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### **WE MUST ENDURE TO THE END**

Back in 1963, the year after I finished high school, I first heard the World Tomorrow radio broadcast with Mr. Herbert Armstrong. I wrote for the Plain Truth Magazine, and 4 years later I started attending Ambassador College in Bricket Wood, England, where I then also observed my 1st Feast of Tabernacles.

**That was 58 years ago.**

Now I have observed my 59th Feast of Tabernacles.

When I arrived at Ambassador College in Bricket Wood, Mr. Armstrong was there, and he was already 75 years old. He lived another almost 19 years. And during those years in the 1960s and 70s and into the early 80s the whole Church of God was **looking forward to the 2nd coming** of Jesus Christ. While the Church didn't set any specific date for Christ's return, **we hoped that it would be soon**, always hoping for within a decade or two.

But the years passed and Jesus Christ had not returned. And then Mr. Armstrong died, and a new leadership took control of the Church's affairs. While the new administration changed many of the Church's teachings, and replaced those teachings with heretical beliefs, **we continued to hope** that Jesus Christ would return soon.

The years and the decades kept passing, but Jesus Christ has still not yet returned. With the passage of time the Church has splintered and scattered in different directions, as far as beliefs and teachings are concerned. We are now divided into numerous different organizations and factions, all tracing their roots back to the time when Mr. Herbert Armstrong was the undisputed human leader of the Church.

Next month it will be **40 years since Mr. Armstrong died**. And Jesus Christ will still not have returned by next month. It is now more than 60 years ago that I began to listen to Mr. Armstrong on the radio, talking about the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ. Back then Mr. Armstrong himself **hoped** to live up to the time of Christ's return. But that was not to be by a long shot.

Now Mr. Armstrong was no different from the apostles in the 1st century, and from the leaders of the Church throughout the ages. **The leaders in the Church of God have always looked for and hoped for a 2nd coming of Jesus Christ during their own lifetime.** That hope gave them the strength to face harsh tests and trials. And towards the end of their lives they all came to understand that Jesus Christ's 2nd coming was still off in the future, that it was not for them to live up to the 2nd coming.

We have been called to look forward to the time when Jesus Christ will rule this Earth. **We have been called to hope for a speedy return of Jesus Christ**, to put an end to all the evils and perversions in our present world. That's what Jesus Christ has instructed us to pray for.

Jesus Christ told us to pray "**Your Kingdom come**". We are to pray that God's will may be done here on earth, even as right now God's will is being done "in heaven" (see Matthew 6:9-10). These instructions are to focus our minds on **the things God wants us to hope for**.

Jesus Christ did **not** mean that we are to pray "Father, please let your Kingdom come **1000 years from now**"! When Jesus Christ gave these instructions regarding things to pray for to His disciples in Matthew chapter 6, He Himself knew full well that it would still be in excess of 1900 years before God's Kingdom "would come". Yet Christ instructed His followers to pray with **the expectation** that God's Kingdom would come **in their lifetime**.

Think about that!

Jesus Christ, the God who knew that He would not return for more than 1900 years, told His closest followers to pray with the expectation that His return would be in their lifetime. Why did Jesus Christ do that?

In the 1st century the Church leaders seriously expected the 2nd coming to be quite soon. And so within a few weeks after Jesus Christ's resurrection they asked:

When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, **will You at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?** (Acts 1:6)

Jesus Christ **did not dispel their wrong expectations**. He didn't tell them something like "no, it is still more than 1900 years from now, before I'll return". He could (theoretically) have said something like that without committing to a specific year for His return. But He didn't do that! Jesus Christ **deliberately kept them in the dark** regarding the time for His return. And so He said:

And He said unto them, **It is not for you to know the times or the seasons**, which the Father has put in His own power. (Acts 1:7)

This statement "it is not for you to know" **did not remove their false expectation**, that Christ's return would be soon, in their own lifetime. And Christ's statement wasn't intended to remove their false expectation. It was intended to tell them not to try to guess or figure out when His return would be.

**Christ's statement is still true for the Church of God today**, and it has always been true, that "**it is not for us to know**" when Jesus Christ will return.

To be clear: This is **an instruction** for us in God's Church **not to set dates** for anything that is to

happen in the future. **Every prediction** for when Jesus Christ will return **has always been wrong**. And if anyone makes any predictions right now, those predictions will also be wrong.

However, this is **not an instruction to stop us hoping** for a soon return of Jesus Christ. This is not an instruction for us instead to relegate the 2nd coming to the distant future.

We need to clearly distinguish between two things: **not setting any dates** for specific prophesied events on the one hand, and on the other hand never stopping from **focusing our own minds on a soon return** of Jesus Christ.

These two things are not the same thing.

**Set dates are impersonal and objective.** Dates that have been set don't depend on how long you will live or I will live. Dates are fixed points in time, independent of what happens where and when. All setting of dates will **always** be **wrong**. Why? Because God the Father has not revealed the decisions He will make regarding the timing of Christ's return.

**Hoping for Christ's return to be soon**, on the other hand, is very **personal** and very **subjective**. There is nothing objective about such a hope. That hope is based on how our own minds function. That hope will determine our motivation for **how we will conduct our lives**. It will determine the level of our commitment to God. And that is why it is important that we always hope for a 2nd coming in the near future. Such a hope increases our chances of staying faithful until we die.

where God can then use them as laborers. God does not force anyone to repent.

The harvest depends on the number of good laborers that can be used to bring in the harvest. (As an aside, during the millennium Jesus Christ will have 144000 "laborers" and that means that then a huge harvest can be brought in. But in this age the number of laborers has always been "few".) So Jesus Christ then gave us the following instruction:

Pray you therefore the Lord of the harvest, **that He will send forth laborers** into His harvest. (Matthew 9:38)

We are to pray that God will send more "laborers" to bring in the harvest. More laborers means that God's target of 144000 can be achieved more quickly.

As a matter of interest, we might look at the Greek text for "that He will send forth laborers", which is "**hopos ekbale ergatas**". The important Greek word in our context is "**ekbale**". This is the 2nd aorist active subjunctive of the verb "ekballo".

This verb refers to forcefully casting out or driving out something. It implies the use of force. And the

subjunctive mood means that this may or may not happen. In our context in Matthew 9:38 it means that we are to ask God the Father to **force more laborers to bring in the harvest**. But the subjunctive mood tells us that **this may or may not happen**. It depends on how fervently we approach God and ask for this to be done. **We have to hope** that God will do this ... force more laborers into the harvest. And if God does that, then the end-time events will start sooner than if the number of laborers is not increased. This is an important responsibility Jesus Christ has bestowed on us in this verse.

Could it be that we don't do this nearly often enough ... ask God to force **more laborers** to work in bringing in the harvest?

Hope is extremely important. Paul ranked hope as one of the top three essential attributes. While hope is not the greatest, it is among the top three.

And now abides faith, **hope**, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

However, our hope must have the correct focus. We can hope for many things. But the primary things we are to hope for must always be connected to the establishment of God's Kingdom here on earth.

**If in this life only we have hope in Christ**, we are of all men most miserable. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

We have to hope for things beyond this present life.

For **we** through the Spirit **wait for the hope of righteousness** by faith. (Galatians 5:5)

For **the hope which is laid up for you in heaven**, whereof you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; (Colossians 1:5)

"The hope" that is laid up for us in heaven is "**the expectation of immortal life in God's Family**". That hope is based on what God has told us in the Bible. If we fulfill our part, to freely submit our minds to God's will, then we can have faith in God's promise to resurrect us to immortal life. That's what Paul wrote to Titus.

**In hope of eternal life**, which God, who cannot lie, promised before this present age (Greek "aionion") began; (Titus 1:2)

The things we hope for are the things we look forward to, the things we anticipate happening. We look forward to God giving us immortal life. Here faith and hope clearly overlap. The Apostle Peter made the same point.

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, **and hope to the end** (Greek = completely) for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (1 Peter 1:13)

It is **our fervent hope** to be changed into immortal spirit beings at the time of Christ's 2nd coming that **provides the determination** to endure to the end. Our hope helps us to grasp what is at stake for us ... future immortality. That is the hope of our calling.

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as **you are called in one hope of your calling**;*  
(Ephesians 4:4)

The hope is immortal life.

And that hope should stir us up to endure to the end, when we are faced with difficult tests and trials.

So this was **my 59th Feast** of Tabernacles. This feast looks forward to the time when Jesus Christ will be ruling this whole earth, and the 144000 in the 1st resurrection will be assisting Jesus Christ, and ruling with Him.

At my 1st Feast of Tabernacles I was looking forward to a “soon” return of Jesus Christ. 58 years later I **am still looking forward to a “soon” 2nd coming** and the establishment of God's Government over this earth. And it doesn't matter to me how many more years may pass before Jesus Christ returns. It doesn't matter to me whether or not I die before Christ returns. I am in the sunset years of my life, and I know that my years are numbered. And that's fine with me. I can hope to live up to the time of Christ's return, but if I die before Christ returns that doesn't change anything. **For me the return of Jesus Christ is, and has always been, “soon”**. I am not ignorant of the point the Apostle Peter made.

But, beloved, **be not ignorant** of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and **a thousand years as one day**. (2 Peter 3:8)

Before God my whole lifetime is so short; it's like a vanishing vapor. And the conviction that Jesus Christ's return is soon gives me a strong motivation to endure to the end. For the apostles Peter and Paul and James and John Jesus Christ's 2nd coming is “soon” because back then they only had a few decades of life left. And **in the next instant of their awareness**, though it will be almost 2000 years later, **they will witness the return of Jesus Christ**.

The strong hope of the resurrection must also motivate us to endure to the end.

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