

Departure From Truth

Is It Justified?

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Departure from Truth—Is It Justified?

Doctrinal changes within the Church of God, during 1973–1974, precipitated a loss of confidence in church beliefs. In the massive exodus which followed, what was the rationale employed to justify departure from truth? What excuses are now being raised to repudiate past teachings? This article will enumerate these reasons and show the fallacies behind them.

It was after the doctrinal changes of 1973–1974 that Church of God members began to doubt church doctrine. What was previously taught as revealed truth had now become "error." As a result, confidence in the ministry and in the church was greatly eroded. Soon, it was not just church doctrine that was questioned—but whether there was any validity to even the Bible itself!

But, for most human beings, it is not possible to simply discard cherished beliefs—without some justification. People do not give up convictions without a struggle. This article is concerned with this justification—this struggle. It will examine, fairly and objectively, the reasons conjured up in the minds of those who have repudiated the past. Hopefully, some will be honest enough to recognize whether there is any validity to their actions. For, either God revealed the truth (which many have now rejected)—or they were never called of God, never knew the truth, and do not now know the truth. It is one or the other.

There are, of course, those who would rather avoid the issue of whether truth is revealed. But, unwillingness to regard this issue does not change fact. Those who refuse to consider revealed truth—not desiring to face the issue as a part of their past—either have already decided upon one or more methods to justify departure from truth, or are presently toying with such ideas.

What many fail to realize is that the New Testament is full of warnings and examples of the excuses made by those who depart from revealed truth. Almost the entirety of the New Testament (with the exceptions of the gospels and the book of Acts) relates to the problems which we are presently facing. Paul's writings are full of the struggle which was taking place, relative to doctrine, during the middle of the first century. John, who wrote near the end of the first century, with great length delved into the apostasy which was then occurring. The rationale used then, for departure from truth, is precisely the same used today to repudiate past teachings. So, in reality, these justifications substantiate revealed truth! Tragic, yes—troubling indeed—but it nevertheless serves to shore up the faith of those with ears to hear and eyes to see. The very same reasons and excuses which the Bible pointed out were to prevail in the last days are the exact reasons and excuses given to repudiate truth today!

In the final analysis, it is the individuals desiring a "way out" from the "burden" of God's truth who will justify the self. Those who sit back with qualifying thoughts or conditional reservations have already set upon a path to find an "out." This is, for all practical purposes, finger-pointing at God! But those who have made up their minds to obey God's Word will hang on to the truth to the very end.

Keep in mind, it is God's truth to which we must be responsible—not the concept of "doing a work." Matthew 24:14 is a prophecy, not a commission. If it is a commission, then so is Matthew 24:12—which means the church was commissioned to destroy the church! This, of course, is not true! The responsibility of each Christian is faithfulness—not to a "work" (which has departed from what initially made it God's work), but to the truth which God has given. Those who wish to be involved in a "work," outside of the responsibility to self, feel they must have something to adhere to. But, this is because they do not want to be responsible to self and to the truth God gave them.

When God desires a "work" to be done, He will raise it up. In the meantime, the Christian's responsibility is toward the truth once revealed to him. It is when one does not wish to be faithful to God's way of life—to the truth revealed to him—that he employs various forms of rationale in justifying departure from what was formerly believed.

What are these forms of rationale—these excuses?

"Not Sure"

This is probably the most common excuse used today. Yet, the people who employ this method had no misgivings when they first accepted the truth. Why should they now allow circumstances to affect their belief?

Jude said, ". . . contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). This text clearly tells us there is a vying—a contention—involved in hanging onto that faith. The inference is that a major part of the Christian struggle is for loyalty to given truth. The truth given each individual Christian will not be reissued.

Paul tells us to call to remembrance the former days of our conversion—when we first accepted the truth—and remember the joy and significance of that time. What folly to base that calling and conversion on the emotional present! We must hearken back to the time of stability and confidence—not the time of distress and turmoil. "The former days" to which we are looking are not the individual corruption and administrative nightmares—which have only recently come to light—but the glorious truth of God which was originally given. Remember when you were first illuminated, and do not cast away that confidence (Heb. 10:32–39). Truth does not change. This is because Christ does not change (Heb. 3:1–2, Mal.

3:6, Heb. 13:8). The Church of God is Christ's house (Heb. 3:6, I Tim. 3:15). That house is not to change. Christian individuals in that house are not to change from the truth given them (Heb. 3:6, 12, 14).

These texts apply to Christians today!

We must adhere to the truth originally given. Why should disillusionment with men cause us to lose confidence in the fact God called us to a knowledge of the truth? Faith is the exercise of that way of life—because we have confidence in God. Why should we lose confidence in God because we have lost confidence in men? Faith is belief in the revelation of God's spiritual way of life. Regardless of the source of that true doctrine, you could not have understood without the divine intervention of God Almighty (John 6:44). Are you going to doubt God because you have come to doubt men? Why should any man be elevated to a level equal with God—so that, in the process of losing confidence in men, you lose confidence in God also?

So, what do we mean when we imply we are not sure? We were sure when we were first called. We had no doubts before the early seventies. Why should we allow an unfaithful ministry to cause a loss of confidence in God and in His revealed way of life? We must never let troubling times or the foibles of men cause us to doubt God.

You can be sure! You can have supreme confidence in God, regardless of the failures of men! Indeed, you must! Those not allowing themselves to be troubled by men are the ones who have, and will continue to have, confidence in God!

A minor variation of being "not sure" is having a distrust of that truth which was originally received. Those affected by this symptom live with nagging doubts. Perhaps some of these individuals never were in complete agreement with what they had been taught. If so, their lives as church members were only a facade. John said those who left the church in the latter part of the first century "were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us" (I John 2:19). Those who departed in the first century departed from truth. They departed from the spiritual Body of Christ—not from the physical organization. If I John 2:19 refers to the physical body, then all Christians should return to the Catholic faith!

During the past years, the vast majority of God's people have departed from truth. But they have not departed from the organization. Rather, the organization has departed from the truth! Many who have chosen to remain within the organization are like those who left—they are "not sure." Their faith has been badly shaken. They do not trust that which was originally given, neither do they trust that which came about as a result of the doctrinal changes of 1973–1974.

The Bible foretold that only a remnant would remain faithful in the latter days. Faithful to what?

To truth!

The organization became the instrument which led God's people away from truth!

Christ is not divided. Of the numerous splinter groups which departed from the Worldwide Church of God, those comprising God's true people are the individuals who remain faithful to original truth. God's truth is unchanging. Those who make up the faithful remnant, in the latter days, trust that which was originally given. They have faith to believe God does not call His children to error!

Distrust of God's Word Due to Past

After the doctrinal changes of 1973–1974, many became resentful toward the Sabbath, the holydays, tithing, and most of God's truth in general. Many detested everything which was represented by the past configuration. Most were affected by at least some bitterness and malice. Had it not been for God's mercy, all would have gone astray. The seeds of doubt, with respect to the past, had been sown.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God personified. The words He spoke were from God the Father. Christ did not come to do His own will. Jesus said, ". . . Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). We received Christ when we accepted Him as personal Savior and accepted what He taught. He taught the truth and said we must live by every Word of God—all the Bible! Jesus said, ". . . blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matt. 11:6). When we received Christ, we received the doctrine which was delivered. Are we now resentful of what Christ taught? Are we offended by the original doctrine?

The Church of God in Christ's day (the congregation in the wilderness—Acts 7:37–38) was offended by what He taught (Matt. 13:57–58). They were offended because they could not live up to the spiritual intent of His teaching. Christ taught a New Covenant relationship, not an Old. If He did not, what then is the significance of Paul's statement, ". . . Christ liveth in me . . ." (Gal. 2:20)? It is "Christ in you" that is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). Today, Christ lives the principles of the New Covenant in each converted Christian through the Holy Spirit—that power not available to those who were a part of the Old Covenant church.

It is those who have drifted from the truth Christ brought—and which was taught by the Church of God—who are offended today. Nonbelievers "couldn't care less." The faith of Church of God members had been gradually transferred, over a period of time, to an

organization and to men. When the organization failed, many became embittered and disillusioned because they saw men fail to live up to what they had been teaching. When what had been taught as absolute truth was altered, they lost confidence in God—they no longer trusted God or the past.

In addition, there was a failure on the part of most to recognize the faulty administration of doctrine. Most could not distinguish between faulty administration and true doctrine. Many have become offended in Christ because their faith in men was shaken. They are unable to recognize where the fault really lies. It is not with God. It is with fallible men who assumed too much.

In Paul's day, those who became offended in Christ stopped attending church. They no longer wanted to be reminded of the truth. Their conduct was an affront to God. They had failed to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Heb. 10:24–26). Their attitudes were those of defiance, rebellion, dissimulation, carping, nit-picking, and self-justification. Like many today, they felt they were capable of reinterpreting truth on the basis of their own ideas and emotions. Paul said these individuals were on the pathway to committing willful sin (Heb. 10:26).

We need to ask ourselves, "When did the church of the last days receive God's truth?" If it has only been since 1973-74, then we have no basis for calling ourselves Christian. For, then we are hardly different from the hundreds of "Christian churches" who all believe truth comes by "scholarship." But if we were called to a knowledge of God's truth when unity prevailed and we were of one mind—before the doctrinal changes of 1973–1974—then we had better recognize that truth for what it is and continue therein (John 8:31). Let us not be guilty of distrusting God's Word because of the doctrinal changes. Do not allow Christ's truth to be offensive because of the sins and weaknesses of men (Rom. 9:33). It is because many have allowed their nature to dominate, that their attitude has drifted from God and they have become offended in the truth. Do not forget, human nature is the opposite of God's nature (Rom. 8:7).

"Herbert Armstrong Copied Truth from Others"

Among the attempts to justify departure from truth, this is the excuse most recently promulgated. The "proof" Mr. Armstrong was not led to a knowledge of the truth—but copied it from others—is the fact that religious publications dating back to 1919 were found in his basement by Ambassador College employees. These religious publications contained most of the truth that Mr. Armstrong preached. The author of these publications was G.G. Ruppert of Britton, Oklahoma, who died in 1922. The assumption is that Mr. Armstrong copied most of his beliefs from G.G. Ruppert. But is this true?

Long-standing members of the Church of God, who were with Mr. Armstrong during the formative years of the church, are well acquainted with the fact that it was Mrs. Armstrong who first became knowledgeable of the truth—through a neighbor lady, a Mrs. Runcorn. She introduced Mrs. Armstrong to the Sabbath. It was the Sabbath question which piqued Mr. Armstrong's study of the Bible. However, it was long after Mr. Armstrong had proven the essential points of Church of God doctrine that he became aware of G.G. Ruppert. And by that time, G.G. Ruppert was dead. Are we to presume, by the mere assumption that these publications were found in his basement, that Mr. Armstrong copied G.G. Ruppert's publications? How many of us have read and filed publications, of one type or another, which seemed to agree with our beliefs? Does that "prove" we came to our present beliefs after reading religious publications which agreed with what we already believed?

Ridiculous, is it not?

One would have to be "grasping at straws" to believe such an assumption!

God has always had His faithful remnant on this earth. When Elijah thought he was alone, God told him there were 7,000 more. But, although God's true people have always been here, there have been many periods of time when they were not engaged in any type of evangelizing activity.

God is not limited—He can reveal His truth to anyone. However, the revealing has always been first to specific, chosen servants—who, in turn, taught that truth to others (I Cor. 1:21, Rom. 10:15, Gal. 1:12). The truth was revealed to Paul many years after the twelve apostles were already actively engaged in the commission Christ had given them (Gal. 1:11–20). But, the truth Paul received was the same truth which had been revealed to the twelve (Gal. 2:7–9). It should not seem unusual, then, for God to raise up different individuals—either at the same time or at different periods of time—and make known His truth. Let us not assume the presence of "religious publications" proves Mr. Armstrong copied the truth. It proves no such thing! In fact, if it proves anything, it proves the validity of divine revelation—for, that truth which G.G. Ruppert believed was, apparently, the same truth taught by Christ and believed by the New Testament church!

It is by divine revelation that God's truth is made known to each individual, whether by personal Bible study or by hearing those to whom truth has previously been revealed. There is no other way. Truth does not come by superior human intellect or by "scholarship."

The accusation that the understanding of the identity of modern Israel did not unlock the key to Biblical prophecy—and that Mr. Armstrong copied this from J. H. Allen's book, *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*—is another example of misinterpretation. J. H. Allen's book does indeed supply the key to prophetic understanding. However, Allen's book does not correlate the identity of modern Israel with prophecy—Allen himself did not

attempt to analyze prophecy. The major mistake Mr. Armstrong made, relative to prophecy, was that of setting dates.

Mr. Armstrong repeatedly stated, over the years, that God did reveal the truth to him. This was done one doctrine at a time, during long periods of Bible study which were often spent on his knees. However, prophecy—and particularly, prophetic dates—should not be confused with doctrine per se. This will be discussed shortly. The problem in the church of God was not doctrine, but rather the administration of that doctrine. Mr. Armstrong's allowing himself to be caught up in the vortex of change (due to the kind of pressure he allowed to be put on him) is no reason to doubt his statements, made consistently over the years, concerning how he was led to the truth. These statements are far more accurate than an analysis made forty years later and based on assumption by someone who was not even there!

This kind of "proof"—offered by those who attempt to disprove the validity of divine revelation—leaves much to be desired. Its advocates are determined to choose even the flimsiest rationale in order to repudiate past doctrinal teaching!

Desire to Change Doctrine for Personal Gain

It is common knowledge that human beings feel safe around others who agree with them, particularly if those who agree with them constitute the majority. Many who accepted the unauthorized doctrinal changes of 1973–1974 did so because they felt the majority could not be wrong. Though their consciences were bothered, many of them could not bear to face the unpopularity of being looked upon as "those on the outside." They stayed with the organization for the sake of popularity and other physical amenities. They were not willing to make the sacrifice Jesus said true Christians would have to pay in order to be loyal to truth. In many cases, those who jumped on the bandwagon of rejecting past doctrine did so for the sake of personal advantage.

It is now becoming increasingly popular to repudiate truth because of the failures of men. Many are now finding it personally advantageous to ridicule the past. Thousands of members of the Worldwide Church of God have left the organization since 1972. What has become of most of these people? There can be no doubt the vast majority have repudiated Church of God doctrine. They would not have done so, had those ministers who broke away in 1974 remained faithful to the truth. But because of administrative abuses and the failure of certain influential ministers to live up to what they had been teaching, the truth became unpopular.

Many who took this approach did so because they were swept away by the emotional tide of the majority. Those ministers who took the lead found it to their advantage to

repudiate doctrine. To have maintained common doctrinal agreement with the Worldwide Church of God would have jeopardized their cause (compare this with I Kings 12:26–33). This is not to say the ministers and members who broke from the Worldwide Church of God were deliberately doing what they knew to be wrong. On the contrary, they thought they were right. But they failed to see the problem was administration, not doctrine. Doctrine is revealed. But administration is the means by which that doctrine is regulated. The administration practiced by the Worldwide Church of God was not Biblical. Those who are "turned off" at doctrine should instead look at administration—this is what was at fault! Those who departed from true doctrine (whether still in the organization by accepting doctrinal changes, or whether they have bolted the organization and repudiated the past) should not have done so on the basis of popularity or by joining the bandwagon of "desire." The repudiation of church doctrine on the basis of popularity and personal gain is tragic, indeed.

"Herbert Armstrong Was a False Prophet"

The thrust of this justification is that since Herbert Armstrong was a false prophet, there is no validity to the past. This seems logical. How could a false prophet ever be used by God? The evidence of prophetic failure in the Worldwide Church of God is abundant. A catalog would have to be written to include all of it.

But, while the Bible warns against false prophets, it also shows that many false prophets were once true prophets! The Bible reveals that the false prophets encountered by God's people were first His true servants. Therefore, answering the question in the above paragraph involves determining whether or not a valid responsibility was initially given.

These servants of God were first called to fulfill specific responsibilities, but they began presuming and arrogating to themselves other responsibilities. They did not wait for God's message and commission.

It is an assumption to believe that God's contact with mankind has encompassed the entire world—and that when God talks about false prophets within the context of Israel, He is talking about Gentiles. Nothing could be further from the truth! God has never dealt—and is not now dealing—with the Gentile world, to any appreciable degree. It was from within the nation of Israel that the false prophets were to arise (Deut. 13:1–3). Those who think the false prophets mentioned in the Bible are of Gentile origin fail to realize Deuteronomy 13:1 says, "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams. . . ."

Those who have assumed Israel was mesmerized by Gentile prophets are mistaken. It was the prophets within who deviated and led Israel astray. God allows apostasy within, in order to test His people (Deut. 13:3). The correct orientation of each Christian must be

to truth—not to the national religion or the organization. The spiritual counterpart of this Old Testament example should be obvious for all to see (I Tim. 3:15).

Paul understood that what he taught was the same message taught by the prophets (Heb. 4:1–2). But not all true prophets remained faithful to God (note, for example, I Kings 13:18). Those who had first established reputations as true prophets—but later arrogated to themselves office, desiring popularity and security—led God's people astray (II Pet. 2:15).

Deuteronomy 18:20 specifically states it is quite possible for a prophet to presume. Christ did not presume (Deut. 18:18). He did not speak His own words.

Christ said the faithful would receive those true servants He sent. We all have the right to make that evaluation and determination. Those who are guilty before God are those who have come to recognize God's true servants today but still manifest disrespect. Those who believe they would have faithfully walked in the footsteps of the original apostles had better take another look. The apostles were not accepted as God's representatives in their day! Hindsight is good for the conscience, but we are not living 2,000 years ago. We are living today. Those rejecting the ministers of today who are faithful (Matt. 24:45–46, John 13:20) would have rejected the original apostles of Christ as well.

It is the truth of God to which we all must be faithful, regardless of what any servant has done. Balaam went astray and prophesied for reward, but the words he spoke concerning Israel were true. Prophets who turn from the responsibility given them should not be followed—but Jesus told the people of His day, concerning the Pharisees, "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matt. 23:3). They did not practice what they preached, but Jesus said to heed their words as long as they preached the truth. Had the people applied this principle, they would not have been led astray.

Is it possible for a servant of God, in the end times, to be dissatisfied with the responsibility given and arrogate to himself those duties to which God did not call him? Look at Saul. Saul was a prophet (I Sam. 19:23–24). But he was not a priest. Is there a modern corollary? Remember, it was the prophets of Israel who became false prophets. They were from within, not without!

Either the Church of God had the true doctrine, or there is absolutely nothing to "churchianity" today! If the doctrine of the Church of God was in error, then God's truth has not been made known to anyone since the days of the apostles. In reality, the prophetic failure of the Church of God substantiates it as the true Church, because it had to first be true in order to become false!

"The Church Was Corrupt—God Never Used It!"

This excuse for departure from truth has come about because of the recent publication of two magazines revealing much of the corruption which transpired within the Worldwide Church of God in recent years. Many documented facts, which have never before been made public, have now been "brought to light." Although previously labeled rumor, many allegations of wrong within the Worldwide Church of God have now been proven true. The natural response to this corruption is: "How could the Worldwide Church of God have been used by God? God does not work through corrupt organizations!"

No one, versed in Bible understanding, can deny the fact that spiritual truth must be revealed by God. When God spoke to Adam in the Garden of Eden, divine truth was being revealed (Gen. 2:16–17). There was no other way Adam could have understood what test he would have to face. God supernaturally revealed Himself to Moses at Mount Horeb (Ex. 3:1–10). While He spoke directly to Moses, He revealed Himself to other prophets by dreams and visions (Num. 12:6–8). But can human beings, as free moral agents, reject or disobey divine revelation?

Adam and Eve rejected truth almost immediately (Gen. 3:6–7)! Balaam, a prophet, disobeyed a direct command (Num. 22:20–22). His desire for wealth and success blinded his eyes. He failed to perceive the extent of his rebellion and lust (II Pet. 2:15). Solomon, to whom the Lord had appeared twice, turned to lust and idolatry because of his inordinate desire for women (I Kings 11:4–10). There were others.

Why should it be any different today?

It is quite possible for a servant of God to turn from truth or fail to live up to it. These prophets and kings had truth revealed to them, but they did not appreciate it. Eli was God's priest for forty years. But the record makes it plain that in his later years he became ineffective and failed to exercise control over his sons, who were also priests (I Sam. 1:3; 2:11–17, 22–25). Asa refused to receive correction from a true prophet of God and had him imprisoned. He also oppressed some of the people who concurred with the true prophet (II Chron. 16:7–10). There is ample Bible evidence that God's servants can and sometimes do fail in their responsibility and calling. Does their failure to live up to God's revealed truth make that truth a lie?

Of course not!

Had the two publications which made known much of the Worldwide Church of God corruption confined their writings to the secular facts, their credibility would have been established. But the publishers have assumed a responsibility which God never gave to them. They have attempted to draw doctrinal conclusions from what they have seen. They are not ministers, nor are they correct in their conclusions.

And, little realized by the publishers, in those two magazines is their own acknowledgement of the validity of the past truth which they accepted. But there is no admission, on their part, that they were the ones responsible for accepting the truth—that they were the ones who asked for baptism and would have been highly offended, had baptism been refused!

Their entire approach is that of attempting to repudiate the past, without looking at the Bible for proof to support their ideas. Their experience within the Worldwide Church of God is generally limited to the later years—without personal knowledge of the thirty preceding ones. They are looking at the end of a forty-year period. Their conclusions are based on recent experiences or information conveyed by others. Either this is the basis of their reasoning—or they were hypocritical and dishonest at the time of their call, baptism, and initial years of confidence and growth.

The writers of such publications have utterly failed to realize that while human instruments are chosen of God to fulfill certain responsibilities, their shortcomings have no bearing on the validity of God's truth! Servants of God who reject or disobey truth, or who misuse and abuse God's people, are not a reflection on the truth. They are a reflection on the depravity of human nature and the refusal of men to take God seriously. The abuses and corruption of the past have no bearing on the validity of God's truth. As Paul said, ". . . yea, let God be true but every man a liar . . ." (Rom. 3:4)!

The gospel of the Kingdom of God was powerfully preached for many years. Thousands were converted and healed. God did use His Church profoundly for almost four decades. Negative fault-finding, relative to administrative abuses and corruption of some in high places, will not alter that fact!

"We Don't Need Anyone to Teach Us"

Those who follow the line of reasoning, "We don't need anyone to teach us," quote the Apostle John for their authority. Verse 27 of I John 2 is given as "proof." We read, "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you . . ." (I John 2:27). The assumption is that once one is converted, he no longer needs a teacher. What is not realized, by those who support this idea, is that verse 24 tells us to go back to the truth originally received! Verse 24 says, "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father."

Paul wrote, ". . . we beseech you, brethren, to know [Greek, 'respect'] them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake . . ." (I Thess. 5:12–13). This text is ample proof the Bible does not substantiate the idea of Christians' needing no one to teach them.

The Bible makes it plain that Christians generally come to a knowledge of the truth as a result of hearing the true gospel. The people of Israel did not want God to speak to them. They were terrified by His voice. So God gave them representatives. First Moses, then later the tribe of Levi to officiate at the altar. In the New Testament period, God appointed a "ministry of reconciliation." But false ministers were allowed to creep into the ministry of reconciliation. So, God's people do need someone—specifically, the called and chosen (true) ministers of God—to teach them!

These true ministers are the "able ministers of the new testament" (II Cor. 3:6). They are given authority to supervise God's Church (Heb. 13:7, 17)—but not to enforce administration in the way formerly experienced. It was faulty administration, resulting from judgmental error, which was so wrong in the past. God's people do need someone to teach them (Ex. 20:19–20, Deut. 18:15–19, Matt. 28:19–20, I Cor. 1:21)! For if God does not have a ministry, then neither does He have a people!

"Anyone Can Understand the Truth"

The statement "anyone can understand the truth—all he needs is the Bible" can be easily disproven. If anyone can understand the truth, then why is religious confusion so rampant in "the Christian world"? There are over 400 differing denominations in the United States alone, and they all believe they are right. So what is meant by the expression "anyone can understand the truth"? The truth of the matter is no one can understand the Bible unless called of God. One must have his mind opened to truth, through the Holy Spirit, before he can understand God's Word.

The Bible is for God's people—the converted. Those called of God hear His voice (John 10:4). They are the ones who understand the truth. Many of those presently "turned off," offended, or who have departed from truth, once understood. The present act of censuring others is their own admission that they once understood. Jesus told the Pharisees, ". . . If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:41). Those who have departed from truth, but who now use portions of it to censure others, are the ones whose sin remains. They once understood and knew God's way, and they received that way through the preaching of God's ministry. They did not receive it from the Bible alone! It is God who sends His ministers, and it is the preaching of these ministers which makes the truth known (Rom. 10:13–15, Ph'p. 4:9)!

"Never Again Will I Follow a Man"

Those who make the statement "never again will I follow a man" are admitting they followed a man from the beginning and have never been right! Those who followed Christ

from their conversion—and continue to follow Christ—are the people who adhere to what they originally received. It is those placing Christ first who have the perspective to recognize the measure of respect which should be placed in men. They know Christ and His truth must come first. They do not disrespect men, but they know all men—including the ministers of God—are subject to Christ and His truth. They know that truth cannot be changed! The original truth given is the manifestation of the revelation of Jesus Christ! If the truth was not given to the Church of God, then we have always been in spiritual darkness—and regardless of the spiritual bent we have presently taken, we are still in darkness!

Because men have been respected above God, confidence in Him has been destroyed. All men are human and subject to error, but that does not change God's truth! Those who say they will never again follow a man are admitting their own lack of perspective. Had they placed God and Christ first, they would not have been so disillusioned by events which transpired during the early seventies. They would not have assumed that Church of God teachings were the doctrines of men only (I Thess. 2:13, Gal. 4:14). They would have recognized that even when men lie, God is true and faithful!

"Worldwide Church of God Was Stepping-stone for Real Truth"

This justification is perhaps the most clever of all. This is because most people hate to think they were "taken for a ride." What this excuse really means is that if truth is revealed—if Christians are called of God and led into the truth by the Holy Spirit—then God and the Holy Spirit are taking the blame! So, it is God who is being accused and held accountable!

Those who attempt—by this excuse—to "get around" the uncomfortable position in which they place themselves, have now concluded truth does not come by revelation or through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Rather, they reason, truth comes through "scholarship." Yet, today's most brilliant theological minds are in complete disagreement as to what the truth is! So take your choice as to which scholar you prefer. In reality, this reasoning boils down to what you think is right! But the Bible says, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Truth comes by divine revelation (John 16:13). Christians are led into truth, not error! While there is progressive revelation, that revelation never contradicts previous revelation. Those who say John 16:13 justifies a "steppingstone" concept are themselves determining the time of conversion. But, what if the call to truth came twenty years earlier? It is God who determines the time of conversion—by His call and when He sends the Holy Spirit to work with each individual. It is not up to the individual to determine, for himself, when God

sends His Spirit! That prerogative belongs to God only! But know for sure: When God calls and sends His Spirit, the unchanging truth is received (John 16:13).

Furthermore, what if others disagree with the individual's selection as to the time of his conversion? Look at the facts. The only time all of God's children were in harmony was before 1973–1974. So, in what period do you trust the veracity of men? When they are in harmony and not in the throes of emotion? Or when they are distraught and in disagreement?

It is obvious, the experience of each individual in the Worldwide Church of God was not a steppingstone to truth! For, if the truth was given initially, then what people now accept is not truth. If truth was not revealed before 1973–1974, the Holy Spirit has been derelict! Jesus said His children would be led into all truth. If what is now touted as doctrine in the Church of God is truth, then the Worldwide Church of God was not the Church of God! On the other hand, if truth was given initially, then it remains the truth. So, there is no logic to the reasoning that the Worldwide Church of God was a steppingstone to the real truth! Jesus said the Holy Spirit leads us into truth—not error. The Church of God could not have been led into truth both in the past and at the present, because doctrinal disagreement prevails. So, progressive revelation does not occur when there is a contradiction of doctrine. There is no possible way to be logical or honest if we embrace the concept of "contradictory progressive revelation." Christians who received God's Spirit received the truth, and that truth does not change!

"No One Group Has All the Truth"

If this concept is true, then Christ and the apostles were in error and were not God's servants. Jesus said, ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ." (John 14:6). While Jesus had previously told His disciples there were many things they could not bear (John 16:12), it was the Holy Spirit which was to lead them into all truth (John 14:26). But as the Holy Spirit led the disciples into more truth, that truth did not contradict previous revelation.

Aside from the true Church, all religious groups which profess Christianity today embrace a doctrinal mixture of truth and error. Paul said, ". . . a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump . . ." (I Cor. 5:6). Those who say, "No one group has all the truth," are admitting that all—including the group they espouse—contain a mixture of truth and error!

Christ is not divided. The church Jesus built is one body. It is not made up of differing denominations all professing Christ but believing differently.

Was Christ arrogant when He said, ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ."? Was Christ bragging when He said He was the Christ? Was Paul proud when he said he was the apostle to the Gentiles?

When the Bible says there are many members in the Body of Christ, it does not mean the true Church is comprised of many differing groups. It means the true Church consists of many individuals, but those individuals have one mind spiritually (I Cor. 1:10). Jesus said there was one body (Eph. 4:4). Those who believe the true Church is divided are of a divisive spirit. It is a concept which justifies rebellion against the truth of God!

Paul referred to the true Church as the ground and pillar of the truth (I Tim. 3:15). Those former members who think they are Christian, but deny the Church of God ever had the truth, are admitting they were never Christian! For, the church that Jesus built is the ground and pillar of the truth!

God's true servants must be called and commissioned. They are held accountable for proclaiming the truth as God reveals it. It cannot be changed. Therefore, the very direction presently assumed—by those active ministers who separated from the Worldwide Church of God—compels them to believe that God called and commissioned them to restore truth. Further, all former members, who accept that which is espoused by any one of the former ministers, are certifying the same activity. Yet, logic declares that if they believe no one group has all the truth, they are also in error.

"I Don't Want to Put Up with What Is Presently Going On"

Those who use this excuse are God's "fair-weather friends." As long as things go along smoothly, they are "all for God"—but when the going becomes difficult, they have had enough. They fail to realize the significance of Job's statement, ". . . What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10)

God allowed the present trials to befall His people in order to force them to make decisions (I Cor. 11:19). Man must learn to put God and His Law first. Not one of us is responsible for what transpired in the Church, but each is responsible for the decision he makes relative to what happened. God allows human beings to do as they wish—and the problems which occurred were generated by human beings, not by God. So, why blame God for what has happened to individuals and to the Church? The love of most is waxing cold because of the sins of others. What nonsense! What people are really saying to God is, "If you cannot straighten out this mess and make it easier for me, then I don't want to be a Christian!"

It is not up to man to tell his Creator what to do (Isa. 45:9). God's will and purpose will prevail, with or without any of us! Have we forgotten the words of Jesus, ". . . strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14)? God's way is difficult. It is through much tribulation that we enter into the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Let us realize the purpose of our calling. It is the trial of faith—the

belief in, and faithfulness to, the originally inspired revelation—that Christians must endure unto the end. God will give us the strength to endure, and He will deliver us in due time if we do not cast aside His truth.

Since every way of man is right in his own eyes, most individuals believe in "the basic freedoms of man." One of these is religious freedom. The Western World is particularly characterized by religious individualism. And religious individualism manifests itself in the concept, "No one is going to tell me what to do—not even God!" Yes, many say God can rule in their lives—but what they really mean is this: God can rule as long as He agrees with their concepts.

God does not condemn individualism—but the individualism He desires is reflected in the man who is willing to stand alone, if necessary, for truth. God desires His people to manifest the proper drive, zeal, and determination to hold fast to that which is right. God never intended His people to be "dumb sheep."

But after the trauma of 1972–74, the individualism which displays itself in contempt toward anything reflecting a "repression of individual rights" became an idol for many. Because their love and devotion had been subtly transferred from God's way of life to the church organization, their disillusionment was likewise carried over. This made it more difficult than ever before to adhere to God's true way. Many are now interpreting the past on the basis of the emotional present—this has become the premise for much of the attitude and thought so prevalent today.

What is important is the individual's adherence to that which was initially given—not his membership in a group which follows a human leader. Those who unwittingly followed a human leader in the past are the ones who are so individualized today. Deeply troubled with the past, they are conjuring up various ideas. However, those ideas are designed to justify departure from the original truth revealed to God's people.

"We Are Tired of the Hassle"

Closely related to the excuse given above is the "We are tired of the hassle" syndrome. This reflects itself principally in a reluctance to continue in obedience to the doctrinal truths of the Bible—but not so much from the point of view of rebellion and doubt. It is as though those who are "tired of the hassle" no longer feel attaining to the Kingdom of God is worth the price necessary to achieve salvation. They have become "weary in well doing" (Gal. 6:9). They have forgotten the admonition of the Apostle Paul, who said, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Those who are "tired of the hassle" have lost the purpose of life. They are going nowhere, because they are living for the present only. They fail to

realize that a man who has lived his "three-score and ten" apart from God has spent his life in frustration and futility. Those who once knew the truth of God but did not appreciate it—who have lost the purpose in life and are "tired of the hassle"—have a most certain judgment to face (Heb. 10:38–39).

God's true people, who are willing to put forth the effort and endure to the end, will receive the promised reward in due time. Again, it must be emphasized, Christians must not become weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9). Now is the time to shore up that faith and to make the necessary determination to "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet . . ." (Heb. 12:12–13).

Comments of Others

This is the weakest of all the excuses made and reflects a determination, on the part of those who use it, to look for an "out."

But Jesus Christ is our example. He was called illegitimate, demon-possessed, and a liar. Did He give up or quit because of the comments of others? If He had done so, we would have no Savior today! Jesus said, ". . . All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy [Spirit] shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matt. 12:31). Jesus did not concern Himself with what men said about Him, but He did concern Himself with blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is because those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit cut themselves off from their only means to repentance. There is no way they can be saved.

Jesus said those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are blessed, regardless of the source of that persecution. Persecution often comes from within—from those we love, from our closest friends and relatives. Jesus came to His own, and His own received Him not (John 1:11). It was the Jews who persecuted Jesus. They were within the household of God. They were the Old Testament Church!

Regardless of the source of persecution and critical comments you may receive, there is never justification to abandon God's truth and the doctrine received. In criticizing God's true people—who are trying to do right—one is, in reality, ridiculing and persecuting Christ! Remember, offenses are to arise. Persecution is to come from within (Matt. 24:10). Those who betray one another do so from the inside. But that is never a justification for departure from truth!

Obligated to Influence Others

The idea behind this justification is: "If I cannot influence others to my way of thinking, I will quit." In essence, this is saying, "Everyone is out of step but Elmer." This excuse indicates a gargantuan ego. Often, behind this approach is the idea that utopia must be created here and now. Completely overlooked are personal levels of faith and any damage received individually, as a result of the spiritual deterioration which occurred during the past years. There is often the demand to conform to the physical dos and don'ts of the past, and spirituality is determined by appearance only. There is no leeway given for growth, no latitude for the faults and shortcomings of others. There is only the demand for all to conform to one's own conception of what is right.

This entire approach is one of self-righteousness and a lack of love. Forgotten is the instruction to "follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). James stresses the need for tolerance and forbearance (Jas. 4:11–12).

The Bible does not give any of us the right to inflict our personal ideas on others. Nor does it give us the right to attempt to sway others to our way of thinking. God is the Judge—no man has been given that prerogative. Those who feel they have the perfect faith should exercise it to themselves before God (Rom. 14:22).

And above all, we have no right to become offended and decide to "quit" because our ideas are not accepted as the standard of perfection.

The Bible clearly shows it is the responsibility of the ministry to preach the totality of revealed doctrine. It is the lay member's responsibility to act on it (Jas. 1:22–25).

"The Church Is Responsible"

When the doctrinal changes occurred in 1973–1974, thousands of members of the Worldwide Church of God were bewildered and confused. For many years, they had been told that the doctrine was inspired by God—that it was the result of divine revelation. Now they were told the Church was in error. While there was no candid admission that the Church had not been divinely inspired, the clear inference was that this had not occurred and the only way anyone could understand truth was by "scholarship." Both of these concepts are in direct opposition to what the Bible teaches.

The justification for following these unauthorized doctrinal changes was given by the ministry itself, which said, "the Church is responsible. If the Church is in error, Jesus Christ will correct it."

Two things were not considered in the above justification: (1) Who is the Church? (2) And, if the Church is in error, who specifically will Christ correct?

The answers to these questions are readily found in the Bible. The Church, which is the Body of Christ, is composed of many members (Col. 1:24, I Cor. 12:14). Therefore, the Church is not limited to the ministry. And if the Church is in error, Christ will correct the entire Church—not just the ministry!

The Old Testament is replete with examples of what happened to those people who followed a corrupt leadership. Note, for example, I Samuel 2:34 and 4:10–11. Here we see the people punished, along with their corrupt leaders. This is because God holds accountable the people, as well as the leadership.

Nazi war criminals who justified their crimes by saying they were only following orders were readily condemned. Their excuse, "the leadership is responsible," was not acceptable to any thinking person. And neither is today's excuse, "The Church is responsible."

This rationale is a blatant failure to accept personal responsibility for what one believes. Christians are individually led to a knowledge of the truth, by the influence of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). While this may be accomplished to a degree by their own study, the Bible reveals that most truth comes through the Church, by those chosen instruments who are commissioned to preach the gospel (I Thess. 2:13, II Thess. 2:13–14).

But, it is also the Church's responsibility to maintain that truth—not to turn from it. The Church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). Therefore, if the Church apostatizes, it is the responsibility of each called and chosen child of God to remain faithful to the truth.

So the excuse, "The Church is responsible," is not a valid excuse before God! It is each individual Christian who is responsible. If he has been begotten by the Holy Spirit, he is a part of the Body of Christ—the Church! Each individual is therefore held accountable and will suffer the consequences if he turns from revealed truth (Heb. 10:35–39). It may be easy now to make an institution responsible for doctrinal changes—but in the judgment day, when all stand as individuals before God—it will be a different story.

In conclusion, there is no legitimate justification for departure from the revealed truth of God, whether by church legislation or by each individual's deciding for himself. Those who are not sure of the original doctrine, who are "turned off" at the Church and its officials, who think they can "go it alone," who use "people problems" as an excuse or who are tired of the struggle to live a righteous life, are only deceiving themselves!

God's Word is sure. It will never fail. It is only men who prove to be failures. Do not let yourself become the biggest failure of life, by rejecting the very call to salvation and the greatest opportunity you will ever be afforded in this life. Make up your mind to be faithful and loyal to the truth you once knew was God's truth—and do it now!