

Are We in the Last Days of the Church Age? Part 1

By Charles Feinberg

This is a prophetic message by Dr. Charles Lee Feinberg, dean of Talbot Theological Seminary in La Mirada, California on the subject "Are we in the last days of the church age?" The subject is are we in the last days of the church age. Now we must be very careful friends when we talk along prophetic lines that we do not misuse terms or use terms with other meanings than those indicated in the word of God. For instance, when we speak of last days of an age, there are always those who think we are speaking of the end of the world. Nowhere in the Old Testament or the New Testament do we find the words "end of the world." I know many think it's there in Matthew 28 verse 20, "but lo I am with you always even to the end the full end of the age," it's not the word cosmos or [inaudible] the word for world in Greek. It is the word [inaudible] end of the age. So we are not speaking of the end of the world when we are dealing with the theme are we in the last days of the church age. Wherever end of the world is found in translations, the proper rendering is end of the age.

Nor are we speaking of the end of the church. The church is that heavenly group called out from unbelieving Jews and unbelieving gentiles. It's a group that has been called out of the unsaved in response of the gospel they have reposed faith in Christ and they have become the body of our lord, the spiritual mystical body of our lord. That's the heavenly called the church. It will never have, it can never have an end since it is inseparably united to the lord Jesus Christ, the head and lord of the church. There is not an end of the church. There may be an end of the pilgrimage of the church on earth before she goes to heaven, but we are not speaking of the end of the church

any more than we are speaking of the end of the world. However we are speaking and that very definitely of the end of the church age. You see ages have beginnings and ends.

With your bible before you, turn with me to the book of Hebrews an open letter in the bible to the Hebrews, letter to the Jews. In the first chapter of Hebrews, in the second verse we read that it's the same God, verse one, who had sundry times and in diverse manners spoke in time past under the fathers under the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son whom had appointed heir of all things by whom also made the worlds, and if you have a bible with a good margin reference there, for instance in your new Scofield in page 1311, the margin reads literally 'ages.' By whom, it's by Christ that God made the ages. The age brackets and all that goes into them. There are ages that have beginnings, and ages that have an end. There was an age that began with Adam and then ended. An age that began with Noah and then ended. An age that began with Abraham and then ended. One with Moses and then it ended. Ages have beginnings and ends. We are speaking indeed we are of the end of church age when we are talking about are we in the last days of the church age.

May I make a very vital distinction which will keep you clear I trust in prophetic matters through all your future study and that is a vital line of demarcation between last days for Israel and the last days of the church age. Now the last days for Israel are not the last days of the church age. The last days for Israel are those of the end of Daniel's prophesied time, the end of the tribulation, the end of Israel's agony, that is indicated, that period the last days for Israel. Messianic times are entered upon after that tribulation time just as in Isaiah 2:1-4, it shall be in the latter days the mountain of the house of the lord shall be established on the top of the

mountains and be exalted above the hills and so on and many nations shall come and flow onto it. The last days for Israel are not the last days of the church age. The last days of the church age are chronologically at the end of that period which began at Pentecost. And the end of the church age comes before the end of Israel's last days, even though Israel's age began before the church age began. It's just so in the wisdom and plan and program of God. The church age is an insert, a timeout as it were, as we speak of it in the sport world.

The tremendous events of this age will consummate before Israel's last days begin. Now a much interest in prophetic themes today exists in so many many places because of fear, because of worldwide perplexity. Dread concerning the extinction, annihilation of the human family because of the hydrogen bomb, the lethal weapons of warfare, because of the rapid changes going on in the world. Also there are many who are showing tremendous interest in prophetic themes. Now we shouldn't be in the dark friends when God has taken pains to inform us of the coming events and the certainty of them. Now that doesn't mean we become prophets, heaven forbid. We're not prophets to predict nor are we sensational guessers. But we do know, God wants us to know, which way the trend is. In Chronicles we read that the men of the tribe of Issachar had understanding of the times that they might know what Israel ought to do. We ought to have understanding of the times in which we live that we may know what we as children of God as part of the body of Christ ought to do. We do know which way the trend is.

A rather humorous incident took place years ago when a man who had lost his way on a Kansas road met a small boy. He named one nearby town, two, three, four. After he had name three or four nearby towns, asking the lad to point he direction in which they lay, getting the answer each

time, "I don't know," "don't know," "don't know." the man in disgust said, "you don't know much of anything, do you?" well the boy said, "no, but I ain't lost." so although we cannot and dare not predict, we do not need to be lost as to the whole program of events. And I'm sure on every side you've heard many times over, each day even, the question "what are things coming to? What's this world coming to where are we going? What's next?" We can realize how the man of the world would ask that question, but really there's no possible excuse for a believer, any believer asking it. The world may be at wits end, but the believer doesn't have to be. The unsaved man is much like the little dog that was being shipped to his master in a baggage car. The baggage man was asked by a man who noticed the dog at a waiting station where that dog was being sent, he said "we don't know and he doesn't know. He's chewed up his tag!" Well, the child of God has his tag sealed on him. He knows where he's going.

Now many who believe in all fairness we must point this out that many who believe we are in perilous times do not believe that we are in the last days of the church age. They claim events like those today have taken place from apostolic times until now. Well they don't know, we don't deny that fact, but time must be running out. We must be near the consummation. We must be near the realization, the fulfillment, the grand finale of God's program. we must be near to it in the 20th century than the first century or else time and history and the program and the universe has no rhyme or reason and we can never lay that charge to God, oh no. Oh no. All things are going according to the good pleasure of His will. Surely the most near sighted of us all can see the pronounced speeding up of conditions connected with the end time. The mark universal character of them just as foretold. We are not in some kind of a quandary about this. We are not

in some kind of a cloud of indecision or uncertainty about it. And we must come to the clear-cut conclusion then that we are in the last days of the church age.

A godly student of the word was told once that things are going no as they always have, and doubtless they will go on without any change. He says you remind me of what would happen if I were seated as I was not long ago, he said, at a rendition of Handel's messiah. you remind me of what would be the condition if after I had been there and listened for two and a half hours you came in and asked what I was doing and I told you I was listening to a rendition, a performance of Handel's messiah, and you asked how long it had gone on, and I said it has gone on for about two and a half hours. You said well how long more will it be? And I said oh about a half hour or more. And you say I don't believe it. if it's going on for two and a half hours, why can't it go on for two and half more hours, or three hours, or go on endlessly? And said to this dear man of God, I would say to that questioner, the reason I know it cannot go on for two and a half more hours, don't you remember back there that solo, and then that choral number, and then that duet, and then that trio. And then would say, I know it can't go on for another two and a half hours, because I have the score in front of me. Yes, in the word of God we have the score, we have the plan, the program laid out for us.

Now this does not mean that we begin to set dates that the Lord is coming in 1970 or the Lord is coming in 1972 or '75\ . Don't you do that or you will bring the prophetic word into disrepute. No one of us even though we have been studying the word perhaps for half a century, no one of us can say that we know the exact date, that it will be on such and such a month, on such and such a day, of such and such a year. We are actually and definitely forbidden to make any such date

setting. Now we have made a very strong affirmation. We are in the last days of the church age. We asked the question are we in the last days of the church age? And we're answering yes, we are in the last days of the church age. Well can that affirmation, which is not a maybe or a perhaps or we think so or we assume so, but can this affirmation be proved? It can, friends, or it has no right to stand; it has no claim to our belief. It is not worthy of our belief.

Now there's several lines of proof out of many more. Our time will permit us to take these. First of all we know we are in the end of the church age because of these several areas that have been prophesied of in a general sense of course. It doesn't mean we can pinpoint, again, the day, or the month, or the hour, or the year. But the scriptures of the New Testament which are the guidebook for believers in this age they indicate that in the end of the church age, that time period will be characterized by lawlessness. I repeat lawlessness. with your bibles before you, 2 Thessalonians 2:7 for the mystery of iniquity literally lawlessness [inaudible], for the mystery of iniquity death already work, oh it is going on tremendously, only he who now hindereth, the Holy Spirit, will continue to hinder until he be taken out of the way. yes there is lawlessness rife throughout the world, and even in areas in countries that are supposed to be the strongest and the best ruled and the best regulated in all the world, lawlessness characterizes all of our streets, our communities, our cities, our metropolises. 2 Thessalonians 2:7, 1 John 2:18, little children it is the last time and as ye have heard the antichrist shall come even now are there many antichrists by which hear it we know, not assume, we know that it is the last time, that's the last time of the church age.

Now Paul's word proves as does the apostle John's that not only is sin in the world, but it is powerfully operative. It's working to its own ends. It has a timetable of its own, as it were. It has

an objective; it has a goal toward which it is irresistibly, relentlessly moving. It's far from dormant. It's not passive; it isn't working haphazardly. It's not hit or miss fashion, not a bit of it. Evil always tends to go from bad to worse, like a disease. Evil is not able to check itself. A falling object has no power to recover itself. That's a law of physics. Instead a falling object falls faster the farther it falls. All lawlessness is falling away from God. Evil is ripening rapidly all about us. This spirit of lawlessness is manifest not only among individuals but among nations as well. Human life, private property were never so cheap as now. it seems to be the great cry of our day not to erect, not to build, not to construct, not to undergird, not to maintain, but tear down and destroy, and annihilate, and burn, and do away with. Oh friends, human life and private property were never so cheap as now. Men are viewing them now through the eyes of avarice and greed.

J. Edgar Hoover the director of the federal bureau of investigation has been warning us again and again of the increase of crime. Truly perilous times are here. Hoover was speaking to the international association of the chiefs of police at Kansas City some years ago, and he indicated that the previous three years have been the most terrible period of criminal history in the life of America. Murders, manslaughters, robberies, sex crimes, automobile theft, greater than ever before, and actually today there are in America over 5 million criminals actively at work. The figure is far beyond 5 million. Plundering murdering. And the aggregate of serious crimes is over a million, probably over 2 million. The national crime bill goes into millions every year, and they tell us that a higher and higher percent of all American crime is committed by boys and girls still too young to vote, and many classes of crime the figure is far beyond 20%. Auto theft committed by boys and girls. Judge Hill a judge in a New York juvenile delinquency court, one of the

country's foremost crime jurists, says 70% of the delinquent cases that came before him every year are the result of godless, ungodly home environment. Oh, yes.

Here is further statistics, later statistics by Edgar Hoover but they point up the same thing: a tidal wave of murder, forceful rapes, robbery, aggravated assaults, burglaries, larcenies, auto thefts, and in a period of three years, crimes had increased 14%. Every 15 seconds, he said, a serious crime committed. Every two minutes a car is stolen. This is for the sixties. What will happen in 70? Think of it, seven arrests for every 200 persons in the USA. Murders gaining 6% over just a few years before. These are reported crime figures. They don't contain the far, far more numerous marginal misdemeanors. Oh, my friends, one boy out of five between the ages of 10 and 17 will have a court record before very long. The total of crime in the United States of America has been running 4 times faster than the population growth. How can men in their sober minds, in their sober calm contemplate a moment, not realize there's an increased tempo here.

Oh, you say communications are greater and means of travel are much faster, and so that's the way all of this goes along. It may be so, these are all contributing factors but it is the awful virus of sin in the heart of man. His disobedience, his defiance of the lord, his disavowal of all that God is and God demands. He makes his own laws and therefore he is lawless. He says God is dead. That means he's the chief one now. He can do what he wants. I'm my own boss. I'm the captain of my soul. I am the master of my fate and no age, no people, no nation has ever said that, and long survived thereafter. Lawlessness is one of the marks a proof of our affirmation, our statement that we are in the last days of the church age.

Now amazingly enough right along with this great spread of lawlessness throughout the world, there has come at the same time a great cry for church unity, ecumenicity, and in a future message we shall deal at great length with the subject of where the churches are headed or what is the meaning of the ecumenical movement. What about church unity? In what way does it indicate that we are in the last days of the church age? Well strange to say along with all this lawlessness that has come, a more determined effort for church unity. You'd think it would counteract the other, that lawlessness would be counterbalanced, that it would be stopped dead in its tracks, but it hasn't come about. And yet there is this tremendous effort for church unity, the union of all denominations and many see that to be the only hope the great counteragent of the lawlessness of the world. Well if past performance is any kind of an indicator, we are not going to find lawlessness dealt with in that way. All too many are glibly talking about what the union of all denominations can accomplish. Three different groups of one particular denomination have already merged. Others are going on, others are in the projected stage, others are in the consideration stage.

Let's think straight on this subject. Some say didn't Christ pray? Didn't Christ pray for the unity of all believers? yes we know from John 17 that Christ prayed that all his followers might be one but don't forget the rest of the verse even as the father and I are one, even as we are one. The unity made a union accomplished by man cannot be on the same plane as that which is of a divine order. My dear friends, Christ isn't waiting for his prayer in John 17 to be answered in the 1970's. Oh, no no. We know that Christ did pray for the unity of all believers and that it was answered at Pentecost when believing Jews and believing gentiles were put into the body of Christ in an indissoluble and an undivided and indivisible union that will last for all eternity.

That prayer by our lord Jesus was answered but not by man but by the divine omnipotent operation of the holy spirit of God.

And secondly we do know that many denominations have united in great campaigns. We thank God for that like evangelistic services for city wide evangelism where the harmony has been of the highest where united worship and intercession were a blessing to all. And in the third place, let's see on what basis union is suggested. Is it by the denial of real differences? Is it by the sacrifice of truths and principles enunciated in the word of God is the basis of these unions, watch closely, is the basis of those union movements, movements towards union of all the denominations, is the basis doctrinal at all? If it is, all we can say is those who were clamoring for it the loudest are the very ones who have thrown overboard the substitutionary death of the lord Jesus Christ on cavalry, his resurrection his bodily resurrection from the dead, and related truth. And without this truth, where were the soul of missions? Where would you have the incentive to preach Christ at all? Where would be the urge the motivation to sacrificial living and giving? where would you have, lets point it up very carefully, where would there be the only difference between Christianity and all the other religions in the world if the Christian faith were denuded and robbed of the substitutionary death of our lord Jesus which is the central fact of all human and divine history? All history before that time leads up to it. All after that in a sense flows away from it. One energetic advocate of unity on the west coast publicly deny the atonement, gave his approval to Sunday sports. He arranged his service early so his people who were invited to come could come in their sport clothes, ready for the day of play. Certain churches can and will unite to accomplish some moral or political reform. They reveal a certain tendency friends, to concentration to amalgamation. That's indicative in a marked degree of

definite conditions predicted of the time ahead of us. In mystery Babylon in Revelation 17 and 18, there is going to be a colossal system that will harbor every kind of a component element and factor. It will be the lodging place for every fowl bird. Oh my friends all though some well-meaning men have been caught in the maze and the meshes of this movement, it's nothing more, more or less, when closely examined, it's nothing less than totalitarianism in the church. Beware of it. Reminds us of judges 18:19-20. When that false priest was asked by the men of the tribe of Dan would you rather be a priest in the home of one man or would you rather be a priest to a whole tribe in Israel, and the scriptures said his heart was glad and of course he chose the greater position with the greater [inaudible]. Oh my dear friends beware of this movement. It is totalitarian in operation and in aspect.

A woman said to a minister do you belong to us? Well the minister asked, who are the us? That's a new denomination to me. I belong to him, the lord Jesus Christ. The creed of Augustine is the one for all believers, on that they can have Christian unity. They need not worry about church unity. This is the way that wonderful creed read a whole Christ for my salvation, the whole bible for my study, the whole church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my parish. Yes just to have union when there's not the basic union in the heart, in that which the spirit of God has indicated for us, that is folly, folly of the worst order. Don't you ever forget it my friend. That can never avail and it never will avail. Someone has likened it to taking two cats that have been fighting and tying them by the tails and throwing them over the clothesline. They would be connected, they would be united in a certain sense, but there wouldn't be true inner unity and that's the difficulty there but that is a telltale sign on the horizon of what of what is yet to come in the last days of the church age.

So I would say are we in the last days of the church age? First of all we are because of the tremendous spread throughout the world of lawlessness. Secondly because of this tremendous upsurge of interest and activity along the lines of church union. And then thirdly there is yet another reason why we know we are in the last days of the church age: the unusual spread of human pride, especially since scientific investigation has gone on into the outer space, and science is talking about creating life in test tubes and so on.

we read in second timothy chapter three verses 1-5, these important words, this know also that in the last days perilous times shall come for man shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, now here you have your pride, boasters, proud, there it is. boasting and proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce dispersers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, there you have it again high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power of it, from such turn away. Boasters, proud, high minded, heady, oh notice the emphasis there on these expressions: boastful, and haughty, and puffed up. Think of John Steinbeck, a Nobel Prize winner, who said in a former age we use to think that many things resided in the care and in the control of a higher power, of a deity. Now we know that these powers reside in us. therefore we have to rise to the occasion and I would suggest he said believe it or not this is what John Steinbeck indicated ,I would suggest that we revise those first words in the gospel of John so that they do not any longer in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God, but he has told us to reread it in the end was the word and the word was with man, and man is the all-important one. Oh too many are talking

so freely of what the world is expecting of the church, and they should expect something. And in their insufferable pride they forgot what Christ expects of the church, why not take him into consideration.