

should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me" (verse 27). A little strong? Jesus said, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). Jesus will be the one to judge those who reject His true ministry (John 5:22). He is the one who commissions and sends (John 17:18; Acts 10:39–42).

Qualifications of the Ministry

It was because of a questionable lifestyle displayed by some ministers, that many members lost respect for the entire ministry. Too many exceptions were made for those individuals in the ministry who proved they did not meet even the minimum New Testament standards. One individual said he did not have to meet the qualifications of the ministry because he was a prophet. Yet, the New Testament makes no exceptions for any called and chosen servant of God. Even the minimum standards are strict. They are found in I Timothy, chapter three, and Titus, chapter one.

Notice how *The New English Bible* translates these qualifications: "... 'To aspire to leadership is an honourable ambition.' Our leader, therefore, or bishop, must be above reproach, faithful to his one wife, sober, temperate, courteous, hospitable, and a good teacher; he must not be given to drink, or a brawler, but of a forbearing disposition, avoiding quarrels, and no lover of money. He must be one who manages his own household well and wins obedience from his children, and a man of the highest principles. If a man does not know how to control his own family, how can he look after a congregation of God's people? He must not be a convert newly baptized, for fear the sin of conceit should bring upon him a judgement contrived by the devil. He must moreover have a good reputation with the non-Christian public, so that he may not be exposed to scandal and get caught in the devil's snare" (1 Timothy 3:1–7).

Note the qualifications listed in Titus, chapter one, according to *The Living Bible*: "The men you choose must be well thought of for their good lives; they must have only one wife and their children must love the Lord and not have a reputation for being wild or disobedient to their parents. These pastors must be men of blameless lives because they are God's ministers. They must not be proud or impatient; they must not be drunkards or fighters or greedy for money. They must enjoy having guests in their homes and must love all that is good. They must be sensible men, and fair. They must be clean minded and level headed. Their belief in the truth which they have been taught must be strong and steadfast, so that they will be able to teach it to others and show those who disagree with them where they are wrong" (Titus 1:6–9).

From the above texts, it is plain to see ministers of God must be men of character and devotion. They must not compromise for the sake of advantage—financial or otherwise. They must not be men pleasers—more concerned about pleasing men than about pleasing God. They must not preach to please people—unless, of course, the people to whom they preach love the Truth. Those who are quick to judge and criticize the ministry, might well ask themselves if they think they themselves are qualified to meet the above standards. Those who reject the ministry reject God's Word. If they reject God's Word, what makes them think they are capable judges of God's ministry? God will deal with His ministry soon enough (Malachi 3:3). But also, He will deal with those who reject true doctrine because they use a disloyal ministry as an excuse to turn from doctrine itself. They have forgotten Jesus' instruction: That a corrupt ministry is not an excuse to turn from truth (Matthew 23:3).

Present Thinking the Result of Past Problems

The attitude expressed by, "I don't need any minister to tell me what to do," is the result of past problems. The ministry failed in several areas. Because of a hierarchical form of church government which led to faulty doctrinal administration, the Church membership was badly abused (Ezekiel 34:4, 21). In addition, the failure of some prominent members of the leadership to live up to what was preached eventually led to ungodly doctrinal changes (Jeremiah 23:11, 36). There was entirely too much emphasis placed on financial support and financial burdens far above necessary were placed upon the membership (Matthew 23:2–4). A ministerial rank system which affected in turn, the laity, led to status-seeking, climbing up the corporate ladder as a means of success and lording it over one another (1 Peter 5:3; Matthew 20:20–28). Members were not allowed in most areas of their lives to make their own decisions. Whatever was recommended by the Church became law. Regulations in every conceivable facet of Church members' lives became equal to the Ten Commandments. The "Work" became the all-consuming purpose of life. Allegiance and obedience to God were thought of in terms of obeying, not God's Word, but rather the word of a minister. What started out in the life of each individual member as a commitment to God and Christ was transferred over to loyalty to an organization and to specific human beings. Loyalty was thought of in terms of dedication to the organization, rather than dedication to God's Word and His Truth. As noted, members were allowed to make few personal decisions. The "Church" did their thinking for them. It is small wonder the membership readily accepted the doctrinal changes. They had never been taught to think or act for themselves.

Because the members had never been taught to make their own decisions, and because the Church equated itself with Christ, particularly in the example of the vine and the branches (John 15:1–5), the greatest sin one could commit was to "leave the Church." Few members continued to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Increasingly, the membership depended upon the Church to "prove" everything for them. With this arrangement, it was easy to accept any doctrinal change which came along regardless of the "proof" presented. What had not been impressed upon the membership was the importance of holding fast to the Truth as originally given (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

The ministry had utterly failed to teach the membership the kind of determination required to hold fast to the true doctrine. Few members had really been allowed to build character. They were motivated by fear of a hierarchy and of being "put out of the Church." Instead of developing stability, they were tossed about by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). Some of the ruses used to confuse and destroy God's people were as cunning as they were crafty. The majority of the membership had long stopped really studying God's Word. Instead, reading Church-oriented literature substituted for intense Bible study and most members were unable to keep up with the volume of this material, let alone read their Bibles. They forgot the admonition, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God . . ." (2 Timothy 2:15).

Because of too many assumptions and the lack of real Bible study, Church members had no realization what was taking place before their very eyes. They did not recognize that the prophesied "falling away" was taking place. They had always assumed there was to be a falling-away from the "Church." They did not know the falling-away was from the Truth! (For a complete understanding, write for our articles, *Can True Christians Be Deceived?* and *How Do Christians Come to a Knowledge of the Truth?*). Those "turned off" over sin in high places, or because they could see a ministry which was no longer sure of itself, were part of a group who either had never proven the Truth initially or were merely enthralled by the personal charisma of one or two specific human beings. In either case, it was their lack of appreciation for God's Truth—and their failure to exercise the necessary determination to be faithful to what they once knew—which led to their rejection of the ministry. Those who compromised, yielding to unscriptural doctrinal changes, will now believe anything. Whereas those who rejected God's ministry and God's Truth now believe nothing! This latter group comprises the true Christian agnostics!

Can the Member Succeed on His Own?

Now we get to the basic question of this article: Can the member who has rejected the ministry qualify on his own to gain salvation?

We need only look at what happened to a membership with a ministry to answer that question. If almost an entire church membership could be led astray by ungodly doctrinal changes—paraded under the guise of "scholarship"—what is the individual member likely to do under the aegis of his own intellect? Today, more groups have splintered from the Church of God. Their doctrines are in disarray. In addition, there are perhaps several thousand who individually have developed their own doctrines. Look at the odds. The individual member who rejects the ministry *per se* has little chance of qualifying for entrance into God's Kingdom. Some few, perhaps, but not many. One thing is certain: Those who are in right standing with God will be searching for those true ministers who are still faithfully teaching the Truth. They will not categorically reject all ministers, but they will be cautious. They recognize the fact it was through a ministry that they came to know the Truth, but they also recognize it is through the faithful ministry only, that the revealed truth continues to be proclaimed. They know the significance of Paul's statement: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? . . ." (Romans 10:13–15). This text proves God does have a ministry and that it is sent by Him. To repudiate that true ministry is to repudiate God! God will not accept the reasonings of those who reject His ministry on the basis of another ministry's failure to live up to and proclaim the Truth.

In the ministry of the Church of God, loyalty toward God was confused with loyalty toward an organization. There are some who know better. Most of these men are hollow shells of the men they once were. There are others who not only have no knowledge of the ungodliness which transpired within the organization, they don't even know the issues behind the doctrinal changes. If asked to prove these changes from the Bible, they would tell you to write to "Headquarters" for a booklet.

Those who by referring to 1 John 2:27, justify their present posture of rejecting the ministry might well ask themselves the question, how did these Christians in John's letter come to a knowledge of the Truth in the beginning? In this text John is telling the Christian brethren that there is no need for them to learn the Christian principles again

since they had been led by the Holy Spirit to understand them when they were first converted.

What the True Ministry Must Do

Had the total ministry of the Church of God remained faithful to the doctrine there would be no real problem today. Those ministers who left the Worldwide Church of God organization had no excuse to turn from truth. But they found itching ears among disenchanting members, and some ministers succumbed to the temptation to gain a livelihood by this means.

Jesus said there would be true ministers faithfully teaching His Truth when He returns (Matthew 24:45–46). Those ministers who on the other hand justify doctrinal changes must admit they never knew the Truth or were never convicted of it. What they presently teach is what they have "conjured up" or from various facets of Protestant theology which they have accepted. The ministry's responsibility is to give right guidance to God's people. It is "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:12–15).

The ministry must guide the membership in building character. Character is the ability to discern right from wrong, and to always choose the right in opposition to the wrong. This is not accomplished by a form of administration which takes away the individual's right to make up his own mind in spiritual matters. There is a responsibility given the ministry in regulating individual conduct of the laymember in relationships within the Church, but all other matters are the member's private responsibility.

The ministry is, therefore, to "feed" the flock of God, not to force it into submission (1 Peter 5:2–3). It was this forced submission of the past which destroyed the character of individuals. Those who are the victims of forced submission through fear tactics or any other means, do not develop character.

Since the ministry's responsibility is to help people build character, it should not subject them to a form of church government which destroys character. God's spiritual

house must be built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, not on the ideas of men. The entire Christian experience rests primarily in one's association with God. There is the responsibility of proper conduct and relationships within the Church, but these too are based upon the individual's respect for God. Those who love God will make the effort to love and respect their fellow man. In the church relationship this is manifested by the willingness of the individual to conduct himself within those guidelines outlined in the New Testament.

God provides a faithful ministry by which His people can be rightly guided. When the priesthood went astray during the days of Eli, God said, ". . . I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind . . ." (1 Samuel 2:35). Why should God act any differently today? It is your responsibility to find that ministry and to be loyal to the Truth God gave you! You must come to know who God's true, faithful servants are!