

Just What do You Mean — the WORK OF GOD?

by Jamie McNab

Those who have been around the Churches of God for any length of time can often be heard talking about the WORK OF GOD. But do we always *understand* what we mean by this phrase?

Since the demise of the Worldwide Church of God as a repository of Truth, brethren have been scattered into literally hundreds of groups and organisations. Some claim to be the "only true church". Others claim that they are the only group "doing the Work of God". Leaders point to colour magazines, circulation lists, booklets, TV and radio programmes and other signs that "prove WE are doing the Work of God".

Some brethren actually *measure* the various groups by how BIG and "successful" their publications and radio programmes are. The yardstick by which they measure is: "The Work of God is the preaching of the gospel to the world, therefore I need to find a group who publish lots of magazines, and have a powerful broadcast—because that is *the evidence* that they are doing THE WORK OF GOD".

But just what IS the Work of God? What exactly is God working at? What is He DOING today? And what do WE need to be doing about it?

GOD'S WORK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Even in the very beginning of the Bible, we see God AT WORK. In Genesis 1 we read the details of how God RENEWED THE FACE OF THE EARTH. The very CREATION itself was the THE WORK OF GOD at that time! Genesis 2:2-3 tells us that "on the seventh day God ended HIS WORK which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all HIS WORK which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all HIS WORK which God created and made".

And notice the Work of God did not consist of magazines or TV broadcasts!

God's Work over His creation *continues today*. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus is "UPHOLDING ALL THINGS by the word of his power...". Moffatt translates verse 3 as "*sustains the universe*"!

We can certainly agree that sustaining the Universe is *the Work of God*! No man can claim *that* responsibility!

As we read through the book of Genesis we see God AT WORK on many occasions. We see Him selecting and calling Abram. And note what God says to Abram, "And I will MAKE OF THEE a great nation, and I will bless thee, and MAKE thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing", Genesis 12:2. The promises of *race and grace* are repeated to Isaac and Jacob, and God has BEEN WORKING for the past nearly 4,000 years to bring His promises to pass. Mr Herbert Armstrong's most popular book, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, documents the WORK OF GOD in this regard.

In Exodus we find more details of the WORK OF GOD with the descendants of Abraham, as God *works* to bring down the nation of Egypt, and delivers the Israelites into the Promised Land.

And still no magazines or TV broadcasts! Yet the WORK OF GOD continues, exactly according to God's master plan.

Despite the WORK OF GOD, Israel repeatedly strayed into idolatry and sin — following the ways of the world around them. God sent His prophets time and time again TO WARN the people of their iniquities, but to no avail. Israel went into captivity to Assyria, then 120 years later Judah was conquered by Babylon. Jerusalem and the Temple of God were totally destroyed.

We then find another facet of the "work of God" in the book of Ezra — the rebuilding of the Temple.

"Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven ... HATH CHARGED ME to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ...Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up TO BUILD the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem", Ezra 1:2,5.

Chapter 2, verses 68-69 continues: "And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at

Jerusalem, *offered freely* for the house of God to set it up in his place: They gave after their ability unto the treasure of THE WORK...".

Here we see the people *giving offerings* for THE WORK — in this case, *the work* was the building of the Temple of God, which was carried out as a *direct command* from God via Cyrus. Ezra 5:1-2 tells us that it was during this time that Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the people, and that Zerubbabel and Joshua "*began to build* the house of God which is at Jerusalem".

Perhaps we can notice an important distinction here. Zerubbabel and Joshua and the other Jews in Jerusalem were certainly working FOR GOD. They were carrying out work that GOD wanted doing. God had given a *commission* to King Cyrus, and the Jews were helping to carry it out. But in reality, the construction of the Temple was more the WORK OF GOD'S PEOPLE, rather than the actual work of GOD HIMSELF.

In Haggai 1:7-8, 14 we read how, "... the LORD *stirred up* the spirit of Zerubbabel ... and the spirit of Joshua ... and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and DID WORK in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God".

Here we can see the WORK OF GOD was in essence the STIRRING UP of the people — working on their hearts and minds — something only GOD could do. Then *the work of the people* was to physically construct the Temple.

THE WORK OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we see Jesus at work we know that we are seeing THE WORK OF GOD being carried out. The gospels give us many details of Jesus at work. Consider Matthew 9:35-38:

"And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, TEACHING in their synagogues, and PREACHING the gospel of the kingdom, AND HEALING every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he *will send forth labourers* into his harvest".

Here we see that the WORK OF GOD was to teach ... to preach ... and to heal. The WORK OF GOD was also *to send forth* labourers — or WORKERS — to help get the job done and accomplish His purpose. Notice that the labourers do NOT *send themselves* forth! It is GOD who chooses and commissions HIS labourers. The next chapter of Matthew makes plain the reason WHY. We read in Matthew 10:1, "And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he GAVE THEM POWER against unclean spirits, to *cast them out*, and to *heal* all manner of sickness and all manner of disease". God gives HIS POWER — to accomplish HIS WORK — to those whom *He chooses* and commissions. That power — to do good — is not given to those who appoint themselves.

The GREAT COMMISSION in Matthew 28:19-20 adds more to the picture.

"Go ye therefore, and TEACH all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: TEACHING them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world". Most modern translations give the first part of verse 19 as, "Go therefore and MAKE DISCIPLES of all the nations...".

This *great commission* is clearly given TO THE CHURCH. It could be described as the WORK OF THE CHURCH. It is *the church* that goes out and spreads the Word ... that seeks to TEACH the Truth to those who are being called by God, and to help them grow in knowledge and understanding. In recent years the church has powerfully used the modern media of radio, TV and the publication of books, booklets and magazines, to assist it in spreading the Word, and in feeding those called by God.

God is very much involved in how the church operates and functions. In Ephesians 4:11-13 we read:

"And HE GAVE some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; [Why?] FOR THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS, for the work of the ministry, *for the edifying* of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ".

These verses begin to make very clear what is the *REAL* WORK OF GOD. Whilst *the church* can publish magazines and support a radio or TV broadcast, it is the WORK OF GOD *to call* individuals at this time, to bring them to repentance, *to work* with them, and ultimately to instil His

perfect, holy RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER in them... till they reach the STATURE OF JESUS CHRIST!

NO MAN can create perfect character in himself or any other. That requires the active hands-on involvement of the Creator God. Let's remind ourselves of God's VERY PURPOSE as shown in Genesis 1:26: "And God said, Let us make man in OUR IMAGE, after OUR LIKENESS".

GOD'S PURPOSE IS TO REPRODUCE HIMSELF. THIS IS THE *TRUE WORK OF GOD!* All that God has done from Genesis 1 onwards, the whole history of Israel and Judah, the very purpose of the church, and the reason for the ministry, is to bring to pass His GREAT WORK of creating a Universe-ruling holy family.

Phillipians 2:13 tells us: "For it *is God* which WORKETH IN YOU both to will and to do of his good pleasure", and in I Thessalonians 3:11-13 we read:

"And the LORD MAKE YOU to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end HE MAY STABLISH your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints".

It is God who must work IN US, changing and converting our hearts and minds, transforming us into the image of His son Jesus Christ. This work cannot be done by any man, or by the church. It is the WORK OF GOD.

Hebrews 13:20-21 tells us:

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus ... MAKE YOU PERFECT in every good work to do his will, WORKING IN YOU that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ". We see that God is *at work* in us.

In Ephesians 5:25-27 Paul tells us that Jesus loves His church — the called out ones — and WORKS to "sanctify and cleanse" the church and to "present it to Himself a glorious church ... holy and without blemish".

In the well-known passage in John 15 we see more of how the Father is AT WORK in the called-out ones:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is THE HUSBANDMAN [a husbandman is a WORKER!]. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit HE TAKETH AWAY: and every branch that beareth fruit, HE PURGETH it, that it may bring forth more fruit ... I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: *for without me ye can do nothing*" (verses 1-2,5).

It should be clear that the WORK OF GOD is the work that *ONLY GOD* can do — the actual formation of holy, righteous character in His future sons and daughters. As Mr Herbert Armstrong described it in Chapter 5 of *The Incredible Human Potential* (page 60, hardback):

"Now came the *CROWNING PINNACLE* of even God's unmatched creative POWER! Now came the very zenith of all Divine accomplishment! Now came a project so *incredulously transcendently AWESOME* it is hard for the human mind to grasp ... this incredibly AWESOME feat of *reproducing Himself*".

This is the greatest Work of all eternity! This is the WORK OF GOD. God is WORKING to bring many sons and daughters *to glory*!

The purpose of the church is NOT to go out and try to CONVERT THE WORLD. The purpose of the church is not to become a "publishing company" or a "broadcasting agency". The success of the people of God will NOT be measured by how many magazines or TV programmes they produce. The purpose of the church is to work WITH GOD—to be CO-WORKERS, as Mr Armstrong used to say. And to achieve God's primary purpose *at this time* means FEEDING THE SHEEP — WARNING THE PEOPLE OF GOD OF THE DANGERS OF DECEPTION — HELPING THE CALLED-OUT ONES TO HOLD FAST until the return of Christ.

Developing holy righteous character TAKES TIME — a great deal of time. Many of us who have been called for twenty, thirty or more years, know we still have A LOT of growing in grace and knowledge to do. There just ISN'T THE TIME NOW for God to start calling many *tens of thousands* to repentance and to START their Christian lives. God sent a messenger over sixty years ago to do that! God raised up *the Philadelphia era* of His church to support that commission of carrying a message to the world and bringing many into the knowledge of the Truth. As is now clear to us all, that particular phase of the WORK OF THE CHURCH is over.

God's urgent focus NOW — as expressed by Mr Armstrong at the end of his life — is to GET THE CHURCH *READY*! The WORK OF GOD is to put His

perfect character into each one of us. Let's make sure that on a daily basis we yield and respond to the WORK OF GOD – and *GET READY!*