

Church of God, The Eternal

P.O. Box 775
Eugene, Oregon 97440

Doctrine Versus Administration Part IV: The Abuse of Authority

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Dear Brethren:

A special and warm greetings for the month of August. Today is a very cool and refreshing day—especially appreciated after the record-breaking temperatures which we have been experiencing here for this area. And from the news we hear, most of you are subject to some form of adversity.

All of us have read and believed the conditions which are to prevail around the world in this prophetic end-time. Yet, when reality hits, it is difficult to accept and place in proper perspective. This being true with these relatively small beginnings, what will be the reaction when the really earth-shaking and mind-boggling events begin to unfold? Somehow one gets the feeling, from the Bible, that few people are going to weigh the circumstances objectively and seriously. The natural, built-in defense mechanism of the human mind does not allow man to accept the facts of reality. Many prefer to live in a dream world—ever hopeful that things will right themselves in the future. "After all," they reason, "have not the responsible people of our society always solved these troubling situations?" On those grounds alone, few people will see, accept and really believe the times in which we live. God's way of life is a matter of faith—for the just shall live by faith. Adherence to the truth is not predicated on economic, military, political or social savvy. These elements of learning and astuteness are beneficial only when applied to the overall *spiritual grasp*, which must be given by God.

God continues to bless us greatly. Many more people are beginning to awaken to the situations which prevail the visible church, and are asking significant and meaningful questions. At this time, several have already made their affirmative decisions. Others continue to study and pray for God's guidance. Still others are troubled and seem incapable of arriving at firm decisions—manifesting a trait which is, in itself, self-destructive. That trait is vacillation. And vacillation produces instability, not only in spiritual things, but in all responsibilities of life. Whereas, the manifestation of a true Christian—a son of God—is

consistency, loyalty, determination: an unchanging spirit of obedience. The true servant of God knows the truth and the way, and knows that he knows. He does not exist in doubt—a negative trait which does *not* proceed from God. As Paul stated, the true Christian has absolute confidence in his beginning. Yet, today most have no such confidence. If they manifest any confidence or faith at all, it is in the operation, direction and changes of the *physical* organization. This is odious to God. For, these people have faith in men but have no faith in God. They obviously believe God failed to perform His responsibilities acceptably in their lives. That is, how could He call them with a holy calling, reveal the truth to them, and aid them in growing in faith and knowledge? And such growth is the spiritual addition of knowledge which does not contradict that which He previously revealed. So, how could He cancel-out Himself by effecting changes which are in total opposition to previously revealed truth? Few seem to take enough time to ask that question.

Indeed, as Christ said, the way into the Kingdom of God is difficult (possible only for those called of God initially), and *few* there be who find it. This statement implies manifold difficulty: 1) Living acceptably before God is not easy. 2) Most who even make an effort to ascertain that way will fail. 3) Only a very few will actually manifest the courage, conviction and faith by which to determine the way. 4) Every one involved in the struggle was initially *called* of God. 5) Those who give up the struggle, fail to make the necessary affirmative decisions, or just conveniently take the easy way, will face ultimate destruction.

Whatever we do, let us realize this fact: We are confronted with a life-and-death struggle. The courageous have no alternative but to accept the challenge with dedication, resolve and determination. The weak, feeble and undisciplined will falter and fail at some juncture in this struggle of life. However, no one is forced to remain weak and unsure. We can be made strong in Christ Jesus. It depends entirely upon our own will. God will not force us to conform—but if we cry out to Him for the help necessary, He will abundantly supply. In no way will we be able to hold God or His Son Jesus Christ accountable for our failures. Each of us alone must bear that liability. For, in Christ we can do all things.

The July '78 *Monthly Letter* covered the first five points of the subject, "Present-Day Application of Doctrine and Administration." For this month, we are ready to evaluate the concept of abuse of power and authority—or the abuse of government.

Abuse of Power and Authority (Government)

As stated before, government *is* of God. The very term implies a structure which can be either rightly or wrongly used. For, one cannot abuse that which does not exist. To

understand the possibilities of acceptable as well as unacceptable usage of power, authority or government, let us consider the example of Jesus Christ—a true minister, as well as the first-born Son of God.

Jesus Christ was commissioned and sent by God the Father. He was given God's message, which He was empowered to proclaim. He could not change or alter it. Christ Himself said: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16). Further, He said: "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49). And He spoke that message with power and conviction (Matt. 7:29). He had been given authority to perform the commission which His Father had given to Him.

When Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples to proclaim that same message, He gave them power and authority. That authority *does exist* in the true ministry until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Note Matthew 28:18–20:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All *power* is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye *therefore*, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have *commanded* you: and, lo, I am with you [true ministry of God] always, even unto the end of the world.

Paul was inspired to write to Timothy (a minister of God):

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, throughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

How does the Scripture reprove and correct?

As it is applied by the called and chosen ministry of Jesus Christ!

It is the *unchanging message* with which the ministry is empowered. And that message innately carries with it the authority and power essential to fulfill the purpose and mission of God, given to His chosen servants.

But, here, we must take careful note. For this very mission, responsibility and authority opens up many avenues for human abuse. No one dares deny the historical fact that the office, power and responsibility granted by God was nearly always abused. *If it had*

not happened in our time, we would indeed have been unique in the annals of human history.

Christ came to set an example. He was the model of proper usage of power and authority in exercising the office of a minister. Also, He was the perfect example of implicit obedience for us all. He is an example of a true *minister*. He is an example of one called and chosen of God—a true Son of God. He is the perfect *example* of how to properly use the power, authority and responsibility of a ministerial office.

The historical sections of the Bible are a comprehensive study of man's failure to perform God's government acceptably—either as a member of it or as a minister who officiates. The Bible is a chronicle of flagrant, tyrannical and destructive abuses of power—abuses which cover the whole span of human existence.

Abuses in Ancient Times

Initially, let us note abuses of office and responsibility in the time of ancient Israel. From these historical examples, we can derive many invaluable lessons.

Ezekiel 34:1–6 :

THEN THIS MESSAGE came to me from the Lord: 'Son of dust, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel, and say to them: The Lord God says to you: Woe to the shepherds who feed themselves instead of their flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the best food and wear the finest clothes, but you let your flocks starve. You haven't taken care of the weak nor tended the sick nor bound up the broken bones nor gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead you have ruled them with force and cruelty. So they were scattered, without a shepherd. They have become a prey to every animal that comes along. My sheep wandered through the mountains and hills and over the face of the earth, and there was no one to search for them or care about them'(from *The Living Bible*).

Now let Jeremiah speak. Corruption and abuse were bizarre during his days:

THE LORD DECLARES: I will send disaster upon the leaders of my people—the shepherds of my sheep—for they have destroyed and scattered the very ones they were to care for. Instead of leading my flock to safety, you have

deserted them and driven them to destruction. And now I will pour out judgment upon you for the evil you have done to them. . . For the land is full of adultery and the curse of God is on it. The land itself is mourning—the pastures are dried up—for the prophets do evil and their power is used wrongly. And the priests are like the prophets, all ungodly, wicked men. I have seen their despicable acts right here in my own Temple, says the Lord. . . . I knew the prophets of Samaria were unbelievably evil, for they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel into sin; but the prophets of Jerusalem are even worse! The things they do are horrible; they commit adultery and love dishonesty. They encourage and compliment those who are doing evil, instead of turning them back from their sins. These prophets are as thoroughly depraved as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were. . . . This is my warning to my people, says the Lord of Hosts. Don't listen to these false prophets when they prophesy to you, filling you with futile hopes. They are making up everything they say. They do not speak for me! They keep saying to these rebels who despise me, 'Don't worry! All is well'; and to those who live the way they want to, 'The Lord has said you shall have peace!' . . . How long will this continue? If they are 'prophets,' they are prophets of deceit, inventing everything they say. By telling these false dreams they are trying to get my people to forget me in the same way as their fathers did, who turned away to the idols of Baal. Let these false prophets tell their dreams and let my true messengers faithfully proclaim my every word. There is a difference between chaff and wheat! . . . Their made-up dreams are flippant lies that lead my people into sin. I did not send them and they have no message at all for my people, says the Lord. . . . But stop using this term, 'God's sad news,' For what is sad is you and your lying. You are twisting my words and inventing 'messages from God' that I didn't speak (Jer. 23:1–2, 10–11, 13–14, 16–17, 26–28, 32, 36; from *The Living Bible*).

Next, Malachi speaks:

You have wearied the Lord with your words. 'Wearied him?' you ask in fake surprise. 'How have we wearied him?' By saying that evil is good, that it pleases the Lord! Or by saying that God won't punish us—he doesn't care (Mal. 2:17; from *The Living Bible*).

Malachi continues:

At that time my punishments will be quick and certain; I will move swiftly against wicked men who trick the innocent, against adulterers, and liars,

against all those who cheat their hired hands, or oppress widows and orphans, or defraud strangers, and do not fear me,' says the Lord of Hosts. . . . 'Your attitude toward me has been proud and arrogant,' says the Lord. 'But you say, "What do you mean? What have we said that we shouldn't?" . . . Listen; you have said, "It is foolish to worship God and obey him. What good does it do to obey his laws, and to sorrow and mourn for our sins? From now on, as far as we're concerned, 'Blessed are the arrogant.' For those who do evil shall prosper, and those who dare God to punish them shall get off scot-free' (Mal. 3:5, 13–15, from *The Living Bible*).

Finally, let us note the testimony of Jeremiah one more time. He writes:

And I brought them into a fruitful land, to eat of its bounty and goodness, but they made it into a land of sin and corruption and turned my inheritance into an evil thing. Even their priests cared nothing for the Lord, and their judges ignored me; their rulers turned against me, and their prophets worshiped Baal and wasted their time on nonsense (Jer. 2:7–8, from *The Living Bible*).

These were the servants of the Eternal who had become corrupt. They had deceived themselves into believing they could do no wrong—that God was obligated to back them up in whatever announcements they spoke to the people. They had taken advantage of their position and responsibility—but not always contrary to the wishes or expectations of the people. For, all too often, the people *wanted* such conditions to prevail.

It is impossible for *strangers* to deceive and destroy the chosen of God. The massive apostasy, such as we have seen from the above texts, could come only by exploiting confidence from within. And that is what happened. God says that the shepherds responsible for this deception were *His servants*—servants who turned corrupt, due to arrogancy and conceit.

We have seen the historical example of the abuse of power in the days of ancient Israel. But, what about in the days of Jesus Christ? What was the religious condition which prevailed in His day?

Abuses in Christ's Day

Mark was inspired to write:

Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?

He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition (Mark 7:5–9).

And the testimony of Matthew was:

[Jesus] Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. . . Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, 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, scribes and Pharisees, 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. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? (Matthew 23:2–7, 24–33).

What was the scope of the activity of those who had set about to deceive? How determined were they?

Continuing in Matthew:

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer

ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves (Matt. 23:13–15).

In Christ's day, deception reigned as it did in the days of ancient Israel. Human nature had not changed. Those who bore responsibility had used God-given authority to achieve *personal advantage*. Christ said they were hypocrites. Yet, in their own minds they had deluded themselves into believing that they were doing the "work of God." They had even gone international to achieve their objectives. But such personalized conceptions are not a proof of divine truth. The only proof of validity is adherence to the revealed way of life—the faith once delivered. Anyone can claim to be doing the "work of God." But those called, only, can aggressively *act* upon the revealed Word. And only those who have a love for that Word will *remain faithful* to it.

Abuses were manifold in the time of ancient Israel and in the days of Jesus Christ. What about the days of the apostles?

Abuses in Apostolic Times

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul was aware of future abuses of power. He knew that human nature had not changed—that perversion of the Gospel and use of personal advantage by the ministers would come to pass.

He wrote to the Ephesian elders:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost [Spirit] hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:28–30).

Also, Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy and to those whom he was responsible for instructing (2 Tim. 2:2):

Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself [Timothy] approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:14–18).

The Apostle Paul continued his instruction to Timothy and others of ministerial charge:

. . . in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these [problems mentioned earlier in the chapter], he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:20–26).

Once again, let us notice the instructions of the Apostle Paul. This time, as he was writing to the Corinthian church:

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him [margin says "with me"]. . . . As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting. . . . But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the

ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:3–4, 10, 12–15).

Bad administration, ministerial advantage and abuse, perversion of the truth and many other problems existed in the days of the apostles. Indeed, human nature had not changed. But, surely the conditions of the last days—the times of the last-day operation of God—should be different. As we stated in our article on prophecy, only after the days of prophetic fulfillments can we know the certainty of them. *Those days have come*. And true to form, the conditions *within* the church of God in the last days are no different than those Biblically recorded for other periods of time. What were the prophetic indications of the last days?

Matthew wrote:

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. . . . And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. . . . For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. . . . Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled (Matt. 24:3–5, 10–12, 24, 34).

And Paul wrote to 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 (2 Tim. 4:1–4).

The times in which we live are the last days—this is beyond question. The conditions, abuses and problems prophesied are specific. But, in addition, they are the

recorded history of other men's problems and difficulties. Why, then, should we concern ourselves with these past historical situations?

Because the examples of ancient Israel are written for *us*! They are examples of trials, situations and problems which *we* will encounter today. Paul wrote:

Now these things [events in the lives of ancient Israelites] were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. . . . Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for *our* admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (1 Cor. 10:6, 11).

The problems generated, within the ranks of those chosen of God to teach Church of God members in the wilderness (the Old Testament church—Acts 7), are examples of *the same problems which we will encounter in our day*.

Let us note Paul's testimony to the Church of God in Rome. He said, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for *our learning*, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

And the Apostle Peter adds:

Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, *but unto us they 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. 1:11–12).

The Bible is the recorded Word of God. It is written for all peoples—when called—regardless of the time. However, in the specific sense, it is recorded for the last generation upon whom all things will come to pass. And as the Word of God, it is instructional, corrective and inspirational. What is written therein is written for *us*. For, as Jesus said: ". . . It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). There is only one way to live by it. And that is: one must read it and then act upon it. He must live by it. It applies to us, NOW. Therefore the situations, problems, and difficulties of various time periods mentioned in the Bible are recorded for *us*.

The problems mentioned by Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Malachi—as well as Christ and the apostles—are specifically applicable to our time, today. And those who will hear and act upon the Word will be greatly blessed.

A quick review of the instructions given by the prophets and apostles tells us of the specific problems of their days. But, what are the problems of our time? Let us examine these difficulties and compare them with the problems of old.

What Abuses Have Been Evidenced in Our Time?

An objective evaluation of past lifestyles, attitudes and behavioral patterns indicates many startling similarities between the Biblically recorded facts and those transpiring in our time. A broad and all-inclusive evaluation indicates a list of seven significant areas in which abuses occurred. To this list, some of those adversely affected could probably add others. Yet, it is our feeling that the following list is comprehensive in a broad and generalized way.

The areas of abuse are as follows:

1) Economic advantage was taken in many ways. A lifestyle was adopted which was totally out of character with those who were being served. The conception was that the upper level of corporate personnel should live as did the industrial and commercial giants of this world. To achieve this level of existence, it was necessary to demand consistent financial sacrifice on the part of widows, the financially depressed, and all who lived under this administrative influence.

To compound the problem, it was discovered that those who accepted this gratuity from the economically squeezed were not comparably sacrificing—either by a percentage consideration or by the true basis of sacrifice. So, the level of want or need was often left unsatisfied. Hypocrisy and double standards were rife. As any true Christian knows, one who teaches others to perform in a certain manner must first live up to that standard himself. For, there is no credibility to his teaching if he fails to perform it himself. In all cases of hypocrisy, the principle of the Golden Rule is categorically rejected. And, above all, such hypocritical living is in absolute opposition to the lifestyle of Jesus Christ. A thorough study of the four gospels will make it abundantly clear that Christ did not live in affluence. He emptied Himself out completely and became *poor* for our good. He set us all an excellent example of sacrifice—for He gave up all, that He might truly serve.

2) Tyrannical control was manifestly evident in many areas, in the personal lives of church members. This control was carried to the extreme that, in some local areas, a minister's suggestion or wish was considered a "Thus saith the Lord." Judgmental decisions were made in areas of clothing, business problems, cars, vacations, size of families, homes,

finances, the stock market, alcohol, food, dating and marriage, etc., etc. A member's failure to implicitly comply was considered tantamount to rebellion, involving a fearful expectation of verbal censure and abuse from some minister. Age and circumstances made little difference.

3) A posture of ministerial superiority—coupled with an equal put-down of the people—was all too evident. A graduate of Ambassador College had "all the answers." But, any who had studied at or graduated from institutions of higher learning other than Ambassador College—regardless of the field of endeavor—were made to feel inferior. In areas of Biblical understanding, there is no doubt about the superior knowledge of revealed truth which was taught. But in due time, this superior feeling was carried over into all fields of study. People who had labored long and hard in particular fields of work were treated with disrespect. All too many ministers felt competent to advise and counsel members relative to *any* subject under consideration. Too often, the results—as in the case of farming—were disastrous. However, few considered the failure or hardship—created by poor advice—worthy of any apology, much less an attempt to correct the wrong.

4) Faith was not spontaneous (from the heart)—it was legislated. Due to fear of reprisal—excommunication or some other form of discipline—people attempted to live up to all expectations imposed upon them. Not that the expectations were wrong. The problem was that the people did not adhere to the commands of God out of love for His way of life, faith in His promises, and a desire to respect their Maker. Divine healing is a case in point. Healing is still a cardinal tenet of the Bible. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He heals today, just as much as He did in other ages and times. However, the basic requirement for healing is faith—not faith in a man or organization or the ministry. It is faith in God. And that faith must proceed from the heart and mind of the people involved. Such spontaneous faith cannot be legislated. It proceeds naturally and convincingly from the subjects who are imploring God for help in the time of crisis.

Had God's called and chosen sons been *allowed to grow* in faith and confidence, there would have been no grounds for the manifold accusations which are hurled at the ministry today. They would have acted on their individual levels of faith—the faith of Christ in them. And any failure on their part would have been evidence of their own weak faith. A weakness which should have been dealt with in kindness, love and understanding. Of course, ministerial help and instruction should be given, but always at propitious and acceptable times. Certainly not at a time when the individual involved needs encouragement and help of a positive nature.

Healing was only one of the many areas where faith was legislated. Jobs, school problems, military, economic difficulties, farming practices, Holy Day observance, and a host of other responsibilities were areas where fearfully legislated faith too often was evident.

The ministry is for the purpose of preaching and teaching the true way of life. The necessity for each Christian to develop faith must be taught. But living it cannot be legislated. It must proceed from the conviction of the individual involved.

5) Too many in the ministry wanted to be served. To serve others is most honorable. But, true service must proceed from hearts and minds of appreciation—service must be the result of love and compassion. Service can never be an act of coercion or requirement. For, such would not be a true act of service but the fulfillment of duty or obligation.

Service is "the name of the game" in Christianity. Christ came to serve—not to be served (Matt. 20:20–28). As an example for the true ministry, ministers should walk in His footsteps. The former ministry should have more specifically served the people. And their service should have been at the spiritual level—visiting, anointing, counseling and encouraging—being available at all times and always in a condescending attitude toward the people whom they were called to serve. In such an atmosphere, expectation of remuneration has no place. The ministry sets the example of willing and compassionate service. The laity responds, in kind, by performing some physical service for the ministry—who, if truly fulfilling their call, will be most busy and helpful toward the people. Service is a mutual responsibility.

But the problem arose because ministerial service to the people became minimal and too often performed with an attitude of "Why do you bother me?" Also, the expectation of physical remuneration grew completely out of proportion to the service some were rendering to the people. Further, the very idea of obligated remuneration toward the ministry is what produced the atmosphere of bitterness and contempt. As indicated earlier, service must come spontaneously. It proceeds from willing hearts and minds. It is the result of mutual respect and concern. In the *latter years* of the church, such an attitude of service was almost completely lost. Both ministers and lay members had lost their way. The stage was set for the terrible debacle of the early seventies. And as the Bible reveals, once such an attitude prevails, it is almost impossible to restore a spirit of humility, service, love and mutual affection.

Can we recall our past and regain our spiritual equilibrium? Service is right! It is a viable principle for both the ministry and the laity of the church. It is the way of life—the

only way by which we can inherit the Kingdom of God. It is worth a renewed determination on the part of all. True service (and there is no other service) comes spontaneously, from hearts of love and affection. It is manifested mutually.

6) The peoples' lives were regulated, too often, by the ministry. Members could not personally decide to make either a minor or a major move, without complete approval of the ministry. In many cases, a change of job required hours of counseling and the affirmative nod of the ministry. In fact, often—depending on the church areas under consideration—no decision could be made by the people without the counsel of the ministry. Of course, in some cases, this was the problem of the people. There were many who did not want to bear the responsibility of their own decisions—or, for that matter, the responsibility of life. But as borne out by fact and history, when such counsel proved negative, the whole ministry was held accountable. There are always two sides to any given situation. Each side must bear its portion of the guilt. The ministry is not excluded from liability of a very grave nature. They were called to proclaim God's way of life. They should have been wise and judicious in handling those situations. But it became too easy for them to tell the people what to do, instead of advising and encouraging them to stand on their own physical and spiritual feet.

7) Too often, ministerial individualization was much in evidence. One man would establish a church area. He would work with the members in a given manner. Selection of lay personnel for deacons, ushers, local elders, etc.—though expressed to be on the basis of merit and spiritual development—frequently was achieved on the basis of personal tastes and likes of the minister involved. Also, the membership was routinely influenced by the individual and personal tastes of the minister.

The shock wave comes! The local minister is transferred to another area. He carries his ideas with him—for they are a part of him. But, so does the new minister who comes into the area.

Now, to the new minister—whatever the area of his charge—nothing seems right. He must change everything to suit his expectations, lifestyle, personal tastes and friendships. The people are moved about like checkers on a board. Feelings are hurt. Distrust develops. Cliques, along with a host of other problems, develop.

But there is a common antidote. The anointing of "attitude." The problem, of course, is always the people. They should be able to take any maneuvering, on the part of the minister, to accommodate his personal expectations. Therefore, a series of blistering and self-justifying sermons is given to straighten out the problem. Now the stage is set for a complete change of ideas, practices, personnel and organization.

This situation prevailed in each church area, as often as the minister was transferred and a new one assigned to that area. In some cases, the membership was submitted to this abusive treatment *many times* in the history of any given church.

Of course, we do not refer to basic doctrine of the church. That, for all practical purposes, remained basically the same—regardless of the area or the minister. What is referred to are those "minor" areas which deal with personal tastes and lifestyles. But, what we need to remember is that such "minor" areas often physically affect us more directly than all the "major" areas of doctrine. We are human beings. Those physical things *do* become quite significant. If we had been perfect, they would not have bothered us. We would have taken them in stride, leaving the judgment of the matter up to God. But, who among us was perfect? Therefore, there were many injustices left unreconciled, members excommunicated because of "bad attitudes," a political regime created, and many other problematic conditions. And finally, because of internal difficulty within the church, the membership, in part, grew bold and were unafraid to "spill out" their resentments and contempt—for one another, for the ministry, and for the church in general.

How Did Abuse of Power Injure People?

There were many abusive areas. But how did these abuses affect the people?

1) They created a fear of the ministry, organization, hierarchy and church. The very fruits of this administrative defect prove them to be wrong. The called and chosen of God should fear Him—not human beings, regardless of who they are. Wrongly placed fear can last only so long. At some given time, revolution is inevitable. *True fear* cannot possibly produce such results. It is by the fruits borne that we can know the value of any given condition, circumstance or practice.

2) They gave rise to the creation of double standards, deception and hypocrisy. A good politician knows how to cover his tracks. So does one *within* the church who is forced, by a deceptive double standard, to live behind a facade. Openness, candor and honesty on the part of the ministry would never have produced the fruit which came into being at the time of the debacle of the early seventies.

In heart and mind, God's people knew and understood basic spiritual principles. But, they soon learned that deception and hypocrisy were essential to weather the storms often generated in the churches. Nothing became more evident, during the insurrection of the past few years.

3) They produced despair and resignation on the part of some. They had been called by God. They knew the truth. They had firmly believed the truth which had been revealed to them. They were baptized for that very reason. And therefore, they could not leave the church. The result was that many lived in complete despair and resignation. What could they do? So, they disappeared into the woodwork. They were "seatwarmers" in the church. They had been injured once, twice, or who knows how many times. There was no way they were going to become involved again. Zeal was gone. Assumption of personal responsibility had disappeared. As resigned subjects, they were fit candidates to be moved freely and easily upon the political chessboard of the church.

4) They produced physical obedience only. Heart and conviction were gone. Though many members would vocalize their objection to such an assertion, the fruits borne were ample to substantiate its veracity. Faith waned, and physical direction in the lives of many became dominant. Attendance at holy convocations became routine and burdensome. Excuses for failures to perform were abundant. The joy and excitement of spiritual obedience was no longer evident. And, in the final analysis, physical obedience is woefully inadequate to see anyone through the fiery trials required for the development of spiritual character.

Physical obedience leaves the door of conviction wide open. For, physically, we are all accustomed to changing at our own discretion. It is an easy matter to carry this same principle over into the spiritual realm. Physical obedience is devoid of all conviction, faith and purpose. It yields to all extenuating pressures and circumstances. Why should anyone die for a principle of which he is not really convicted and which he does not really cherish?

Subscribing to the abusive exercise of power and authority robs one of spiritual orientation. On the other hand, such conditions can augment faith and conviction, providing the member resists the pressure to compromise his spiritual convictions—a responsibility which requires him to know the truth and firmly hold fast to it until the end. This necessity was emphasized over and over by the apostles, as well as by Christ.

5) By these abuses, a total dependency upon the ministry or organization was created. Why did members need to assume a lifetime spiritual responsibility, when it was very easy to acquiesce to someone else's concepts? In many cases, members came to *expect* counsel and necessary *answers* from the ministry or the church. They were taught, by the very principles which were practiced within the church, to *become completely dependent*. And, this dependency consisted of every conceivable problem—from minor to major items. The people became indecisive. They could not make decisions which affected their own personal lives. Like the responsibility of parents toward their own children, the ministry

should have taught principles and the exercise of independence. For, Christianity is a way of life. It is not the way of the flesh—the physical. It is the *spiritual* way of life. And the knowledge of that spiritual way is committed to God's own chosen vessels, who are chargeable for proclaiming it to His own chosen subjects. Those chosen of God are required to grow spiritually and thereby become strong in that way of life—for they are to become pillars of strength for future use by God. Dependency upon the ministry, during the period of training, will never develop that kind of strength and capability. And for the present, it left open the door of accusation—accusation of the laity toward the ministry. Abuse was not one-sided. The ministry required the stamp of approval before action was permitted. Yet, the people came to *expect* their decisions to be made for them. Such a corrupt arrangement could not produce good fruit. Is it any wonder manifold problems exist today?

6) Because of abuses, spiritual growth stagnated in the lives of many members. Why put forth the effort to study and apply the principles of the Bible, if their decisions were going to be made for them? And they had come to expect the ministry to deliver the goods—the promises and assurances (Ezek. 13:6, 22; Jer. 23:17).

All abuses are contrary to the Spirit. The two cannot coexist. One who is oriented to the physical will stagnate, and the spiritual will eventually die out altogether.

To grow spiritually is to develop spiritual capability—the ability to make meaningful decisions. And those decisions will not counter the revealed truth which God has given to His ministry, who in turn wisely and propitiously proclaim that way. In a sense, ministers are co-laborers with God to create spiritually capable adult members. And by this process, members will eventually be able to rule and reign with Christ. Spiritual stagnation is one of the worst evils, destroying objectivity and creating a false sense of security. As long as they remained in the physical body, church members had full expectations of reaping the reward. But, that reward can come only by exercise of individual spiritual responsibility, resulting in the necessary maturity and growth of spiritual capability.

7) Abuses resulted in abhorrent contempt for the ministry. Abuse, as a product of the flesh, cannot produce spiritual fruits. Though such abuses produced dependency upon the ministry, the emotional rise of resentment and contempt was inevitable. For, a bad principle cannot produce good fruit.

The ministry *is* of God. God is the author of this responsibility. But, as with most things in life, it is frequently abused. And abuse brings about contempt *for the responsibility itself*. Few people are able to differentiate between abuses and the order of responsibility.

To condemn ministerial responsibility is to condemn God and make Him responsible for the problems which His people have experienced. It is only Satan who consistently wants to point a finger at God. And we are sometimes subject to Satan's influence, unless we are sufficiently aware of his antics. By understanding this fact, we can resist the temptation to hold God accountable.

There is no doubt the ministry of the past few years, and perhaps many years longer than that, is accountable. It has abused power and authority. But the members must not emotionally commit an even greater error—that of condemning the office which God created—by holding the ministry accountable for the people's own problems. Let us carefully differentiate between the abuses and the office itself.

8) Ministerial abuses allowed for character gloss. God is the creator of human nature. He created it for a purpose. Since character cannot be created by divine fiat, external circumstances and conditions are required to produce it. Those external factors involve human nature. For, the nature with which we were created has the bent or proclivities of Satan the Devil's nature (Eph. 2:1–3). And, in accordance with the intents and purposes of *that* nature, a world has been established—that is, the society which is the fabrication of humanity, the possessors of human nature. Therefore, there are three things which the called servants of God must overcome: the influence of Satan, the world (or society), and human nature.

When responsibility was taken from the chosen people, a major defect was allowed to supplant the purpose of God. Rather than evidence the production of character, the people were allowed to deceptively present a character gloss. That is, responsibility was avoided and the people assumed a noncommittal attitude. The ministry—especially those who had arrogated significant power and authority—became the sole individuals to determine action, where faith was required; to give direction, with respect to belief and the changes sought; and to influence others with respect to lifestyles, judgments necessitated, and other routine and mundane responsibilities.

The people turned over, by hierarchical decree, the total responsibility of their own lives. They would not make decisions—the church would do that for them. As a result, personal mastery and overcoming were not necessary. Members were held accountable only for adhering to that which they were told by the ministers.

Though most pleasing and acceptable to those people attempting to avoid the necessity of responsibility, this abuse was by far the worst of all mentioned. The results were absolutely devastating to any who were called to achieve a spiritual purpose. For,

anyone's intervention in the character-building process is unacceptable to God. If He had wanted to create automatons, He could have done that from the beginning. God is the author of individual freedom. For, only thereby can true and genuine character be created.

The abuses of the past administration were many. Those defects had a devastating effect upon the character development of the people whom God had called. The called and chosen servants had been badly damaged and, in some cases, irreparably injured. But what we need to yet understand is: What were the fruits of such injuries and abuses? What were the manifestations of these problems?

The Aftermath of Injury and Trial

1) For some few, such trials and difficulties were the source of character development. The God-given intent of trial and pressure is the production of traits and characteristics which *He* possesses. We should be *made* by adversity, not undone. Yet, so few can truly grasp the real intent and design of such difficulties. To understand this principle, we must read and comprehend the following texts: Matthew 7:24–29, Proverbs 24:10, and Hebrews 12:1–11.

The traumas and experiences of the people of God, these past few years, were intended by God. Why? To determine those approved in His sight (1 Cor. 11:19). And the basis of that judgment (determination) is the *revealed truth*—that way of life to which we all were called. Are there adversities and trials which would cause us to give up the truth, or to subscribe to the changes of men and organizations in order to conform to the expectations of others? What God wants us to determine is: Do we love the truth more than anything else on this earth? Therefore, the only acceptable result of the problems of the past should be a more fervent and determined will to obey the truth to which we were called! Yet, so few even remotely grasp this, today.

Though the only acceptable result of the past trauma is a greater desire to obey God, what are some of the more prominent *unacceptable* results of those difficulties? Each of these results is unique in itself. Yet, each was a tragedy which could have been avoided altogether by a closer contact with God. The results to be mentioned are the undeniable evidence of spiritual lethargy and slumber. Few, if any, had truly taken Jesus Christ at His word. He said, "Watch." And He told us precisely what to watch. But we had so thoroughly accepted the deceptive interpretations of history and world news that, when the actual events began to unfold, most were oblivious to their fulfillment—both at the beginning of their manifestation and now.

What were the consequences of the changes and administrative abuses of the past? To avoid comparable pitfalls in the future, we must thoroughly understand them. The next series of fruits borne was of a negative nature. They were the actual products of those who missed the real intent and purpose of the trials undergone.

2) A spirit of deep, unmitigated resentment, bitterness and hate developed. The people reacted as though the plot which unfolded had been preplanned—preplanned by human beings, not that which was ordained of God. For, if they had seen the hand of God in it, they could have accepted the situations favorably. But, the very resentment and bitterness which were manifested proved a loss of purpose for those involved. They reacted naturally, carnally—as would any human being who had been treated in a comparable manner. But, remember, these were the called and chosen of God. They were *supposed* to have the influence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. However, again we must remember: The fruits of a negative nature, which were in evidence, were *not* of the Spirit of God. They were the manifestations of carnality. And, how could people called and chosen of God revert to total carnality? By losing the Holy Spirit. And there are many who stand in serious jeopardy of that reality, at this very moment. Unless, by the help of God, they snatch themselves out of the clutches of Satan the Devil immediately.

3) There was a serious loss of faith and confidence. Many did not know what to believe or accept. They were instructed in ways contrary to what they had so religiously practiced in the past, and were told that their past beliefs in the Church of God were wrong. Now they were expected to accept the revisions of the church at face value. In some cases, they were told that they could not prove the truth from the Bible—that they did not have the intelligence, the scholarship capability, or the "inside track" with God. And in desperation, many verbally threw up their hands and absolved themselves of all responsibility by saying that the ministers were chargeable and they would have to pay the price if they were wrong. A very easy "out," if that had been acceptable with God. But, we must remember that the trials and difficulties were ordained by God to test our faith and fervency. In effect, the problems experienced did one of two things. By them, the fervent had their faith strengthened. The other sustained, by personal choice, a loss of faith. How tragic, when one realizes that "the just shall live by faith."

4) Confusion became the hallmark of the organization which once taught, believed and practiced the truth. Doubt, suspicion and disbelief reigned supreme. The only factor left, around which to rally, was the organization; the truth was gone. But, physical orientation is insufficient to hold people in proper perspective. Time is the enemy of such a structure, revealing the inherent weaknesses. Then, bit by bit, the organization begins to fall apart, because the vibrancy and life of the Spirit is gone. Things of the flesh do not

possess the inherent traits of eternal dedication, life, vitality and purpose. They are as transitory as physical life itself. And the fruits produced in our past affiliation prove the premise of that statement. One needs to make but a cursory observation.

Faith is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And when that Spirit is gone, one cannot expect to see the manifestation of its fruits. Confusion is a fruit of the flesh. Where it is in evidence, the Spirit is absent and the thrust of the flesh is present. This is an irrefutable principle.

5) There was a progressive rejection of the truth, of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ. Men and organization became the anchor. Truth was no longer a pivotal consideration. What was taught was basically irrelevant. What really began to count, to most people, was *who* said it. If the statement, belief, practice or rumor came from the right individual, it had to be right. It was not subject to question. However, even if the truth were spoken, it was categorically rejected when it came from the wrong person. The premise of belief was not the revealed truth, which all of us had accepted initially, *but the human source* of utterance.

Satan, with a masterful stroke, broke the faith and conviction of many people by precipitating hypocrisy, deception, double standards and cover-up situations within the church. He knew that few people would exercise their divinely ordained responsibility. This requires effort—the effort of prayer, study, fasting—and, above all, a fervent desire to be honest with all information. Truth was subjected to question. *But the human agencies which had been responsible for proclaiming it were not subject to question.* The assumption was that beliefs and practices could be wrong, but that God would never depart from the human beings whom He had called. This is the most subtle perversion ever devised by Satan. And men have fallen for it.

The only and real guide of life is the unalterable truth—the truth which must be revealed. That truth was revealed to the last-generation people. But those people, for the most part, were prophesied to forsake that way and revert to carnal practices. They had no love for the truth. What a tragic consequence of a subtle transfer of faith and allegiance from God and the revealed truth to men and organization. We have witnessed that very prophecy unfold.

6) Economic instability and bankruptcy ensued. Because of sacrifices—given willingly, on the part of many who desired to contribute to "God's Work"—some were led to economic disaster. In some cases, bankruptcy was the only solution to an untenable situation.

We do not question the value of God's economic policies. The problems arose from excessive sacrifices and the unwise desire to go above and beyond the call of duty. What was really wrong was the constant urging of the people to make such sacrifices on the basis of a "Work" and the urgency of the "end." Also, the sacrifices made were not comparably made at other levels of the organization. This became a very sadly evident fact as information leaked out from "Headquarters." To this knowledge may be added the prophetic indications of the last days. Widows were injured. The fatherless and others were left destitute. While those in the hierarchy were consuming the very best. Such a disparity is not acceptable to God.

7) Government became the object of contempt, on the part of most. Of all the difficulties mentioned, this one has evoked the greatest interest—as well as the greatest aversion. Much has been written about the subject. Yet, most authors of material written during the past few years scrupulously avoid the specifics of the Bible. God is the author of government. To hold government in contempt is to hold God in contempt.

The underlying fabric of the entirety of the Bible is government. This is a subject which must comprise a part of this series of letters. For a very thorough and complete analyzation of that doctrine, read next month's letter. Most will be quite surprised at the material. Until then.

All our deepest love and affection,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Raymond C. Cole