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TWO DIFFERENT CAUSES OF DIVISIONS AMONGST GOD'S PEOPLE

Recently a friend of mine made a very interesting observation, one I myself had not considered, but which I could immediately recognize as valid, because in one sense the two points he made are really the opposite sides of the same coin. The observation was this:

There are two different causes for divisions and scattering amongst God's people. ONE CAUSE for God's people being scattered is "DISOBEDIENCE AND SIN". And ANOTHER CAUSE for God's people being scattered is "OBEDIENCE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS".

Let's briefly examine both these causes.

SCATTERING DUE TO DISOBEDIENCE AND SIN

There are many Scriptures that show that one of the penalties for sins is that we would be scattered and divided. Starting in Genesis, we see that God imposed scattering upon the tribes of Simeon and Levi as a penalty for their sins.

Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. (Genesis 49:7 AV)

Even before then God had scattered humanity for their sins at the building of the tower of Babel (see Genesis 11:9).

In the two chapters that spell out blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (i.e. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28) we again see that scattering is a penalty for sins.

And I WILL SCATTER YOU among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. (Leviticus 26:33 AV)

And the LORD SHALL SCATTER THEE among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. (Deuteronomy 28:64 AV)

While these statements were addressed to the physical nations of Israel, it should be clear that scattering and divisions are a penalty for sins. Note another statement Moses made in speaking for God:

I said, I WOULD SCATTER THEM into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: (Deuteronomy 32:26 AV)

Or consider this statement Nehemiah made in his prayer:

Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I WILL SCATTER YOU abroad among the nations: (Nehemiah 1:8 AV)

There are many other Scriptures that reinforce this point that divisions and scattering are one of the penalties for sins.

A Scripture we have frequently turned to in recent years is Daniel 12:7, which shows that "the power of the holy people (i.e. God's Church) would be scattered", and this is also in the context of this being a penalty for transgressions.

And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished TO SCATTER THE POWER OF THE HOLY PEOPLE, all these things shall be finished. (Daniel 12:7 AV)

And so it has been understood for a long time that scattering is a penalty for disobedience and for sin.

SCATTERING DUE TO OBEDIENCE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

This has also been understood for a long time, though we have seldom viewed these two opposing causes in the same context. It seems that when we have focused on one of these causes, then the other cause would never enter our minds within that same context.

Let's notice some points.

When we came to repentance and conversion, this caused divisions between us and friends and family in all too many cases. In many cases we were rejected as "religious fanatics" by former friends and acquaintances, and all too often even by some parts of our families. After all, Jesus Christ had said very clearly:

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. (Matthew 10:35-36 AV)

The Book of Acts records that the newly-founded Church was soon scattered because of severe opposition from the Jews.

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and THEY WERE ALL SCATTERED ABROAD throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. (Acts 8:1 AV)

Therefore they that WERE SCATTERED ABROAD went every where preaching the word. (Acts 8:4 AV)

Obedience to God commonly causes divisions between us and people in the world. Paul stated very clearly:

Because the carnal mind is ENMITY AGAINST GOD: for it is not subject to the law of God,

neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. (Romans 8:7-9 AV)

That "enmity" of the carnal mind is very often directed at the people who represent God's way of life. Thus, frequently that enmity against God will end up being directed against us.

Coming to our recent history:

When pagan teachings entered the Worldwide Church of God, then we who wanted to hold fast to the true teachings of the Bible WERE SCATTERED. We were scattered because of our determination to hold fast to the truth. I myself did not understand this at the time (around 1994 to 1995), and so I tried my best to resist being scattered away from what I considered to be the organization representing God's Church. Yet THE SCATTERING WAS INEVITABLE in the face of an endless stream of false teachings being introduced ... and my ignorant attempts to stem the tide were utterly futile, as well as being misguided. I didn't really understand what was happening to the Church, that those who wanted to obey God were being scattered away from the organization that promoted heretical teachings.

So those who held fast to the truth LEFT the organization and were scattered. Those who accepted the heresies that were being introduced stayed behind ... only to later themselves ALSO overwhelmingly be scattered back into Protestantism. [From what I have been able to glean, it seems that, in very general terms, approximately one quarter left the Worldwide Church of God to be able to hold fast to the truth, another approximately one quarter are now STILL nominally in the Worldwide Church of God ... and about ONE HALF have gone either into other Protestant denominations, or they have left religion altogether.]

However, once we left the Worldwide Church of God in order to be able to hold fast to the truth, that was not the end of our scattering. No, even since leaving Worldwide the scattering has continued unabated. TODAY those who have left Worldwide are FAR MORE SCATTERED than we were 5 years ago, in 1995. Why has that happened?

THE CYCLE IS REPEATING ITSELF AGAIN

We have gone back to the first reason for scattering ... today we are STILL being scattered because of unrighteousness and sins. What did the Apostle James say?

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? (James 4:1 AV)

Surely THE PRINCIPLE that James was referring to must apply to all of us today, who have left Worldwide and who cannot get along with all the others who left Worldwide for exactly the same reasons we left! We don't really like to refer to this Scripture, do we? Because even as we may want to apply it to some of the other splinter-groups that have come out of Worldwide, even so it must surely also apply to US OURSELVES, whichever group we may happen to be a part of, since WE (whoever we are!) aren't getting along with the other groups either, are we? So we all just prefer not to focus on James 4:1, and we hope that others won't either.

Since 1995 we have continued to be scattered because of sins. We can't agree because in some cases we want prestige or power or preeminence or recognition. It has been said on more than one occasion that the divisions are really amongst the ministry, and that if it wasn't for a divided ministry, then all of God's people would be able to be together. While that is very likely somewhat of an overstatement, there

is nevertheless a lot of truth in it. In the past few years there have also developed a number of doctrinal differences amongst the various groups that have come out of Worldwide.

Now let's look at one specific claim that has been made repeatedly in recent times. That claim is about the Jewish calendar. It has been claimed:

"THE JEWISH CALENDAR HAS GIVEN US UNITY! ALL OF THESE OTHER CALENDAR PROPOSALS ONLY CAUSE DIVISIONS AND FURTHER SCATTERING!"

THE CALENDAR QUESTION AND "SCATTERING"

There are those leaders who have refused point blank to acknowledge any of the problems that are inherent in the present Jewish calendar. They are simply not willing to face up to the SCRIPTURAL requirements for a correct calendar, which scriptural requirements the present Jewish calendar very clearly and irrefutably violates. They claim that this examination of the calendar only causes divisions. And in that they are to a degree correct.

However, it is important to understand THE REASONS for the divisions and the scattering that is being caused by the calendar. Are we in this case being divided and scattered because of obedience to God, or are we being divided because of disobedience to God?

1) Those who have carefully examined exactly how the present Jewish calendar VIOLATES clear biblical instructions and intentions are in the process of being divided from, and scattered from, the churches of God that have come out of Worldwide. THE REASON for this scattering is identical to the reason for which we originally came out of Worldwide ... to be able to apply ALL the Scriptures in our lives. The reason for this division is a matter of OBEDIENCE to God's instructions in the Bible.

2) Those who refuse to face up to the obvious flaws in the Jewish calendar, when it is compared to the Word of God, will FOR THE TIME BEING appear to not be scattered. But just as surely as those who accepted the heresies in Worldwide and remained there for a short time, and were THEN ALSO SCATTERED, so likewise it is INEVITABLE that those who hold fast to the Jewish calendar AFTER ITS FLAWS HAVE BEEN SHOUTED OUT FROM THE ROOFTOPS will then ALSO BE SCATTERED! But their scattering will be "BY" God; it will NOT be "TOWARDS" God! Their scattering will be an obvious penalty from God ... even as our present continuing scattering is an OBVIOUS "penalty from God", because we have behaved like the shepherds of Ezekiel 34 and of Jeremiah 23. The reason for this scattering will be the refusal to face up to clear biblical statements and principles that apply to the calendar.

Let's understand one thing very clearly!

As long as we refuse to face up to the ways in which the present Jewish calendar TRANSGRESSES biblical instructions and intentions, so long the calendar will CONTINUE to divide and to scatter God's people! Those who recognize its violations of God's instructions will be scattered for obedience and for righteousness (i.e. for trying to keep all of God's commands and laws). Those who continue to cling to the Jewish calendar will subsequently ALSO be scattered, but for disobedience and for sin.

The scattering that is even now going on is going to continue UNLESS we openly and squarely face up to the ways in which the Jewish calendar transgresses biblical instructions. Unless we respond with the attitude of Phinehas (i.e. with zeal and commitment) ...

And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. (Numbers 25:7-11 AV)

... our divisions will continue unabated!

God said that Phinehas ... "turned away My wrath". Can we not see from the pathetic struggles amongst ourselves that "WRATH FROM GOD" has been upon us? Can we not see that this is God's way of telling us that we need to make SOME CHANGES SOMEWHERE? Can we not see that the Jewish calendar with its OBVIOUS flaws is an obvious candidate to cause us to start making some changes? Have we not been hit hard enough yet? How hard does God have to hit us before it dawns on us to ask: "What is there that God wants us to change?"

Let's understand that we are ALL being "hit" by God! EVERY GROUP that has come out of Worldwide has been hit by scattering and by divisions! Therefore it follows that what God is telling us to change must be something that is COMMON TO ALL THESE GROUPS ... since all the groups are being chastised by God in exactly the same way.

Solomon stated a very clear principle in the Book of Proverbs. It is:

When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. (Proverbs 16:7 AV)

Never mind our enemies, since leaving Worldwide we have not even been "at peace" with those who are supposed to be our brethren and our friends! The inescapable conclusion is simply that our ways have NOT been pleasing to God! And since there isn't ANY group that has had an uninterrupted 30% growth per year for the past few years (the kind of growth that God gave to Mr. Armstrong's efforts for about 35 years), it follows that God is showing us that there is something that He wants ALL the groups to change!

Thus far all the major groups are "united" in adhering to the present Jewish calendar. But unity in something that violates biblical instructions is not "righteous unity"; and anything that is not righteous unity will sooner or later crumble into disunity and scattering. And of course, the scattering is already taking place all around us. It reminds me of the huge glaciers that jut out into the ocean in Alaska (e.g. the Mears Glacier): everything seems calm until suddenly and without any warning a huge piece of ice just breaks off and crashes into the water. Then everything is calm for a while until at some other point the same thing happens again ... and again ... and again.

The churches that have come out of Worldwide have been like that. Everything seems to be going along just fine, and then suddenly a huge piece just breaks off one of these churches. Then everything is calm again, until suddenly a huge chunk breaks off one of the other churches, and so on it goes. I believe that, as long as we don't all face up to the fact that God wants us to change away from the Jewish calendar with its violations of biblical instructions, this process of breaking off and scattering will continue. But this scattering is a penalty for disobedience; it is not a scattering for righteousness.

So when we say that "the calendar only causes divisions and scattering", we should recognize that this is the case for TWO different and diametrically opposite reasons:

1) Those who have examined the Jewish calendar against the standard of the Bible and found it to be in violation of biblical requirements are being scattered "for obedience and for righteousness", for a desire to uphold biblical standards, rather than to go along with unbiblical human traditions.

2) Those who cling to the Jewish calendar, whether they have actually examined its problems or not, are also going to be scattered (as is taking place right now all around us), but for disobedience and for unrighteousness, for a refusal to acknowledge the calendar requirements God chose to record in His Word.

The claim that "the use of the Jewish calendar has always been a unifying factor for the Church of God" is clearly incorrect. Never in the past 100 years has the Church of God been more divided and scattered than it is today. The very churches that STILL hold fast to the Jewish calendar are **DIVIDED AND SCATTERED AWAY FROM ONE ANOTHER!** The fact that they all hold to the Jewish calendar has done **NOTHING** to prevent them from fragmenting and scattering away from the other churches which also still adhere to the Jewish calendar.

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