their life.

Luke 10:30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

Luke 10:31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

Luke 10:32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

Luke 10:33 But a certain Samaritan [Jesus purposefully chose someone who was not **socially acceptable** at all], as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

Luke 10:34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

Luke 10:35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two day's wages, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever you spend more than that, put it on my tab and when I come again, I will repay thee.

Jesus then asks us a very important question – which kind of Christian are you?

Luke 10:36 Which now of these three, think thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?

Luke 10:37 And he said, He that shewed **mercy** on him. Then said Jesus unto him, **Go, and do thou likewise.**

Our salvation depends – **not** on our being in the right group – but on how we relate to one another. Jesus could not have made it clearer when He gave us the definition of Christian love.

Matthew 25:40, 45 Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

Everyone will possess his **own personal record** of **evidence** (or the **lack** thereof) which will be presented to Jesus Christ on His judgment seat. Jesus is not going to ask us how big our group was where we attended, but He will ask us, "did you diligently seek after the 1/99?"

We need to respect our brothers and sisters for who they are, even if they seem to be stumbling just a little at the moment. When any one of God's children is unwilling to get together or to confer with other Christians, it is division – and it is wrong. Division in the church is as real today as it was in the first century. Let us take the initiative to show ourselves friendly.

Hebrews 10:24-25 Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 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.

Malachi 3:16 Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name.

End: One in Ninety-nine