

Church of God, The Eternal

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Doctrine Versus Administration—Part III: The New Administration and Church Government

July 1978

Dear Brethren:

A belated greetings? The month will be half expired before you receive this letter. I had hoped to write it while in Switzerland. But the days spent there were full and long. Therefore, I have had to write this *Monthly Letter* after my return to Eugene. And as you may know, the duties piled up here while I was gone.

The trip abroad was wonderful, rewarding and refreshing. There are yet a few people who really do love the Truth of God. Response has been generally slow, because most of the people are simply not aware of what is happening in the church. In fact, there are some who sincerely believe many of the problems they are experiencing are entirely due to the man (minister) assigned to their particular area. They are dumbfounded to find that all this mess, chaos and confusion proceeds from Pasadena.

With the addition of several new families in the past few weeks—from Belgium and France—the people of Europe are greatly inspired. And we all are mutually inspired, and convey our love and kindness once again.

God is so merciful and kind. In many cases, whole families have responded to the need to return to the faith once delivered. In other cases, the mates may not be a part of us but are very affable, warm and cooperative.

This year, the French-speaking brethren's Feast of Tabernacles will be more than doubled over last year. It is possible that 55 to 60 people will be present.

The numbers are small. But each servant is priceless in the sight of God. The way into everlasting life is difficult, and few there be that find it. Even so, God knows His own and will yet separate out those who are worthy. Let's all be praying for those whose lives are at this moment being weighed in the balance. Multitudes are in the valley of decision. They need help from us—through our earnest, prevailing prayers.

We visited people in Belgium (at the present, one very fine family), in northern France, in south-central France, and in western France—the Bordeaux area. What a privilege to see, speak to and help these people! All manifested the indwelling presence of the Spirit. Truly, they are our brothers and sisters. And for the most part, these people were thrilled to see and understand the problems of our time—in the church.

The above is about all I can convey through this letter. I must not give names, locations or specifics. Enemies of the Truth have capitalized on this information in the past. Much more can be discussed with you individually at the Feast this fall.

The concepts of doctrine and administration have been covered in the past two issues of the *Monthly Letter*. What we need to understand now is how these affect us. Can we orient—change or modify—doctrine to the concepts, styles and beliefs of the twentieth century? Are laws and ways of the ancient past relevant to the present? Can, or should, doctrine be static and unbending? Do administrators, chosen and called by God, have the right to review and update the force and direction of doctrine?

What about administration? Was it changed? How does the concept of administration affect the doctrine of church government? Is government of God? What was the purpose of government? What are its scope and limits? Who bears the responsibility of government? Is there evidence that the power and authority vested in government have been abused? Does the misuse of a doctrine render it null and void?

How does grace fit into the picture of the doctrine of government? What about mercy—what part does it play in the exercise of government?

Religious leaders bore authority in Old Testament times and during the era of Jesus Christ and the apostles. But, is not such responsibility contrary to the Christian principles required upon the chosen of our era of time? Did not the exercise of individual spiritual responsibility come to a conclusion with the charges of Christ and the apostles? Are not all peoples free and independent in their relationship with Christ today? Is not Christ the one and only Mediator between God and man? Cannot any who will to be obedient to God come to the knowledge of the truth, independent of a ministry? Should any human being be subject to any other human being—in either physical or spiritual matters?

Once established in responsibility by God, is inherent ministerial power and authority absolute? Are all members mere pawns, to be moved upon the chessboard of life at the whim of superiors? What is the relationship, *approved of God*, which must exist between the laity and the ministry?

What do the lessons of history (lessons of both subjects and rulers) teach us? Make no mistake about it, understanding the object lessons of history—and our immediate past—is essential to the fulfillment of God's awesome purpose!

Doctrine Is Absolute

What is doctrine?

It is the very Word of God—pronounced into existence by Jesus Christ! And that very Word was made flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:1, 14), the very personage of Jesus Christ. That is, Christ was the Word of God personified—living in the flesh as a manifestation of the Way of life.

Only those to whom the Son is revealed can come to know Him (Matt. 11:27 and 16:15–17). Since Christ is the Word of God personified and must be revealed, it becomes most evident that doctrine (the Word of God) must also be revealed. As Christ in the flesh and dwelling among men of His day was unknown to them except by revelation, so the Word of God—though written in the book of the Bible—cannot be known or understood today except by divine revelation. Paul was inspired to make that point clear to the called and chosen of his day (1 Cor. 2; Eph. 3:1–9; Rom. 16:25–26).

As the truth was revealed to God's called and chosen instruments in the day of Noah and in the time of Abraham—as it was revealed to Moses and his successors, to Jesus Christ and to the apostles (including Paul)—so was it revealed to the chosen servant of God in the last days. The Bible is written for *our* admonition and learning. The Biblical record is of value to us in that it reveals *how* God works. We must live by it—in its totality. For, man shall live by every word of God—not merely by the "bread" of personal and selective choice.

In *our* day God revealed the truth. Christ is living in us. Within those *chosen* of God Christ lives, unless they deny and reject Him. He is the truth and the life. He is the Word of God. Acceptance of Christ is acceptance of *truth*. As the Truth of God—the very Word of God—He is unchanging (Heb. 13:8). Once called of God, Christians become recipients of the way of eternal life—possessors of the truth. They have Christ living in them, and that way is *not* subject to review or change. It is a matter of continuity in faith. The change which must be effected is that of personal mastery and overcoming. Man must change, with the help of God, the carnal nature with which he was born—but he must not attempt to change the unalterable Word of God, which is the manifestation of the nature and character

of God. Satan, the enemy of truth, has subtly convinced man to transfer the requirement of change—from *man* to the very Word of God. In other words, Satan has deceptively led man to believe that God needs to change His Word, and not man his nature.

The doctrine which Christ taught is exactly the same doctrine which His chosen instruments are required to teach, in every era of time, until His imminent return (Matt. 28:20). And the only way by which any instrument of God could know the true doctrine is by divine revelation—the revelation of Jesus Christ, who represents the totality of true doctrine. The true servants of God in the last days are the recipients of that revelation. Each is required to be faithful to his call and responsibility. However, the Bible prophesied that there would be a departure from the truth—an apostasy was inevitable just prior to the return of Christ.

Paul wrote, to those called as ministerial servants of God:

... though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8–9).

To the called and chosen instruments of God, in the last days, the gospel of salvation was given. Those instruments are forbidden to teach any other doctrine. And the people are forbidden to accept or practice any other gospel—even if a clever perversion of the true doctrine (Gal. 1:6–7).

What God wants is faithfulness. He wants continuity in both the ministry and the laity. Jesus Christ—the author and finisher of our faith—said, "If ye *continue in my word*, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31–32). God committed to us a way of life. He is faithful who promised. Can we be faithful to that charge given us?

The Old Administration

There is an old administration, in contrast to a new administration. What was the old administration? And how did it differ from the new administration?

The old administration was of the letter. It required physical obedience. It was not of the heart and mind. It was an administration of condemnation—of death. Even so, the

basis of that administration was the Law of God. Failure to conform to the requirements of the laws and statutes of God meant death. The letter application of the Law produced death. There was no mercy involved. Compare the following texts: Romans 2:27, 29; 2 Corinthians 3:6, 7, 9; and Hebrews 10:28–29.

By thorough study of the Book of the Law, it can be readily determined that letter obedience was enforced by a stringent penal system. Even where the death sentence did not apply, physical obedience was fearfully encouraged by the necessity of reconciliation to Israel through sacrifices, fines, costly and laborious offerings, as well as the "eye for an eye" principle. It was a costly and laborious penal system which our forefathers could not bear (Acts 15:10).

Such letter obedience did not effect any real change of heart and mind (Deut. 5:29; Josh. 24:14–25). And physical obedience required an effective judicial system, as well as the absolute honesty of witnesses and governmental personnel.

A simple review of the historical evidence contained in the Bible will quickly reveal that such judicial honesty infrequently, if ever, truly existed. Human nature dominated in both the rulers, judges and administrative personnel, as well as in the people who had flaunted the laws and statutes of God.

Why, then, did God give such a system to the children of Israel? The reasons are twofold. First, the children of Israel were to write physical lessons for you and me—for those called of God in the end time; lessons by which we could become cognizant that sin and rebellion do not pay beneficial dividends (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). Secondly, the whole system developed was a lesson of the enormity of the sacrifice of Christ—a sacrifice necessary for us to have the hope of everlasting life (Heb. 9, 10). The entire ritualistic system indicates the gravity and seriousness of the sacrifice of Christ. What a price was paid for us! A price we could in no way match.

Just a moment of reflection ought to tell us that enforced obedience has *never* been effective. It has *never* changed the hearts and minds of the people involved. Surely, God is desirous of something greater than coerced obedience. How, then, has God planned to bring about heartfelt obedience? It cannot be accomplished through physical coercion. The whole history of God's chosen people proves that point, beyond a shadow of doubt. But, let us not progress too rapidly. The proof will come a little later in this letter.

At best, physical letter-of-the-law obedience produces *outward* obedience only. There was a certain glory accompanying such obedience (2 Cor. 3:6–11). Physical

obedience is much better than no obedience at all. Yet, such physical restraints did not allow for development of the *character* essential for inheritance of everlasting life. For that very reason, a certain flexibility had to be instituted at some time. As we shall see later, this latitude was brought by Christ.

At this point, what must be specifically understood is that letter-of-the-law requirements could not prevent the exercise of dishonesty, corruption, abuse and every other evil on the part of those held responsible for the administration of God's laws and statutes. Jesus Christ said of the Scribes and Pharisees (those with administrative responsibility):

Woe unto you . . . hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse *first that which is within* the cup and platter, that the *outside* of them may be clean also. Woe unto you . . . hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful *outward*, but are *within* full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matt. 23:25–28).

True conversion *commences* with the cleansing of the heart and mind. We must face the odious liability of our own natures. Then as Jesus said, after we effectively work on the heart and mind, the outside will take care of itself. Letter obedience is necessary as a secondary responsibility. The primary charge is the cleansing of heart and mind—the spiritual application of the laws and statutes of God—in the life of each individual.

Physical obedience, though effecting a certain glory, has never changed the basic heart or nature of man. As honorable as it may be, it is of no value when compared to the real *glory* which Christ desires to be created in us. And that glory is not forced, it is of the heart—a spontaneous obedience which reflects character and will.

Christ came to institute a new administration—the New Covenant. The only change indicated in the Bible, with reference to God's Law, is the transition from the old administration—the Old Covenant—to the new administration of the New Covenant. It was a change from the glory of the old to the overshadowing glory of the new (2 Cor. 3:13–18).

Grace and Mercy Introduced

Christ had to come to institute the new administration. What was the reason for this necessity? How did it differ from the old?

John wrote: "For the law was given [codified as a national constitution for Israel] by Moses, but grace and truth [spiritual dimension of the law which had existed before the national constitution for Israel] came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Christ said He was the truth and the way of life. He was the Word of God made flesh. Since there was no New Testament at the time He came and was manifested in the flesh, the Word to which reference was made is the Old Testament. Thus, as the manifestation of the Word and the truth, Christ brought to light grace and a *spiritual* manifestation of the Word which had been given physically (codified) to ancient Israel. By His very appearance, He became the *physical* manifestation of the Word. And by His life He was the *spiritual* manifestation of the Word of God—the Truth and the way of life (*not death*, which prevailed under the terms of the letter application of the codified Law of God).

The significant reason for the change from the physical application to the spiritual was to open the way for eternal life to mankind. Physical death prevailed under the old. But life was the intent and purpose of the new. Yet, in effecting this transition, the conditions and requirements of the Law became many times more binding and absolute (Matt. 7:13–14). This time, obedience was a matter of heart—intent—and not mere outward performance, the requirement of the old. Compare the following texts: Matthew 5:17–20, 21–22, 27–30, 31–32, 33–37, 38–42, 43–48; Matthew 6:14–15; Matthew 7:1–5, 12; and Matthew 9:10–13.

Man's carnal nature—hostile to God and His Law (Rom. 8:7)—cannot be mastered or overcome instantly. All men are subject to sin. For that reason, we must have faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We must come to Him in mercy, knowing that He is willing to take the guilt which we have incurred and put it under His own shed blood (1 John 1:8–10). This overcoming requires time. The mercy and grace of God are extended for the purpose of personal mastery—space of time is granted for true and genuine repentance. In this sense, we must grow daily. We must be putting on the character, nature and perfection of God. In no way is the mercy and grace of God extended for the purpose of changing His plan and purpose. We must not frustrate the grace of God. Grace does not give license to sin. Such manifested kindness and love is for the sole purpose of giving us the opportunity to overcome the deceptive, corrupt and carnal minds with which we were born.

This freedom was not afforded under the terms of the Old Covenant—the old administration. The old required death or the exercise of a specific penalty. This is the penalty which Christ incurred when He took our sins and iniquities upon Himself. He paid the price by His own sacrifice. Therefore, when we sin under the operation of the new administration—the exercise of grace and mercy—we can come faithfully seeking forgiveness and reconciliation by divine favor. Then, by the help of the Holy Spirit (by

Christ's living in us), we can more perfectly live up to the basic requirements of the Law and statutes of God—the violation of which necessitates repentance and forgiveness.

By the grace and mercy of God, our past is cleaned up—the slate of life is made clean (Rom. 3:25). It is by the grace and mercy of God that we are afforded the privilege of knowing the way of life and becoming partakers of that hope. And by the same grace and hope, we can have our daily sins (and what man sins not daily?) forgiven and be reconciled to the favor of God.

Grace and mercy, having come through Jesus Christ, are two of man's greatest blessings from God. His mercy endures forever. His grace knows no bounds. By just a little logic, one can see that those two factors alone are totally opposite to the requirement of judgment and condemnation. God so loved the world that He was willing to sacrifice a sinless Son to pay the penalty of our sin. Out of the same depth of love and mercy, He is willing to extend space for repentance—grace—so that weak and helpless human beings can be brought to perfection through the operation of God's Spirit. Should man's relationship with his fellow man be any less than that manifested by both God and His Son, Jesus Christ?

Any unforgiving spirit and attitude—toward another who may have sinned—is tantamount to rejecting Christ and His awesome sacrifice for humankind, as well as God the Father and His indescribable love for man. But, patience and love toward others is not manifested as a condonation of wrong. On the contrary, it is the extension of mercy and kindness—the time needed to effect mastery and change in the personal life of the offender. How long should such mercy exist? God set no bounds on it. He alone is the judge and the one who determines when the time extended is sufficient. For there does come, indeed, a time for final judgment.

Grace and mercy are components of the new administration. They were brought to light by Jesus Christ. And it is He who effected the transition from the old to the new administration. What is the new administration, instituted by Christ? How does it affect us? And how does it differ from the old?

The New Administration

The letter-of-the-law administration claims the lives of all who have ever lived. For, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But, thanks to the love and mercy of God, Jesus Christ came to this earth and took upon Himself the form and nature of man—so that by His death He could pay the penalty for all who will accept that sacrifice. And by

acceptance of Christ, it is implicitly stated that we voluntarily give up our own ways and purposes and allow Christ, by the Holy Spirit, to live within us.

The laws, statutes and ways of God are the same during all periods of time. The only difference between ancient times and our own day is the manner of administering God's Law. With the advent of Christ, we are afforded the opportunity of accepting the *spiritual administration* of His way of life. Sin—violation of the Law given at creation—no longer carries an *immediate* death penalty. Rather, we are afforded the opportunity to repent, to change and to receive complete forgiveness for the error committed. This is called the administration of life—not the administration of death, which would have resulted under the terms of the old agreement.

It is an administration where grace, mercy, tolerance, forgiveness and forbearance reign. It is a time when such love and kindness rejoices against judgment. It is truly a spiritual way of life (Rom. 8:1–14, 26–29; Rom. 7:6; Ps. 51:17).

What is the purpose for kindness and mercy? By the extension of life, it affords God the opportunity—through the power of the Holy Spirit—to effect changes in the lives of His chosen servants. It affords the time essential for God to complete His work of creation—the act of creating holy, righteous character. We have been called to glory and virtue. By faith and belief in the assurances and promises of God, we may *put on* the glorious divine nature of God (2 Pet. 1:3–4).

By the spiritual administration of the laws and statutes of God, man is given the opportunity to expunge the vileness of his own nature. And this change becomes possible by the cleansing action of God's powerful and influential Holy Spirit. It erases and renders ineffective the base nature of man (compare Matt. 15:17–19, Isa. 55:6–9 and Gal. 5:19–24).

The only way by which an effective change of heart and mind can be accomplished is by the independent volition of each Christian. There is no possible way to achieve a spiritual change of heart by means of fear generated by man or organization. Man must come to fear God and His way of life. Man must thoroughly believe the truth and practice it, regardless of what others may do or say. Man proves his faith, belief and trust only when he is willing to die for his conviction. Such is implicit trust in the way of life. It manifests the will and resolve necessary for the inheritance of everlasting life. Paul explained, to the Galatians, the struggle man faces: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). It is a life-and-death struggle. The flesh is desiring to do things which appeal to it naturally, while the spirit or mind is desiring to do things which are right

and acceptable to God. Only belief and trust in God will produce sufficient will to subdue the flesh and allow the spirit (the mind) to dominate. Coerced obedience will never produce this kind of character—the proof of our love and belief in the way of life to which we were called.

Again, Paul explained the enormity of the demand upon each of us independently. He said:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations [thoughts of the carnal heart], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity [control by independent volition] every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3–5).

Through the ministry comes the knowledge of the way of life. But how can one know, in a time of distress and difficulty, who the genuine and honest ministers are? Among the proofs of the true ministry is one which must not be overlooked. Paul was inspired to record it for our admonition and learning. He said: "Who [Christ] 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). *True ministers are not enforcing doctrine and physical obedience.* They are preaching the doctrine—the same doctrine which God gave to Israel, to Jesus Christ, to the twelve apostles and to the Apostle Paul. They are faithful and loyal to the truth which God revealed to His own chosen instrument of the last days—regardless of what that servant may have done. But, they are not forcing or compelling obedience on the part of the chosen laity. That judgment is left for Jesus Christ, the appointed Judge, in the last days—at the time of His Second Coming.

The spiritual application (administration) of God's Law allows for time, mercy and grace. It does not exact immediate payment for wrong. But those who truly understand the spiritual administration know that the gift of such mercy does not condone, justify or substantiate evil, sin or wrong. They know that mercy is a guarantee of time to repent and change. Further, they know that the inevitable judgment—delayed only temporarily, due to grace and mercy—is even more severe and exacting (Heb. 10:26–29).

Administration does make a difference. If we are not careful, some of us could fall into the same configuration as the Jews who desired to return to the physical application of God's laws. But, all history tells us loud and clear that character, perfection and obedience cannot come from such administrative requirement. It can come only by the spiritual

application of God's Law—from the heart and mind individually, not because of any individual or collective coercion. Unity, accord and agreement can exist only when individuals (one or millions) individually determine—will, resolve, or compel themselves—to obey from the heart. Obey what? That form of doctrine which was initially given to them (Rom. 6:17).

Does this mean there is no authority in God's Church? If not, what is the ministerial responsibility which God has given? Over what do they have authority?

Ministerial Authority

Today, the concept of "rule" or "government" evokes disdain, contempt and disgust. Due to abuses at almost every level of responsibility as exercised in the past, many former members have turned sour and contemptuous. Because they "unreservedly" gave their lives and energies to the church, most feel let-down, disillusioned and betrayed. Such wounds are always followed by the most intense scorn and ridicule. This lesson of history clearly reveals the absolute need for public servants to conduct their lives in honesty, frugality, openness, and humility.

But, can we reject the doctrine of government on the basis of past sordid and troubling experiences? Was the past problem government or rule?

Blind reaction against any abuse will not change the fact that God instituted church government! Since the last person you should trust is the emotional self, intelligence and reason dictate—from a spiritual premise—the absolute *necessity* of judicious study. Can we clear our minds of prejudice and distrust, and let the Bible speak for itself?

All nature reveals government, rule, control. It is hard to imagine a planetary system without order: the beneficent result of acceptable control, rule, and—if you please—*government*. Equally hard to grasp, is an entire stellar system devoid of such government. The world, at various times, has seen the ascendancy of the masses over constituted authority—only to see the collapse of that entire society. The breakdown of rule in the home has always resulted in monumental disaster. Can you imagine an ordered home where the babes and young rule the family? The very concept of "no government" has no basis in fact. It is the emotional outburst of troubled minds, resulting from abuse. As stated earlier, such rationale does not alter the facts.

Government *is* of God. It is the underlying premise of order, design and purpose. All people want the results of government, as long as its purposes correspond to their own. Government, order and control become anathema only when the direction counters that of the person involved.

The very concept of government requires submission. Despite pulls and influences of an adverse nature, the planets, stars and other bodies of the universe must obey the physical laws established to control them. Animals obey the law of instinct which dominates them. Only man is left the choice of decision—decision as to whether he will obey government. Wives must will to obey their husbands. Children must be taught obedience to parents. And those children must will obedience. It is a matter of character and control.

All the above is well and good. But, some will say they do not believe in *church* government. Is such organization wrong? Does the ministry bear any rule over the true flock of God?

Initially, God dealt with man on an individual basis. He gave commands and instructions to our foreparents, Adam and Eve. They did not will to obey God, even though He *personally* communicated His will to them. Their reaction was one of complete individualization. They determined to do what *they thought* was right. And we all know the consequences of that decision.

God called a nation and gave to them His priceless possession, the Law—the very essence of His nature and character. He personally spoke to the people. They were terrified and distraught. At that moment, they were very willing to seek the help and direction of God's true servant. They wanted Moses to receive the required instructions and bring the same to them; then they would obey. This whole episode foreshadowed the appearance of Jesus Christ. Compare Exodus 20:18–21, Deuteronomy 5:22–28, Deuteronomy 18:15–19, and Acts 7:37–39.

Christ came as a servant of God. He brought the true significance of the gospel to light. What He taught was exactly the same as that which was taught by Moses to ancient Israel (Heb. 4:2; Heb. 8; Heb. 10).

Christ came to establish, among other things, a New Testament ministry. The New Testament ministry is called "the ministry of reconciliation." Jesus Christ's last instructions were to His true ministry—including not just the original twelve apostles, but the ministry from His own day to the time of His second appearance. They were to teach exactly the

same things He had taught (Matt. 28:19–20). And Jesus taught the very same things which Moses taught (John 5:39–47).

Jesus came in the power and authority of God. He spoke with that conviction. After His resurrection, He was given *all power* in heaven and earth. But did He give any authority to His ministry?

The ministry is to continue to Christ's Second Coming (see Eph. 4:11–14 and Matt. 28:19–20). The twelve apostles were given authority and power to perform the responsibilities for which Christ called and commissioned them. The Apostle Paul was given the power and authority to carry out his responsibility. Is the ministry of today powerless to perform the function for which it is called? Indeed, NO! But, more imperatively now than at any time previously, the office of a minister must be exercised carefully, wisely and judiciously. As the Bible clearly states, a wounded man is harder to win than a fenced city. Barriers against reason are well constructed. The abuses of the past are indelibly inscribed in many memories and are very real. Only time can and will erase some of the scars.

Despite the abuses of the past, those who hold to faith and courage do not allow belief and conviction to be eroded by the failure of others. They love God's Truth and are willing to make the necessary sacrifices and pay the required price of obedience.

Today's ministry does bear responsibility. It had to be called and chosen in exactly the same way the apostles were selected, trained and commissioned. They will be teaching the same thing Moses, Christ and the apostles taught. God did not fail. The true Church *does* exist today. But it departed from the truth, just as God's prophets and servants indicated it would. At the same time, there are some who will remain faithful to the revealed truth. Many texts dogmatically state this fact.

And, as the record of the Bible is preserved for us upon whom the ends of the world are come, it is obvious that the true ministry is equipped with the power and authority to carry out assigned responsibilities (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Tim. 3:4–5)—as were the ministries of Moses' time, Christ's time and the apostles' time. Jesus said man shall live by *every word* of God. The above texts are a part of those words.

That particular authority given the ministry is absolute! It is Biblical. But, before some become deeply troubled, let us ask, What kind of authority is meant? What is the premise of that authority? And over *what* is such rule?

The true ministry does *not* have authority over the faith and conviction of any member (2 Cor. 1:23–24). Faith and character cannot be legislated! Coerced obedience is useless. Real and genuine obedience comes from the heart.

The first responsibility of ministerial authority is that of preaching the REVEALED Word of God with power and conviction. Inherent in that responsibility is the understanding that each minister is under authority—the authority of God. The ministry cannot change or alter the revealed truth. To do so is an act of defiance against the one who has authority over him. How can such a minister exact, or expect, obedience to his words, when he has had little if any respect for the words of God? Such a minister has freed himself from obedience to God and has enslaved himself to his own whimsical nature. The results are confusion, rebellion and insurrection.

Secondly, the ministry must rule the church (1 Tim. 3:5). Whether one wills to be a part of the Body of Christ—the Church—is a private decision. However, it must be understood that Jesus Christ has but one body. At some time, all of us must submit to the rule of God or be utterly rejected as candidates for the Kingdom of God—where the government of God *will* continue.

Thirdly, the ministry must rule itself in relationship to the chosen people of God. A minister is a servant. A true minister must show—from the heart—empathy, kindness, tolerance, mercy and unselfish interest in those he serves. Christ is his example. He is willing to assume the responsibility for all actions, accusations, etc.—giving the members the benefit of all doubt. He must be forgiving and exemplary in all respects.

The true servant will countenance no deviation from the revealed doctrine. Heresy must be quickly and specifically dealt with—when espoused for the purpose of misleading others or as an act of self-justification.

Fourthly, the ministry must rule in the lives of others only to the extent that blatant sin will not be permitted to demoralize, corrupt and destroy others of the faith. Such practices—those which affect others and are not of a private nature—must not be allowed to influence and weaken others. Overcoming and mastery of all other problems (problems of a personal nature) must be the sole responsibility of those bearing the weaknesses. And this approach in no way condones sin. In essence, the major responsibility of the ministry is to preach the gospel—the truth. And the major obligation of the laity is to hear the Word and act on it in faith. No place, in all the Bible, is there indicated a timetable for mastery of personal sins. However, the fruits manifested will most assuredly indicate effort of a genuine nature or the display of hypocrisy.

Fifthly, the ministry is given authority and power over outside powers and influences—in accordance with the plan and purpose of God. For anyone to lay a blanket responsibility upon the ministry to heal, cast out demons, raise the dead, and perform other miracles is to misunderstand the plain teachings of the Bible. All responsibilities are gifts from God. They are given as He wills. Further, God determines the times during which such powers will be given. No one has a right to lay claim to any such power. Conversely, no lay member has a right to demand the performance of miracles as a proof of a minister's call. God calls, uses and empowers as *He* wills. In a general sense, the whole ministry is accountable for anointing the sick—as well as preaching the revealed gospel. In general, whether one is healed depends upon the faith of both the member and the minister.

The very fact God gives such powers is an internal proof that these powers are not always possessed. For if they were innate in the ordination, why should God give them as *He* chooses?

We have established ministerial authority as a *fact*. The Bible teaching is plain. If we do not accept these clear texts, then why accept any other texts of instruction? The Bible is written for our time—every word of it. Paul said:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

That inspired Word of God says: "Remember them which have the RULE over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God . . ." (Heb. 13:7). Compare verses 17 and 24, also 1 Timothy 3:4–5.

Further, remember this fact: Even as the Apostle Paul said, neither he nor an angel could change the Word received. He had to be faithful. His authority did not exceed that of Christ and God the Father. Obedience to the revealed doctrine is the evidence of ministerial faithfulness. Change or alteration of the revealed truth is a rejection of Christ—of His authority. And the results of unfaithfulness to God—changing the truth—are confusion, anarchy and bitterness. People will fail to see the need for respecting a human instrument when that instrument fails to honor the God who gave him his authority and power in the first place.

Next, we have established the fact that no minister—regardless of responsibility or position—has jurisdiction over the faith and conviction of others. He has no power to act outside of his call and commission. And that responsibility is beautifully laid out in the book of 2 Corinthians:

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates. For we *can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth*. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection. Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction (2 Corinthians 13:5–10).

The Truth of God must be preached. God's chosen servants are empowered to preach it. But they cannot tamper with it. Also, the laity are the chosen of God. They are a purchased possession which belongs to Him. They are not chattel, moved about according to the whim of anyone. God gave the required authority to *care for* His flock—not to abuse them. Ministerial authority has its definite bounds. It is not totally absolute and unending. The Bible is full of examples of those who lost their relationship with God—as being chosen instruments—because of assumption.

On the other hand, God will not lightly view the matter of a sheep's attempting to rend a true shepherd. It pays to be wise and understanding. How many Biblical examples are there of rejection of true servants, and punishment meted out or prognosticated for the future? The wise will beware! Any assumption, on the part of either ministry or laity, is not the manifestation of wisdom.

God is the author of government, with its attendant authority and power. Moses ruled the people of God! The prophets spoke with power and conviction. Jesus Christ came in the power and authority of God. The apostles—including Paul—were empowered and commissioned. The Sons of God will rule authoritatively during the Millennium and the White Throne Judgment. Why should the time period since the apostles until the establishment of the Kingdom of God be any different? For, if church government is invalid today, then the Bible is not relevant and has no practical value for you and me.

Brethren, due to the many demands upon our time, we will of necessity have to shorten these *Monthly Letters*. They have grown much longer than originally intended. There are so many things which need to be written—and events keep happening which require explanations—that it seems impossible to keep up. We make a feeble try, because we want you to know and be abreast of the times. We earnestly and sincerely desire your prayers. Our prayers are always with and for you.

I want to completely explain the points involved in this matter of government. For that reason, I shall take more than one letter to accomplish the purpose—rather than making this another unusually long one.

To be covered are such topics as 1) the abuse of power and authority, 2) why people resent government, 3) examples of abuse, 4) power and authority—not absolute, 5) contrast between administrative abuse and God's mercy, 6) today's problem: administration and government confused, 7) historical records, a means by which we are taught, 8) who will understand, and 9) an exemplary group in the last days.

With your patience, we shall be able to fulfill all God wills. Thank you for the obvious love, understanding and consideration you all have shown. It is greatly appreciated.

Until next month, all our love, prayers and compassion.

With deep, affectionate love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the text "With deep, affectionate love,".

Raymond C. Cole