

Church of God, The Eternal

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Doctrine Versus Administration—Part II

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Dear Brethren:

Hopefully, physical conditions are improving in your respective areas. This past winter was a new experience for most. Records were broken in many places. But out of such conditions the true light of God's chosen will begin to shine brilliantly. For, God knows His own—they will be protected and blessed, regardless of the external conditions, providing there is no need for a trial to be experienced. Mere assumption of a proper spiritual condition—on the part of any individual—will be woefully inadequate to escape the adversities of the future. Only those who *truly* honor God, in faithful obedience to His way of life, will be protected and blessed.

And as God warns, now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed. We need to buy back the time of the past several years when, unfortunately, too many were merely marking time. Critical examination of *self* is essential. True conversion dictates *daily* self-examination and a closer walk with God. Prayer and Bible study, with periodic fasting, are vital. But, perhaps more important than any other condition is the absolute necessity to learn the art of walking in harmony with others who are chosen of God. If we cannot love those whom we do see, how can we possibly love God whom we have not seen? The act of truly loving and respecting those whom we do see is the proof of our love for God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now is the time to make preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Let us not be disappointed at the time of that memorable occurrence.

For the month of June, the second part of the doctrine-administration explanation will be presented. Having read and digested the doctrinal aspect, you should be equipped to comprehend the application of administration.

What Is Administration?

Administrational change, as opposed to doctrinal change, was the root cause of major disagreement and difficulty in the days of Jesus Christ. The physically oriented Jews were unable to grasp the real mission and objective of Christ. When Christ effected administrative change, the Jews were convinced He had broken the Law—because He had countered the traditional

application web with which they had surrounded the pure Law of God, as had been delivered by Moses. Christ, the unalterable Word of God, had not changed the truth—the doctrine; He had come to liberate the Law from the administrative tangle which human beings had woven for themselves over the centuries. The Jewish people, under the hierarchy of the leaders of that day, were greatly burdened in their travail. But they were fearful to depart from the physical—or visible—organization. Christ came to liberate both the people and the Truth of God. He effected major *administrative* changes.

Our problem, today, is parallel to that of the Jews in their day. Somehow, some seem unable to differentiate between doctrine and administration. Some even go so far as to believe administration is doctrine. One must ask or ponder the thought, in individual minds, Is the confusion surrounding administration there for the purpose of pursuing individualization? The concept of administration, which Jesus did change, has become a fixation in the minds of some. In order to adhere to a prejudicial view of administration, they have rejected fellowshiping with others of like faith (convening for the Sabbath and Holy Days), in honor preferring the other, respecting the true ministry, and manifesting the spirit of true love.

What is administration?

There is one Greek word with two cognates which are translated "administration" (or other allied words). These words are *diakoneo*, *diakonia* and *diakonos*. And they are translated in the following ways: ministered, minister, ministry, serve, service, servant, office, administration, and deacon. In *no place* does the concept of doctrine enter as a consideration. Administration is a matter of service. And knowing human nature, one must be cognizant of the fact that such service can take myriad turns—often for personal aggrandizement and to the detriment of others. The Old Testament is a chronicle of administrative defect. In the realm of human history, coercive obedience did not effect a change of heart. Such physical application today would render no better results. On the contrary, the real administration which must be individually practiced is a recrudescence of the spirit—of the heart and mind.

Perhaps, an element of the confusion in people's minds may relate to a belief that administration is wrong.

Absolutely not!

Administration is of God. The question is: What is the *correct form* of administration?

When we refer to defective administration, we refer to the manner of administration—not to whether the concept is valid. We must understand this fact.

What we must now recognize is *how* administration applies to us, in our time. And we must be cognizant of this fact: God condemns someone "in the last days" for abusing the office of service (administration). This fact, in itself, indicates God's abhorrence of the manner in which His people were treated. Why? Administration relates to a *manner* of service to people—from responsibility to responsibility. And there are many Biblical examples of administration—from one office of service to another.

Let us understand.

Administration Is a Servile Service

Administration is an act of service—it can be performed either in an acceptable fashion or used for personal gain. True administration is an outgoing concern for those being served. Although there are different levels of service, one avenue of application is the physical service. Overt, visible acts of kindness and help. These acts can involve beings on an individual as well as a collective basis. The Bible makes these areas plain and understandable.

Angels are administrators. They are the servants of God. Their acts of service are usually in relationship to human beings, who are potential children of God. In the first example to be given, the recipient of angelic service is Jesus Christ. He had been subjected to the tyranny of Satan, the Devil, and was in need of comfort and help. Matthew records: "Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him" (Matt 4:11). An act of service and kindness—true administration.

In Hebrews, Paul wrote: "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:13, 14). Angels are not heirs of salvation. Yet, they were created to serve (administer protection, kindness and help to) human beings who are heirs of salvation. They do not serve in order to obtain higher responsibility. They serve for the sheer love and reward of serving. God's angels act out of a deep sense of love and respect for their responsibility. They are not motivated by vanity, a false hope, or assumption. There is no evidence of a hierarchical ladder of responsibility, which aspiring angels could climb with a hope of greater recognition or glory. On the contrary, the only angels who assumed and aspired for such recognition became demons. All others were motivated by the act of service only. True service (administration) is anathema to vanity or position. (The concept of position will be discussed later).

A point to consider is: Who will judge angels?

The faithful servants of God, heirs of salvation, whom they served.

The basis of their judgment will be the scope and intent of the service which they

rendered—and could well be a basis of all judgment which we as human beings, potential sons of God, will exercise. If angels will be judged by orientation and purpose of service, is it not likely that those whom they serve will be judged by the same criterion?

Administration of Christian principles is required of all human beings called of God. Some of these acts are of a physical nature, while others are spiritual in nature. Judgment and balance are absolutely requisite. A couple of Biblical examples will illustrate.

In Matthew 8:14–15 we read: "And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them." Here is an act of physical service. Peter's mother-in-law responded to the needs of that moment. This was Christian administration.

In the book of Luke, we read another example where balance and judgment were necessary:

. . . Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him [Christ], and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:40–42).

Jesus did not say that Martha should not be concerned about the physical needs. He commended her for her acts of service. But, He took the opportunity to instruct her in the matter of judgment. Martha needed to understand that there are other areas of service necessary—not just feeding the hungry. Wisdom and discretion are necessary in any act of service—the physical administration of Christian responsibilities.

Women are administrators. The above texts prove that point. They are responsible for judgment and discretion in performing their physical and spiritual responsibilities.

So far, we have seen examples of individual responsibility. Are there areas of *collective* responsibility? Is the responsibility of positional administration any different in nature from that of an individual administration? Does the type of administration change in relationship to office, position, or rank? Instruction from God (the Creator of all) makes these points abundantly clear.

Relative to a situation which had developed in the infant Church of God, Luke wrote:

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were

neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost [Spirit] and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:1–4).

By previously qualifying, seven men were appointed to administrative service. And this act of kindness was primarily toward the widows who had need of special attention. So when the need arose, those who had been appointed by God for a specific responsibility established an office whereby the need was judiciously satisfied. And in fulfilling that charge, the twelve apostles propitiously sought the input of the laity. Oftentimes, the discharge of administrative responsibility is a mutual effort. How marvelous it is for the servants of God to work in harmony and oneness, in the fulfillment of duty! Such cooperation is possible only when all involved understand areas and limitations of that responsibility. The twelve apostles would perform the official act of assignment, but the people became responsible for the judicious and wise selection of the candidates.

Those appointed, collectively, were accountable for satisfaction of all needs of widows and those in related circumstances in the church. Administrative service was their charge. Their labor was not for personal aggrandizement, but an act of outgoing service to those who had need. The rewards related to this act of service were not immediate but, rather, futuristic. Christ made it very plain that if an act of service generates an immediate reward, then there is no reward for the future. All acts of true administration are acts of faith—faith in the promise of everlasting life.

Paul wrote a commendation for acts of administrative kindness. And any act of self-denial and inconvenience to the one serving others is a manifestation of true administration. He wrote: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10).

Why does God not forget acts of kindness? Because the reward is yet to come. As stated earlier, true administration does not aggrandize the self—it does not rest on the premise of vanity or personal glory. True administration is complete *denial* of the self. It is self-effacing. But it is absolutely required for a reward in the Kingdom of God. People who separate themselves from the true brethren cannot be pleasing to God. For, if God is not unmindful of acts of kindness by which you will be judged or rewarded, then obviously He expects all of His called and chosen to cultivate the true administrative relationship with others (the saints). And as Paul indicated, it was not only administrative responsibility of the past, but also of the present. Present failure will wipe out past acceptable performance. We must endure to the end. We must be capable administrators of all Christian principles, until the end. All of us have a collective responsibility. This responsibility cannot be performed except in fellowshiping with others.

There is yet another area of collective responsibility. It is an area profoundly abused by many today. Paul wrote to Timothy about his relationship with one of the saints. He wrote: "The Lord grant unto him that he [Onesiphorus] may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well" (2 Tim. 1:18).

Here is an individual who ministered to many needs of the Apostle Paul. But, the act of service he performed is representative of a basic need which should be borne by all the saints under the care of a specific minister. It is the collective responsibility of the laity. Yet, in this responsibility lies the potential for abuse. Service to any servant of God is not to be for the personal advantage of the man serving. The ministry sometimes has a need to be physically served, with much judicious care taken, to free them to discharge an equal responsibility of spiritual service to the people. If judicious care is not exercised, ministers can allow the people to serve them far beyond the bounds of propriety. In the same way, the laity can expect acts of service from the ministry *beyond* the demand of honesty, decency, and integrity. Judgment and discretion are requisite for *both* the ministry and the laity.

Selfish and carnal man does not have the ability, innately, to fulfill the basic spiritual responsibilities of true administration. Even the called of God must have help. Regardless of his station or position, each must have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit—the power by which Christ lives within us. Christ lived and set a perfect example of spiritual administrative responsibility.

Christ Set Example of True Administration

Notice, now, an act of human carnality manifested—a complete failure of some to understand what true administrative responsibility is! Jesus used this situation to drive home relevant spiritual principles. Matthew writes: "Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him." Illogical requests, and acts of subterfuge, are generally preceded by flattery. It is the way of man's deceptive nature. Matthew continues: "And he [Christ] said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom." Why? Because she and her two sons thought that level of position was an indication of accomplishment. This had always been true, in all physical situations about which they were knowledgeable. Why would it not be true in this new venture? New lessons had to be learned by the disciples—for the way of man is diametrically opposite to that of God. Continuing: "Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. . ." They were unaware of the requirements of conversion—they did not grasp the difference between the spiritual and the physical. Again, he continues: ". . . to sit on my right hand, and on my left hand, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." The two disciples had been partially instructed in the ways of true administration and the Christian life. But let us note a real display of carnality: ". . . when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two

brethren." They were as lacking in understanding as the two. The ten were angry and upset because two of their compatriots had gotten ahead of them. They did not react as truly converted and well-informed servants would have. Their whole approach was as carnal and wrong as that of the two disciples.

Christ used this incident to drive home several very poignant spiritual principles. "Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them." Christ saw straight through the veneer of human carnality. He knew they wanted position and recognition. They wanted to give orders. They did not want to be under another human being. How wrong their whole thinking process was! Christ said:

. . . it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [servant]; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt 20:20–28) [Compare this with Mark 10:35–45 and Luke 22:24–30].

Christian responsibility does not give anyone tyrannical rule over others. True administration is an act of *deference* to others—an act of *service*. The next installment will discuss the matter of authority and levels of responsibility. These points will be covered in the third part of this series of letters.

Christ came to serve. Any acts of service rendered to Him, by others, were for the sole purpose of aiding Him in the fulfillment of His primary administrative responsibility. As the example above illustrates, no act of service should carry with it the aspiration for recognition or personal glory. Such attitudinal orientation is contrary to the Christian ethic. Christianity is manifested in voluntary acts of administrative service. For, Christ came not to be ministered to, in a physical sense, but to become the minister of many. Christ, the unchanging Word, will live the same kind of life in any whom He chooses and with whom He is working today.

True administration, regardless of the level of responsibility, does not give one tyrannical authority over others. On the contrary, it manifests itself in special service and understanding for other human beings. It manifests itself in the ability to take wrong, when necessary, to benefit others. And this Christian responsibility applies to every level of duty. One who is quick to point a finger at others should make sure he is fulfilling this basic requirement in his own life. None of us is in a position to personally condemn or criticize others. Such administrative responsibility belongs to God alone. He will exercise that duty at the appointed time and in the manner He so wills.

Christ, an apostle and true minister of God, came to serve mankind. While here, He not only established a New Testament church, but He also created the office of the true ministry—a

ministry which is prophesied to continue until His Second Coming. What, then, is the responsibility of the ministry today?

Of that church which Jesus built, Paul wrote:

Now *ye* are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? (1 Corinthians 12:27–29).

To the church of God at Ephesus, Paul wrote:

And he [Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 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 fullness 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 (Eph 4:11–14).

The Church was established by Christ. It derives its authority and existence from its Creator. The purpose and objective of that Church was well defined by Christ. That body, the Church, is held accountable for teaching the Truth and perfecting the saints. For how long? Until the Second Coming of Christ! Therefore, the present goal of the church is unity and oneness in the Body *and* development of character in the lives of its individual members—so that they will not be led astray by spurious doctrine, espoused by heretical individuals or by the subtlety of their own minds.

The responsibility of the ministry—a New Testament office created by Jesus Christ—is to carry out the same functions which He, Christ, had been sent by His Father to perform. He came to preach and set an example for us to follow. As He made clear, He was not sent to judge at that time. He did not condemn at that time. Truth and mercy came by Him. And mercy rejoices against judgment.

The administrative function of the ministry today is to bear the same responsibility of mercy, kindness, and love. If Christ is the example of true administration, then most obviously the ministry, even more than the laity, must walk in His footsteps. He is their example. He administered the Law and way of God with patience and love. Mercy was paramount.

Everyone Involved in Administration

Administration is a *personal* responsibility. We all have our own lives to administer. We must serve God. We owe honor and respect to one another. And we must perform the required personal obligations to self. In every area we are either correctly (positively) or incorrectly administering responsibility. It is a matter of understanding what those responsibilities are. All too frequently the obligations of administrative charge, from area to area, are confused. For example, the husband must be an administrator in the charge of a family. But the wife has her own areas of responsibility. Confusing the two areas results in chaos. God is not the author of confusion. Harmony and agreement are achieved only by recognition, individually, of both scope and limits of responsibility.

Jesus Christ spoke of our personal obligation in service to God the Father and to Himself. He said:

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour (John 12:25–26).

Service to God and Christ requires *forsaking* the natural aspirations of the self. A new orientation must be spiritually developed. A new sense of direction and purpose. And such can be achieved only by control of the natural mind and heart. Failure to control the source of carnality is the cause of all difficulty experienced. Service to God—the propitious administration of personal responsibility to God—is achieved by correctly acquitting ourselves in the negation of self. This one area of major responsibility is often overlooked. The control of mind and heart—individually. If we would be judicious administrators, let us begin with the self. Only God can specifically assign us to any other responsibility. And once assigned, the scope and limits of that responsibility are clearly spelled out in the Book of Life.

By virtue of birth, marriage, call, or gift, an individual is endowed with administrative responsibility. Understanding the gravity of any such charge is fundamental to the fulfillment of it. Failure to understand such responsibility is an underlying cause of the world's woes. Nations are vying with one another because they have forgotten the purpose of God. Husbands and wives fail to fulfill God's purpose because they have forgotten or rejected the purpose of marriage, established by God. Children are delinquent because parents have forgotten or rejected the simple, plain instruction of God. Even in the midst of this obvious chaos, many people assume competence in administering responsibilities *not* given to them, but are unable or unwilling to handle charges incumbent upon them. Before we can handle greater responsibility, we must first learn to discharge those physical responsibilities already given—such as marriage and the procreation of children. In this context, God plainly tells us that if a man cannot rule his own household, he cannot possibly rule the Church of God.

Peter was inspired to write:

And above all things have fervent charity [love] among yourselves: for charity [love] shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift [administrative charge], even so minister [administer] the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. . . (1 Pet 4:8–11).

What are the responsibilities given to us, individually? Have we sought them out? Do we thoroughly understand? *Assumption* of administrative responsibility *not given* is the root cause of chaos, disharmony, contention, and every evil work. And God is not the author of such conditions. If we would be God's, let us understand our liabilities, both physically and spiritually, and then set about to overcome them. Sins are both of commission and omission. Let us not fail—but fully live up to the expectations of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What are our personal administrative responsibilities? In Colossians 3, Paul beautifully spelled them out for our understanding. He wrote:

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity [love], which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful (Colossians 3:12–15).

This is the charge of every living being. But this is a personal charge which we forget when emotions and resentments are allowed to dominate. If we will *always* be the servants of God, let us administer *love and understanding*. It is in that area of administration which we can see the breakdown during the past few years in the church. Proper administration of individual responsibility is not limited to people *we* accept or approve. For in any such manifestation of partiality, we prove ourselves to be no different than publicans, sinners, or workers of iniquity. They, too, respect their own. We are different when, and only when, we curb the emotions of self and live up to the expansive characteristics of God's way of life —by showing love and mercy to all. He is merciful and kind to all. For, even the rain falls on the just and the unjust.

Note Jesus' instructions in Luke 6:31–32. He said: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them." Note carefully, Jesus said to love others as you desire

others to love and respect you. He did not say to treat them in the manner they elect to treat you. And, do not most of us want to be acceptably treated at all times? Therefore, in exactly *that manner* we should treat all people at all times. Please note, this does not mean the condonation of wrong or sin. Christ is talking about our relationships with human beings. And those relationships must always reflect the character of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. What is their character? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). And to whom did God manifest this love? "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

Administration by Which You Heard Truth

Administration is of God. Within that administration, there are many levels of responsibility. Those levels were created by God, and He alone can assign. God and His Son, Jesus Christ, created the office of the ministry—an *administrative* responsibility. No one may assume that office. One must be called and be placed in that office by God. Also, the ministry is the only means by which one can come to the knowledge of the Truth. Christ was a minister and apostle. He called, trained and commissioned His successors. In like manner, He called and commissioned the Apostle Paul. Paul said, "Who [God] also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

God calls and commissions His true servants. Through them, all converted Christians have come to the knowledge of the Truth. And today, the administration (application) of the Law is spiritual—not physical, of the letter.

As we shall see more completely in later sections of this letter, problems and difficulties have been generated because of the confusion in understanding the difference between the letter application, as opposed to the spiritual application, of the laws and statutes of God. Regardless, however, we have come to know the Truth *because of administration*. We were taught by God's chosen servants—His ministers.

In this respect, those who are bewildered and confused about the application of spiritual administration have denied true spirituality altogether. Why? Because when they resist all ministers, they resist the administration of God. God administers His way through His own chosen ministers. The need to "know the ministry" does not justify departure from God's form of administration, but rather the ascertaining of those who are faithful and loyal to the revealed Truth.

Careful evaluation of administrative responsibility requires two distinct considerations: 1) Each one must adhere to the revealed doctrine. Doctrine is absolute and cannot change. 2) The administrative approach of God's servants must also be carefully considered. Subsequent letters, and points of this letter, will make it clear that any departure from the *first* concept must not be countenanced or followed. But, in addition, defiance against or resisting of any servant for the *second* reason cannot be justified, either. The examples of Solomon, Samuel and the Jews in the days of Jesus Christ make this point quite clear. Jesus said to the people who were under the oppressive Jewish administration: Do what they say but do not after their works; for they say, and do not. They were abusive and hypocritical. But they still sat in the seat of Moses. Note Matthew 23:1–6. Departure for wrong administrative practices is not justified. The only basis for separation from the church is doctrinal departure!

Administration does involve the ministry. What, then, is the scope and limit of their administrative responsibility?

Administration of the Ministry

Within the scope and limits of ministerial administration are many specific functions and responsibilities. These need to be understood by all. The ministry will be judged by how well they have *fulfilled* those responsibilities. The laity will be judged by how well they *respond* to those responsibilities. And, in general, we all will be judged by how well we respond to one another.

First, the ministry must be cognizant of the needs of all the people under their care. These needs are both spiritual and physical. The Apostle Paul frequently attended to the physical needs of the people whom God had called through his preaching. In Romans 15, the Apostle Paul manifested a keen desire to go to Spain and to Rome to preach the Truth. But, for the present, there was a very great physical need for him to journey to Jerusalem. The saints of Palestine had been deeply affected by severe drought. From the churches of God in other areas of the world, an abundant bounty of food necessities had been gathered. Paul had elected to make the delivery personally—choosing to attend to these physical needs himself. Compare Romans 15:19–28 with 2 Corinthians 8:18–20.

This example forms a part of the Bible. In addition to proclaiming the Truth, the ministry obviously has a serious responsibility to extend care and concern for the physical needs of God's people.

Second, the ministry is accountable for guiding, teaching and instructing the chosen people of God. Fulfillment of their specific administrative responsibility requires that they faithfully preach *the truth* which God gave to them.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (2 Cor 3:3). The lives the Corinthians were living were a testimony to the spiritual principles which they had been taught. Minds and hearts had changed. The power of the Holy Spirit had acted upon the minds of those people. They lived the Truth, which could be observed by others. What outsiders saw was harmony between what the ministers taught and what the called servants were doing daily. Their actions were living proof of the validity of ministerial responsibility. The ministry taught the Truth, and the people responded—from the heart, not coercively. The principles which the ministers taught were inscribed upon the *hearts* of the people who heard God's Word and responded to it. Coercive obedience does not come from the heart. Such obedience is attained out of fear—fear of men or organizations.

True administration requires fulfillment of responsibility from the heart—out of love for the message and respect for the Truth. Ministers are called and sent to proclaim the Truth. The people are called through the Word spoken by God's chosen servants. They must administratively apply those truths, in their own lives, because they love the Truth and respond out of respect for it. As God does not force any minister to remain faithful to his responsibility, so He does not force the laity to accept or conform.

Third, the ministry of reconciliation has been given to those called of God for His purpose. Paul wrote:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18–20).

Paul knew that the people were called by his preaching. He said: ". . . as though God did beseech you by us . . ." (verse 20, above). It was his responsibility, as well as the responsibility of all other ministers chosen by God, to administer the Truth—to preach the way of life. It was a ministry of reconciliation, not a ministry of judgment. The true ministry must dispense mercy, kindness and help. They must reconcile, not destroy. As long as there is hope—and the sinful actions of people are not internally damaging to others—the ministry is duty-bound by God to teach, inspire, influence, convict and help those in need. The example of Christ is one of profound mercy and kindness. We can do no less than He did. He is our leader.

The ministry has been given the responsibility of administering a message of reconciliation. They have not been given the duty of *judgment*. That charge has been assigned

to Christ and is not yet applicable. The day of judgment has been appointed. But thank God, the administration of ministerial mercy, kindness and inspiration rejoices against that day of judgment. God finds no satisfaction in the destruction of the wicked. Because of His love and character, He is overjoyed when one resolves his problems and begins to live the full, abundant life which God willed that all pursue. If God so loved mankind, dispensing such mercy and kindness, should His ministerial servants do any less?

Fourth, administration carries with it limits and bounds. There are administrative restrictions imposed upon the laity. Comparably, there are limits imposed upon the ministry in general. Also, there are specific restrictions which regulate the ministry's activities.

For example, may just anyone decide to be a prophet? Can one who is called of God, to fill the office of an evangelist, impulsively decide to become an apostle? Is it acceptable to God for one given the responsibility of manifesting the gift of faith to presume the capabilities of healing? In like manner, may those called of God for restricted duties (in limited areas) arbitrarily change the geographical limits? See Matthew 10:5–6; 15:24; 28:19–20; Acts 9:15; 13:47; 14:27; 15:12; 21:19; and Romans 11:13.

Presumption of office and responsibilities has been key in the failure of many chosen servants of God. Saul is an example. Prophecy indicates that such a situation would exist in the last days. To be discussed comprehensively, in the third letter of this series, is the administrative presumption in our time. For, vested authority and rule have their limits.

Fifth, God's chosen ministers must faithfully preach the truth given to them. They are not at liberty to change the message which God delivers. The apostles, including Paul, wrote of their faithfulness to the message which had been delivered to them. Christ faithfully administered His responsibility when here on earth. He taught only that which the Father had given to Him in command. He did not speak His own words.

Comprehensive administrative responsibility does not grant the freedom to alter or change the message given. To be a legitimate servant of God, one must first have received the true message. He may not presume. The example of Paul will make this point clear. He said, as recorded by Luke: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). A ministerial, *administrative* responsibility had been given to him. Was the message delivered to him also? He wrote to the Ephesians:

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph 3:3–5).

The message—the way of life—resides with God the Father only. In His own time, He makes that message known to His chosen vessels. They are, in turn, held accountable for faithful performance of their designated responsibility. Where, in this order of God's plan, is there permission to err? There is none! Presumption relative to a call, arrogation of specific duty, preferential determination of right and wrong, faithlessness in performance of assigned responsibility—are all condemned in God's Word. The true ministry must be the same yesterday, today and forever. They must be faithful to call and duty. They must evidence the same character God possesses. And further, they must walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, the perfect example. Administratively they should dispense mercy, tolerance and kindness. They must preach the revealed Truth. And they should aid the called and chosen in their endeavors to overcome and put on the character of Christ.

Administration of the Prophets

Prophets are administrators, too. Their knowledge, power and might were not a mere display of vanity. They were servants dedicated to their call and mission. What was that mission—that purpose? Whom did they serve?

Peter wrote:

Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they [prophets] did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost [Spirit] sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into (1 Pet 1:12).

The prophets did not serve themselves. They were called of God to indict and record historical events applicable to us in our day. Their purpose—as well as that of Christ and other servants called of God—illustrates the fundamental character of administration. It is objective, not subjective. It is an act of true service, in a genuine interest for others. It is self-deprecating. True administration is condescension toward others.

When one realizes the scope of godly administration, failures and abuses become startlingly absurd, as well as disconcerting and disgusting. Advantage and opportunity, taken because of position or responsibility, are odious in the eyes of God. For, all spiritual responsibility is of God. The duties involved therein were created and sanctioned by God for the purpose of serving others. Reversing that order does violence to the beauty and order of God's way of life.

As true ministers, we must serve the people. We must not presume judgment or arrogate responsibilities which have not been given. The lessons of the prophets, Jesus Christ and the apostles prove that point.

Warning to the Ministry

Paul knew the pitfalls involved in discharging the office of a minister. Many places in the Bible give specific warnings, concerning the human tendency to pervert the Truth. Historical evidence makes it plain that few remained faithful to the God-given responsibility.

In Colossians 4:17, Paul warns a fellow minister—one under his charge—of the necessity to carry out the requirements of the ministry. He says: "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it." Archippus had not personally elected to become a minister. He was chosen by Christ. And his duty was to remain faithful to that charge. The charge involved the truth which he was called to preach, not just the office of a minister. Continuing in the capacity of a minister is of little value if the servant does not continue in the truth which he was taught. God is little concerned with continuity of office. But He is greatly concerned with faithfulness to the way of life which He gives. A priceless gift—the Truth of God—has been given to His chosen servants, and He instructs them to remain faithful to that call.

Paul, speaking of the last days, warned of the human tendency to depart from the Truth. False ministers do not give up office; they turn from the pure, unadulterated way of life with which God entrusts them. They are not faithful. Paul wrote to the evangelist Timothy:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim 4:1–5).

Even in the last days, the ministry is chargeable to God for administering the Truth. Most are prophesied to depart from the way of life. But, the instructions of Paul to Timothy (applicable to our time) certainly indicate the existence of a true ministry in these days. Why, then, do some who take exception with the concept of administration—its application in mercy, kindness and tolerance—deny administration altogether by avoiding their responsibility to "know" those who have the rule over them? Individualization is not acceptable to God. Regardless how few there are who remain faithful to the revealed Truth, they are one in mind and heart. They administer their individual responsibilities by living up to the Christian principles. And those principles require a relationship with one another, as well as with the entire congregation. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to perform those responsibilities by separating and living isolated lives. Such actions do not fulfill the purpose of Christianity.

Administration is properly performed only by comprehension and understanding. We must know the rules and regulations. We must know our limits. We must not assume. As we shall see, later, there was a different administration prior to the time of Christ. He effected an administrative change. Grace and truth came by Him. And grace involves mercy and kindness. But, at the same time, correct spiritual administration involves faithful continuity in responsibility. In the case of a minister, he must continue to preach the revealed Truth. Voluntary action, coming from the heart, is required on the part of the hearers. The New Testament dispensation does not allow for coercive conformity. It must come from the heart and by a genuine love of the Truth. It is the manifestation of true character. If this kind of character had existed in the lives of all chosen of God, there could have been no falling away from the Truth. Such apostasy can occur only due to disinterest in and contempt for the responsibility borne—because of a lack of character.

With all that lies within us, it is our desire to administer the laws and ways of God with love and kindness. Mercy is the key to overcoming. It is absolutely necessary to tender mercy, in order to see some finally make it through the severity of their trials. And, in that sense, all of us need mercy far more than we may think.

Kind of Administration Acceptable to God

Administration is of God. No one can honestly deny that. We have seen what the nature of administration is, and how it applies to peoples of respective responsibilities. But, what kind of administration is acceptable to God? To faithfully fulfill and perform in accordance with the intent and purpose of God, we must understand what is approved of God.

In 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul speaks of some who addicted themselves to serving (ministering to) the saints. That is, they were wholehearted and deliberate in their efforts. They were motivated by the Spirit. This was no casual or incidental response. It was exemplary, in the eyes of God. It is recorded as an example for us—a part of the sacred Word of God.

One of the key characteristics of a genuine servant of God is his wholehearted response to duty or service. It manifests itself in selflessness and true humility. It is oftentimes unnoticed for long periods of time. A true and genuine servant does not seek recognition. He asks only for the opportunity to serve others. And when that opportunity is afforded, he serves with his might and strength.

In the long run, employment of ulterior motives deceives no one except the one involved. God wants our character to be as sterling as pure silver or gold. Do our actions indicate the true self? Let us always dispense (administer) true love, integrity, honesty and character. This, and this alone, is the administrative behavior acceptable to God. Be wholehearted. Perform with a pure heart. Give your best, at all times.

God's Law is absolute. It is the standard of righteousness which God requires. It is the very basis of judgment in the last days. Yet, in relationship to the Law, God requires mercy and kindness toward one whose attitude is right. That is, in relationship to personal contacts, God indicates the mandatory nature of mercy and tolerance.

James wrote:

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment (Jas. 2:8–13).

In what area of our lives, our thoughts and beliefs, does partiality exist? Is it not in judging others? The greatest difficulty lies in the preferential treatment we accord ourselves in our relationships with others. For James said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. . ." When one is capable of living this principle of life, he does well.

What sins of commission or omission do *we* have, toward which we are unusually tolerant and forgiving? But toward which we would have only contempt and disgust if observed in the lives of *others*!

Sin is sin. It is abominable in the sight of God, regardless of who the violator may be. And it is sin, in the sight of God, for us to accord *ourselves* greater love, respect, tolerance and mercy than we do others. God does not categorize sin. If we break one of the laws of the Eternal, we have broken them all. Do we covet a little, maybe just occasionally? If so, we are guilty of breaking *all* the laws. Have we honored our parents perfectly? If not, we are guilty of breaking *all* the commands. Do we feel that we are more perfect than others chosen of God? If so, we have committed the sin of self-righteousness. Man is in a helpless state. All of us need mercy, tolerance and forgiveness—daily.

Does mercy, kindness and understanding—a forgiving spirit and heart—indicate an attitude of condonation (acceptance) of sin? Absolutely not! Sin is sin. It is vile in the sight of God. The Bible is a complete chronicle of man's problems, resulting from his following the way of covetousness and iniquity.

Why, then, the spiritual requirements (spiritual administration) of mercy, tolerance and forgiveness? Without mercy, overcoming and an attendant change in the character of man would

be impossible. For, there is no man who does not sin daily. The requirement of the Law is death. If the full force of the Law were applied daily, there would be no man left alive at the end of the first day. But, mercy rejoices against the Judgment. Why? Because mercy affords us the possibility of overcoming—putting on the nature and character of God by crucifying the self.

In administration, an attitude of mercy and forgiveness is absolutely essential. Jesus Christ said: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6:14–15).

God reads the hearts. No man can. And it is by reading the heart, only, that God evaluates the endeavor of personal mastery. Time is crucial for repentance and overcoming. And a forgiving, helpful spirit—on the part of others who profess to be Christians—is necessary. The final judgment is at the time of Jesus Christ's return.

How tolerant should we be toward others? Surely, there must be a limit to that which we must countenance? There is! It is at the time of death, or at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Read the fate of any who will not exercise the necessity of mercy and kindness. It is found in Matthew 18:21–35. If we do not completely forgive, from the heart, God will not forgive us in the day of judgment. And who is there that will not need the covering blood of Jesus Christ, and a substantial portion of His mercy, at the day of judgment?

We must consider the consequences of a letter-of-the-law approach to the problems of other human beings. Arrogancy, conceit and self-righteousness—which lead (rather, deceive) us into believing we will not need the mercy of God—must be recognized for what they are.

Failure to exercise the above principle was, perhaps, one of the most damaging problems in God's Church of the latter days. This principle will be thoroughly documented in the third letter of this series.

We have discussed administrative principles which relate to all of God's people in general. What are the specific requirements imposed upon the ministry of Jesus Christ? These points we must completely understand.

To the Corinthians Paul wrote:

We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. . . Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by

longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost [Spirit], by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things (2 Corinthians 6:1–10).

And Jesus Christ said of Himself and the true ministry:

Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt 20:25–28).

The book of 2 Samuel records:

. . . David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. For when David was up in the morning, the word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and say unto David, Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. . . . And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man. . . . And David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house (2 Sam 24:10–17, parts).

David knew the people were not directly responsible. His administration was one of mercy.

Relevant information may also be found in Proverbs 20:28. We read: "Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy."

Ministers ordained of God must administer responsibilities in mercy and kindness. Their very responsibilities are sustained through mercy and truth. But when both mercy and truth fail, the ministry and the sheep are in deep trouble.

True servants of God must assume their own guilt. They must set an example of self-negation—of self-sacrifice. They must not live contrary to that which they teach or require of those under them. Whatever they administer to the people is precisely what they ask for themselves. If they are intolerant, merciless, hard and unsympathetic, they are inviting the same condemnation.

God's true servants must be faithful and loyal—dedicated to the truth which God alone can give. If they are not faithful, how can they expect others to be responsive to their responsibilities? True servants must first set the example. Christ, both as a minister and as the Son of God, was implicitly obedient to the instructions of the Father and to the requirements of a Son of God. For, Christianity is walking in the footsteps of Christ.

Though not guilty, He (Christ) took the sins of the world upon Himself. He became a sin-offering for mankind. Likewise, the chosen ministry must take to themselves the necessity of faithful performance. They, as much as anyone else, must assume their own guilt and confess it. Failure to do this can only produce chaos and trouble in the Body—the Church.

Now let us briefly review the united, collective (or combined) responsibility of the ministry and the laity. No man can stand alone. Most responsibilities are performed in a harmonious relationship with others of differing duties.

From the Living Translation, 2 Corinthians 8:4 reads: "They [the people] begged us [ministry] to take the money so they could share in the joy of helping the Christians in Jerusalem." Much of the initial work had been performed by the people. They had the joy of gathering up the commodities which they were sending via Paul. Paul had the charge of delivering their largess personally. Both shared in the performance of a Christian duty. Both will be the recipients of God's blessings for a duty well performed. All were involved in an act of spiritual administration. Paul could not have done the whole service himself. And it probably was not possible, without ministerial direction, to deliver the goods to the needy brethren in Jerusalem. But their *united* act became a Biblical example for us. It is instruction from God, by which we shall live. Harmonious relationships are superior to the independence of individuality. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

Harmony and oneness come from the recognition of responsibility and the personal mastery of overcoming those human tendencies which generate strife and disagreement. Let us now understand the diversity of administrative responsibility.

Administration Has Various Levels of Responsibility

There is but one Truth. It is perfect truth. It cannot alter or change. But there are many administrative responsibilities. These duties, combined, make up the whole—the complete

mission and purpose of Jesus Christ. In the creating of a church—the continuation of the Body of Christ—He divided the responsibilities. Those chosen of God to become a part of that body are given specific gifts and duties, predetermined by God. It then becomes the collective responsibility of all the called and chosen of God to create the oneness which Jesus Christ experienced in His own fleshly body. And that oneness cannot be achieved except by the negation of self and by living up to the spiritual purpose for which God called us together. The degree of performance is evidenced by our relationships with one another and the understanding of individual responsibility. Assumption on the part of any one of the chosen subjects will result in discord and chaos—confusion, of which God is no part.

What are the offices and responsibilities? Understanding them, and accepting the facts as they are, will make it possible for us to live in harmony and agreement. Any assumption will generate disharmony.

First, "the office of a deacon" is detailed in 1 Timothy 3:10–13. "Deacon," in the Greek, simply means one who serves. By prior qualifications, the servant is permitted to carry out a responsibility of administration—the New Testament (spiritual) administration. And qualification, was achieved by complete self-negation. The office was not created for the pleasure of fulfilling it. Rather, it is an opportunity of service—to subjugate self and cater to others.

As we have already seen, the laity had much to do with the selection of those who would render this service. Those selected had the complete approbation and approval of the people they would serve. How differently this responsibility was handled in the recent past! What mistakes and difficulties could have been eliminated, altogether if this simple, combined responsibility had been harmoniously carried out! Further, how different conditions would have been if the selection had been predicated on service—and not on personal preference on the part of the ministry, or afforded as an opportunity for the individual to manifest his own vanity. Some were excellent servants, but how many left much to be desired?

In organizing the New Testament church, Jesus and His Father had certain specific functions in mind (1 Cor 12:5–6). What was the administrative structure of functions which God ordained? An ascending, hierarchical order of ministerial ranks was a product of pagan "Christianity" *after the third century*. It was never a part of original Christianity.

To the Ephesian church, Paul wrote: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11). And to the Corinthians he wrote:

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues

[languages]. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? (1 Corinthians 12:27–29).

The Church is the Body of Christ. In that body are many responsibilities. And those duties are given by God. No one may assume any one of them. God sets the individuals and gives responsibilities in accordance with His will. And, perfect harmony is achieved by each individual's understanding his own duties and faithfully performing them in relationship to all other duties and responsibilities. Major troubles are experienced when people assume. How many lift themselves up, taking duty and position which God has not given? Such action will surely warrant God's condemnation.

Receiving a duty is predicated on understanding its purpose and direction. What is the purpose of God—the purpose for which He structured the Church?

Let us return to Ephesians. Paul wrote, after listing administrative responsibilities: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). The overall responsibility is to instruct and aid the Body of Christ—members in particular—to achieve perfection. And verse 13 makes it clear that such responsibility will continue until the Second Coming of Christ—for, perfection will be achieved no earlier. At that time there will be complete unity. This is not to say that we should not struggle for such oneness at the present time. No, but regardless of how hard we try, such perfection will not be achieved until Christ comes and makes even the minute details known, erasing from us the insidious natures with which we were born.

The purpose of the struggle for oneness, at the present time, is avoidance of the human tendency to be swayed in many directions. Unstable minds are never settled in faith. They are always darting in divergent directions. And the justifications are limitless.

Solidarity of purpose and direction cannot be assumed by any individual until the purposes and operation of God are completely understood. Where is the ministry? A belief that one can independently—without the help of the ministry—make it into the Kingdom of God, denies virtually every principle of true administration and the purpose of God. God is the one who has established such a purpose. In failing to understand and live up to His intent and purpose, one denies Him.

Knowing human nature, one must ask how the above perfection can ever be achieved. With men, this would be impossible. But let us note, again, the perfect example. Jesus lived His fleshly life so that we would have an example to follow. How did He achieve it? Let us quote a single passage which will make the need apparent and clear:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no

reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name (Ph'p 2:5–9).

If you expect to have administrative responsibility in the Kingdom of God, you must empty out the self now. Just be a kind and merciful servant, in whatever responsibility God has given you. Do not assume or take a charge to yourself. Recognize God's call in your life, then live up to the purpose of that call and the gift He has given you. It is no problem to know when God has given you responsibility. It comes through the structure which He has blueprinted and given to us.

A Change of Administration: Once

The Old Testament was an administration of the letter. It was stern and unmitigated. There was no room for repentance. There was no mercy. When one sinned seriously, death was inevitable.

But, with the advent of Jesus Christ, there was a change of administration. He brought truth and mercy. For the first time, true repentance was possible. That is, the death penalty was intercepted—opportunity for change was granted.

He personally lived a merciful and tolerant life. He practiced forbearance and forgiveness. Yet, at the same time, He preached with power, conviction and authority. Even though mercy had come and was exercised, the responsibility of preaching the Law in all of its force and authority had not diminished one iota. The change of administration was predicated on a human need—the need to grant time for change, the evidence of true repentance.

After Jesus Christ had completed His mission on the earth, He was received back up into heaven, from where He had come. He returned to His former glory and responsibility. But He did not leave mankind destitute of direction and purpose. Before ascending to heaven, He established the Church. At the same time, Christ created the New Testament ministry—a ministry of reconciliation. That ministry was, and still is, under the requirements of the new administration. It must walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

The product of that new ministry must reflect the intent and purpose of that administrative change. Paul explains this transition, in 2 Corinthians 3:2–11. He says: "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men." Their lives were the reflection of the mercy and love of God. They were willingly obedient—obedient from the heart. Their conduct was not coercive obedience, or obedience to the long arm of State. It was an obedience which stemmed from a *love* of the Truth. Paul continues: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the

epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." Willing and heartfelt obedience is plainly observable. It is responsive. It flows from the heart and mind. It does not come from fear and arbitrary authority. God does not want robot obedience. This obedience was spiritual obedience, because the intent of that obedience was written in their hearts.

And Paul, writing to these Corinthian brethren, confirmed the change. He said of the ministry: "[Christ] . . . hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." Outside of the New Testament administration, what other administrative responsibility existed? Only one. It was the administration of the Old Covenant. That administration took the lives of those who sinned. There was no mercy or forgiveness. But the New Testament administration was the continuation of that which Jesus Christ brought. It was the display of mercy and forgiveness. It made life possible.

It seems that some, in the Corinthian church, had difficulty in understanding the change which Jesus Christ brought to light. They desired coercive obedience. But Paul was informing them that such administration produced death. Life was not possible through that order.

But was such administration—that of the Old Covenant—evil and bad? No, not unless we fail to see the real reason for it. It was written in blood and sorrow for us, upon whom the ends of the world are come. The historical lessons make it plainly obvious that legalism and coercive administration will not produce life. Such fear and coercion will not change hearts and minds. What God is producing is character. It is manifested in *willing* obedience to the Truth. And God does not will to interfere with the order of events and circumstances by which such character is produced. He has given no such authority to the New Testament ministry. To revert to enforced obedience is to return to the Old Testament form of administration. And, to do this is to resort to confusion of principle. Cannot we separate the Law from its form of administration? It was administered by the letter in the past. Today, we must administer by the Spirit.

Continuing in 2 Corinthians, we read:

. . . if the ministration [administration] of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious ?

There was an intrinsic glory (beauty) of even the physical application of God's Law. But, why cannot we come to realize that the spiritual application is much more significant? The Law and obedience to it remain exactly the same. It is a matter of how it is administered. In times past, it was administered according to the letter. Those who sinned had to pay the price—death.

Today, the spiritual administration—tolerance, forgiveness and mercy—allows for life and change of heart and mind. How much more glorious!

Paul continues:

. . . if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

That which remains? The Law of God! That which is done away? The form of administration—the letter which killeth! Why, then, do some desire to bring back that which Jesus Christ abolished by His death? He made it possible for you and me to have life—to have mercy and forgiveness, which we need on a daily basis.

Does the application of mercy and tolerance soften the force of God's Law? Can people now impugn God's way with utter contempt?

When we understand, it becomes apparent that by the application of mercy and forgiveness, the ultimate force of the Law is enhanced. The gift of grace is for one purpose only. It offers us sufficient space for repentance and change of heart and mind. Through a wise fear of God and His Word, we may effectively use mercy and grace to absolve a guilty past. But such freedom allows for no voluntary insubordination or rebellion against God—against His Law and way of life. This freedom is granted for the sole purpose of drawing closer to God in perfect obedience—obedience to the way of life which was given to us, that for which we were baptized.

Must Not Forsake the Solemn Assembly

Paul makes these principles very clear, in the book of Hebrews. We read:

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith [belief in the way to which we were called], having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience [our natural heart and inclinations of mind], and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22).

But what is the purpose of this absolution? Why such extension of grace and mercy? Continuing: "Let us hold fast [how? by change or continuity?] the profession [past commitment by word and action] of our faith [belief in the way] without wavering [the manifestation of character]; (for he is faithful that promised;)" (Hebrews 10:23). God is consistent! He expects us to develop the same nature and character. Paul continues:

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together [fellowship is mandatory, where there is a church to attend], as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:24–25).

History—Biblical and profane—indicates the fact the people of God, by this time, were separating from the visible church, due to doctrinal aberrations. Yet, Paul was inspired of God to instruct the people to continue meeting together—fellowshipping with one another, for their mutual good. God commanded the solemn meeting. Times and circumstances do not change that inexorable law. Conditions do not alter the force of that law. But why should we continue to meet with one another? Paul continues:

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth [and we did receive the truth—knowledge of the Bible which applies to us in our very day], there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant [confirmed at the time of baptism], wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:26–29).

Death was immediate, under the letter-of-the-law application (administration). Whereas, under the terms of the new administration, death is postponed—granting space for repentance. But if we misunderstand the terms of grace and willfully break the Law, ultimate death is more permanent. It is the "sorer punishment" to which Paul makes reference.

For the present, judgment is held in abeyance. The premise of that judgment is exactly the same—regardless of the times of the administration. The only variable is the time involved in overcoming. Therefore, Paul continues: ". . . Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people" (Heb 10:30). The context, here, implies people had the same problem then as they have today. Some were requiring immediate judgment—coercive obedience or expulsion from the Body. But Paul was inspired to write that such is not the nature of the new administration. Judgment is future. It will be exercised by the only one appointed to perform that task. In the meantime, mercy is extended—the appointment of time necessitated for complete change of hearts and minds. But such mercy does not lessen the ultimate force and lethality of God's Law.

Those who are part of the New Testament ministry (administration) exercise an appointment by God only. No man may take this responsibility unto himself. The ministry of reconciliation is a New Testament administration. It is the administration of mercy, grace and tolerance. And because of this mercy, evil-minded men perverted the Truth of God. Corrupt administration proceeded from within the church (2 Cor 11:5–20). In this administration, the

very extension of mercy was a cloak behind which error was espoused. it is not startling that administration is, this very day, so troublesome to people—at both ends of the spectrum. Some want the return of the physical administration, while others have taken the conditions of mercy as an opportunity to advocate liberalism.

Why Bad Administration Is So Wrong

Christianity is possible only by Christ's living in us. We are a reflection of the life and character of Christ.

The Christ pictured by professing "believers" is divided, confused, corrupt and brutal. This is the exact opposite of what we read of His character and purpose, recorded in the Bible. Today, a false Christ is worshipped. There is a vast difference between the true Christ and the image which most worship—for, the latter has assumed a posture not condoned in the sacred Scriptures.

The true Christ came to manifest obedience to His Father. He was a perfect example of character.

By the corrupt assumptions of those who have arrogated responsibility and powers not given by God, Christ has been made to appear as a minister of sin (Gal 2:16–20). Extension of mercy, by His death, did not abrogate the force of the Law. Such kindness was afforded for the sole purpose of granting us the necessary space for change in our minds and hearts. Time is afforded us to confess our guilt and make the necessary changes in our lives—changes dictated by the laws and statutes of God.

By living the laws and statutes of God, we manifest the character of Christ. But by employing the spirit of grace as an opportunity to circumvent obedience to the way of God, we make Christ appear to be the minister of sin. How atrocious! The New Testament administration of God's Law is our hope of everlasting life. Let us not corrupt it.

Until next time, all our love and prayers.

In love and deep respect,

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