

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## Doctrine Versus Administration Revisited—the Difference Between Them

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Dear Brethren:

For the month of April 1990, the issue of doctrine versus administration will be addressed once again. This issue has been the basis of much contention and strife among those once called—those who once knew and understood the Truth.

Passover and Unleavened Bread are again upon us. We, as required by the Scriptures, should have completed or at least be in the process of an evaluation of the self. The basis of that evaluation is God's revealed Truth—Truth to which we are required to be faithful eternally. That Truth is called the Word of God—spiritual concepts which never will, indeed cannot, change. It is the unchanging doctrine of the called and faithful.

Due to Satanic deceptions during a crucial period of testing allowed by God, the body to whom that Truth had been given failed miserably. As evidenced historically, the body resorted to "human" tendencies in an overt thrust to "re-prove" the Truth. The results were devastating both for the body and the individual members. Practiced erroneously within the latter years of the chosen body of the last days, administration became tyrannical. This tyranny is expressed in several ways in the Scriptures. Suffice it to say here, the members were brutalized, threatened, and abused. What were the results?

### The Problem Stated

Having experienced personally the changes in administrative style, the "re-proving process," the spy-like atmosphere evidenced in this changing time, as well as observing the membership's reactions, we can with considerable confidence indicate and substantiate the existence of at least seven characteristic responses of bad, tyrannical administration.

They are as follows:

1. Generalized confusion among the majority of the membership. They were like sheep milling without direction or purpose.

2. The internal state of affairs was laid at the feet of doctrine. Doctrine was blamed for all the ills which the church had experienced.
3. The membership had become highly sensitized—rendered immune to teaching, instruction, correction. They did not trust anyone, or anything.
4. A defiant spirit surfaced. There was no fear—fear of God or anyone who might represent God and His Son Jesus Christ. Many became totally unteachable. Note what Paul said in Hebrews 6:4–6.
5. Each member turned to himself. Each became a law unto himself. Rejection of self and one's own thinking was utterly abandoned. The tendency of most was to assume a "one-on-one" relationship with God. The concept of a "one body" was rejected.
6. In the final analysis, all external authority was rejected. Each turned to his own mind.
7. Lastly, some asked honestly what was happening in the church. On the basis of honesty and many hours of prayer, a small remnant of people continued to practice, doctrinally, what they had come to believe at the time of their call.

Since the lines dividing doctrine and administration had become confused and insidiously blurred, it is necessary for those whose eyes can see, whose ears can hear, and whose hearts are yet teachable to review this crucial subject and renew their original faith. With an acceptable understanding of this significant subject we can resolve our collective and highly personalized problems. Is there any subject more central to a right attitude and personal mastery and spiritual growth?

### **What Is Doctrine?**

There are three basic words in the Greek which are translated "doctrine" in the King James Version of the Bible. These three words are: *logos*, *didasko*, and *didachee*. In general all three simply mean, "words," "to teach," "teaching, the doctrine." Specifically, they are unique—not just any words. It is imperative that the chosen servant of God understand what words are indicated—and why.

Doctrine is the teaching of Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 6:1, the Apostle Paul refers to the teaching of Christ as "the principles of the doctrine of Christ." Then he proceeds to enumerate a few of them. At the very beginning of His ministry, Christ uttered doctrine. Matthew records:

"... he opened his mouth, and taught them . . ." (Matt. 5:2). This teaching is doctrine. Then the Apostle John states that only with the receipt of the doctrine of Christ do we have the Father abiding in us (2 John 1:9).

Doctrine is/was the teaching of Jesus Christ. Did Jesus Christ's doctrine originate with Him? If not, from whom does it come?

Doctrine is called the Word of God—the Way of God. It did not originate with Jesus Christ at the time of His first appearance. Jesus said: ". . . My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16). It is repeatedly called the Word of God (Heb. 4:12; 1 Thess. 2:13; Mark 12:14; John 8:28; Acts 18:11). What Christ taught—His doctrine—were the very words of God the Father. Doctrine therefore proceeds from the Father. What Christ taught was the message given to Him by the Father before He came to the earth in His first appearance. Those words were spirit and life (John 6:63). As spiritual truths, how long have they existed? From the beginning (John 1:1).

As spiritual principles, are they subject to change? Amelioration and revision by men? Do they speak with unalterable and irrevocable authority? Are they imperative?

In Hebrews, Paul makes abundantly clear how unchanging and imperative the words of God are. He states:

. . . the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Need any comment be made? God's Word is incisive. It cuts to the very heart and core all of our thinking and action. Christ set the example of incisive preaching (Matt. 7:29). How imperative is the doctrine of Christ? See 2 John 1:9. It says, "Whosoever . . . abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. . ." Strong words, those are. Yet, we are given the glorious opportunity of self-evaluation. In the humility of mind we can see ourselves for what we really are. The doctrine does not change on the basis of emotion or human circumstance. It remains the same. It is the individual who must change on the basis of that imperative, unchanging doctrine. Doctrine was manifested to humanity in the unchanging life of Christ (John 1:14).

That same doctrine was taught by God's chosen ministry (1 Thess. 2:13; Titus 1:1–3; 9–11; Romans 6:17). It carries the same element of authority and imperativeness regardless of the individual called to proclaim it (1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Thess. 3:14; Romans 6:17; Romans 16:17; Titus 1:9). Though spoken by a chosen man, it is nonetheless authoritative. It should be understood that the very same doctrine has been taught throughout the ages since the first appearance of Christ. This was the promise of Christ prior to His departure from the earth at His return to

heaven (Matt. 28:20). The word "teaching" means the doctrine—the teaching of Jesus Christ. The doctrine has not changed from the days of Christ until this very day in which we live.

What is doctrine? It is the teaching of Jesus Christ which He had previously received from the Father, and then, prior to His departure from the earth, had given to His chosen ministry by commission—a commission which remains valid until the Second Coming. That imperative and authoritative teaching is the source of our change—a conversion of the human mind and heart. We become pliable and teachable. How different from the hardened and impenetrable heart of the natural man. See 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Titus 1:1–3; John 7:17. It becomes the source of the converted person's faith, continuity of purpose, and diligence (Titus 1:14).

A warning! So many times the deceptive heart and mind of man cannot be trusted. Devious men will appropriate the name of Christ and then proceed to maintain adamantly their own concepts and practices of life. They work out their own doctrines which do not require basic change in the mind and heart (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7).

Conceptually, philosophically, the doctrine of men is precisely the opposite of that which proceeds from the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Man changes concepts in order to cater to the self. By receipt of the incisive doctrine of Christ, the human heart and mind are changed. They abhor the self and love the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Doctrine is the teaching of Jesus Christ—the very words of God which had been given to Him. It is the same message given to all the chosen ministers from the apostles down to the last man chosen to bear that responsibility just before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is imperative and authoritative. It is unchanging; but is the source of inspiration and change of man's hardness. It is that which is administered—both in times of old and at the present time.

### **What Is Administration?**

By definition, administration means to manage, supervise, or execute some responsibility—laws, codes, concepts, whatever. As used in the Bible (New Testament) it comes from the Greek words "diakonia" and "diakonos"—meaning "official service," "to aid," or "minister to" in some way. Interestingly, no human being is devoid of some level of administration.

Since administration is an act of service, a duty or charge, it must have a source from which it derives powers, privileges, and rights. Anything less would imply anarchy—each individual a law unto himself. What is the source of all power and authority?

All administration comes from God—regardless of when given or how it has been carried out. By the act of creation, an entity is infused with rights, privileges, or authority—the underlying concepts of administration. To man God gave certain responsibilities. Within that province designated by God, man has the right of administering those duties. Always limited, however, to the limitations imposed by God—limitations of time, level of responsibility, appointment, etc.

First, let us notice that administrative responsibility is given by God. Within the scope of this letter, we will concern ourselves with spiritual administration only. Because of the failure of Judas, that vacancy created had to be filled by appointment (Acts 1:17, 25). The term "ministry" comes from the word which is elsewhere translated administration. The charge borne by the ministry is administration. We shall see what administration a little later. The Apostle Paul understood perfectly. He said, ". . . the ministry [administration], which I have received of the Lord Jesus . . ." (Acts 20:24). His administrative responsibility is called an office in Romans 11:13. In 2 Corinthians 4:1, Paul broadens out the responsibility to include all who had been appointed to the ministry. This ministry is called the administration of reconciliation—given by God (2 Cor. 5:18). Paul emphasizes that the duties of administration were given to him by the grace of God and made effectual by the working of the power of God (Eph. 3:7). The administration of God-given responsibility for today is called the administration of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6).

In Ephesians 4:12, we are clearly informed that Christ organized the administration of the new covenant prior to His departure for heaven. Further, the offices inherent in this new administration were not filled by election or personal choice. They were by appointment—the appointment of Christ. The new covenant administration had a particular objective. Christ had created it for the purpose of perfecting the saints. In the following verse you will note that the term of office (overall responsibility) was to exist until we come to a unity of the faith. Further, the Apostle Paul understood that no mere human being could possibly fulfill the requirements of such a spiritual obligation. Christ must "enable" any man called to fill such an office (1 Tim. 1:12).

What are the duties of this new administration? In Acts 6:4, it is called the "ministry [administration] of the word." And what was the Word? That which existed from the beginning, the message the Father gave to Christ, the gospel commission given to the New Testament ministry. And perhaps most important of all: Why did God commission a New Testament ministry? It was the means by which the message would be taught to those to be called by Him (1 Cor. 3:5). There are no other means by which men can come to the knowledge of the Truth. God and Christ are consistent.

There are two administrations. The one is called the old and the other, the new. Note carefully 2 Corinthians 3:7–9. We have already noted that the new administration relates to those

called subsequent to the time of Christ. However, to understand thoroughly the difference between the two administrations it is essential that we grasp the problem with the old.

In Hebrews 8:7, the Apostle Paul indicates there was a problem with the old. And that problem proved to be the people themselves. Born of a flesh nature, they could not possibly be obedient to spiritual principles. This problem needed correction. That correction was one of the principal reasons for the first appearance of Jesus Christ.

The people had agreed to a covenant which they could not possibly keep. Joshua understood this (Josh. 24:19–20). They were physical; the law was spiritual. Therefore, their agreement was simply to a letter application (2 Cor. 3:6). They had agreed to death if they did not obey. Since they could not obey, the agreement was a death assignment. Note carefully what Paul said about it in Hebrews 10:28. The people died without mercy at the hands of two or three witnesses. That is the reason Paul called this administration, the administration of death (2 Cor. 3:7).

Christ came to change the above conditions. He died for our sins that we might come to Him for protection. But to gain this protection, we have to be willing to give up the self and live obediently in Him.

Without extensive elaboration upon the principles of the Old Covenant, let us take careful consideration of the concepts of the New. Christ is our perfect example.

Christ said He came to minister (administer). Did He give an indication of what difference would be experienced under His administration? He made it very clear that He came to serve—to tender compassion, forgiveness, and mercy (Matt. 20:28). The Apostle Paul called this administration "the more excellent ministry." It was predicated upon the promises of life, not death. It is the administration of the spirit, a spirit of glory, and of righteousness—not the administration of condemnation (2 Cor. 3:8–9). Through this administration the called can escape the claim of the law—death penalty—and "serve in newness of the spirit" (Rom. 7:6). It is the privilege of mercy and kindness—necessary for time essential to make required changes (Jas. 2:13). In no place in the Bible is there any indication of a time limit allowed to effect this change. As long as the heart is right there seems to be no limitation of time. The final judgment of intents and purposes belongs to Jesus Christ only. He will render that judgment at the time of His Second Coming.

Under the terms of the new administration, God is writing the laws, statutes, and judgments into the hearts and minds. The words of God—doctrine—are not abrogated. They are being written into the very lives of the willing—the converted. God does not compel. We must desire His administration.

Since the words of God and Christ are spirit (John 6:63), they cannot be destroyed. They will abide forever (2 Cor. 4:18). How we are treated in the process of mastery and overcoming is administration. Letter application is a matter of condemnation. Spiritual application is a matter of mercy and kindness—forgiveness.

Doctrine is the unchanging, eternal Truth of God. It is binding forever. Administration is a matter of ministerial responsibility. Under the terms of the Old Covenant, the administration was that of death. Under the terms of the New Covenant, instituted by Christ, it is a matter of mercy and kindness. The laws, statutes, and judgments administered, both in the Old and the New, are the same. They are eternal. They are spirit. They cannot be changed or destroyed.

The contention is this: If we do not have a rigid application of administration, how can the church be kept pure, untainted—free from sin and perversion? Did the administration of condemnation and death keep the church free from sin and perversion? Of course not! Only conversion and a candid admittance of the self ever produce a body free from the taint of human weakness. And even that requires time—lots of time.

Let us not speculate. We have been given a classic example in modern times of an attempted application of the letter covenant. About the only thing which did not prevail in our day was that we did not take the lives of the sinners. Investigations existed. Penalties were exacted. Other people's lives were lived for them. Multitudes of decisions were made for them. In most respects their faith was legislated.

As a result of this false administration, what conditions and attitudes were manifested?

1. There was no fear of God, the Word, or man. People grew quite defiant, rebellious.
2. Perversion of the Word—the doctrine—was common (2 Tim. 4:3–4).
3. Almost a total lack of self-discipline.
4. Individualization (Prov. 16:25).
5. The concept of a "one-on-one" relationship with God (Prov. 16:2).
6. Contention and division.
7. A scholastic orientation.

People now no longer really hunger and thirst for the Truth. They do not want to be taught. They have turned to themselves. The unchanging validity of God's Word has been challenged. The matter of divine revelation is rejected. There is no fear and respect for those appointed of God. In the first place, most will not even accept the fact that anyone could be or has been chosen and appointed by God. Only with the return of Christ will the matter be set straight. But, then, for those called, it will be too late to make any necessary changes. For the just must live by faith—the faith of the present administration of the Truth of God given by revelation in these closing days.

One final point needs clarification. So much confusion exists regarding ministerial responsibility (administration) today. What administrative duties do the true servants of God possess?

If we believe the Word of God, the matter is quite clear. They bear rulership in the church (Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Tim. 3:5; Matt. 16:19; John 20:23). This rulership obviously applies to the application of the laws of God. It is not a tyrannical control. Christ set the example. It does, however, have the force and power of God's Word. In what ways is that power and authority used?

1. In teaching and preaching: 2 Timothy 3:16; 4:2.
2. To monitor internal affairs in the body—the church: 2 Timothy 6:3–5; Romans 16:17–18.
3. To warn: 1 Timothy 1:3.
4. And at times to take specific action: 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14–15; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; Romans 16:17.
5. Sometimes consignment is warranted: 1 Corinthians 5:13. In typical fashion, the offending party must be banished, put out—out of the body of Christ—just as the called of God must put out leavening during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

In summary, we must take careful note and thoroughly understand that doctrine is simply the Word of God which existed from the beginning. It is the Word which proceeds from God the Father. It is the Word which God sent with Jesus Christ. It was the sum total of the life and actions of Jesus Christ personified in His flesh. It is the message Christ bequeathed to His chosen successors, the apostles, including Paul. It is the message given to chosen servants in the last days.

Doctrine is spirit in substance (John 6:63). It is eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).

Administration is the exercise of duty or obligation—service—related to that which is indestructible, unchanging—doctrine, the Word. The Old Covenant was a letter administration—an administration of condemnation involving no mercy or kindness. However, the substance of that which was administered was spiritual—the laws, statutes, and judgments of God—that which remained after the demise of the old administration (2 Cor. 3:11). The administration of the old gave way to the new. Yet, the doctrine remained viable, firm, and unchanged. The new administration involves the same laws, statutes, and judgments—the spiritual words of God. Under the new administration, time for change is afforded—mercy—not the exercise of an immediate death penalty. This is called the administration of the spirit.

Under the conditions of the old administration, administrators existed, those appointed and charged with inherent responsibilities. Those administrators were the priests. Does anyone doubt that fact? Of course not! It is a matter of Biblical record. But what about the new administration? It was an office of responsibility which began with the ministry of Jesus Christ. He carried that charge out personally as long as He lived here on earth in the flesh. What happened after He ascended back to heaven? Did He leave any responsible agency here, after His departure, to carry out the work and commission which He had begun? Indeed, He did!

Paradoxically, most people conceptually believe there is still a viable ministry in these last days. However, that ministry is stripped of all force, authority, responsibility. In essence, their concept of a ministry is not a ministry at all. Why? The very root meaning of ministry is administration. This time administration of the spirit, not that of the letter.

Yes, Jesus Christ did acceptably discharge His administrative duty. One of the significant purposes for His first appearance was the creation of a New Testament administration which would carry on the work He was commissioned to establish. In the fashion of His own commission, He gave charge to those who were to follow Him. And those who were to carry on that administration began with the apostles, who commenced their work immediately after Christ's ascension back to heaven.

Though the Bible does not speak of any specific "work" to be done in the many years which followed the administrative responsibility of the apostles, it does precisely and comprehensively detail the continuation of that same administration in these last days—the volatile days leading up to the return of Jesus Christ, under whom that same responsibility will be carried out for another thousand years. It still carries with it the initial power, authority, and imperativeness, yet tempered with the spirit of mercy, kindness, gentleness, affection, and much patience and understanding.

May we all recognize the charges inherent in that administration of the spirit and life. Each one, accepting his level of responsibility, makes the whole character of the body more rewarding, inspirational, and satisfying. Resistance, belligerence, contention, and argumentation

can only produce uncertainty, apprehension, and doubt. Let us choose life, joy, and happiness—the well-defined manifestations of a smooth and efficiently run body. For, when we rule ourselves, little governance otherwise is needed. Let us be an exemplary example of internal "health."

Much love always,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'R' and 'C'.

Raymond C. Cole