

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## Doctrine Versus Administration—Part VI The Correct Application of Doctrine, Government, and Administration

January 1979

Dear Brethren:

In previous letters, we have discussed the subjects of doctrine, administration, abuses of government, and the fact that government is of God. For this month, we are left with one basic and very vital subject to explain. All the technical and explanatory information contained in the previous letters will be of little value unless we thoroughly evaluate and make understandable its *total* application to our times.

What Is Correct Application of Doctrine, Government, and Administration?

To set the stage for a comprehensive evaluation, let us review briefly the concepts of doctrine and administration. A proper understanding of these factors must be kept in mind. They will be critical to an intelligent grasp of the whole subject.

### Review of Doctrine

Both government and administration are absolutely impossible without basic doctrine. Doctrine is the *basis* of belief and practice. It is foundational.

Doctrine—which means teaching, word, or instruction—is the fabric of a system, plan, or way. For instance, the doctrines of democracy, Marxism, and fascism are nothing more than the verbalizing of principles by which these governmental concepts are practiced and administered. The doctrine of God is the codification (written form) of the spiritual principles of *God's government*. The difference between the concepts of men and those of God lies in the fact that God has *all* power and authority and *can* carry out His plans and purposes. Whereas, the concepts of men are human—subject to the ever-changing nature of man—and are dependent upon willing acceptance or rejection by the masses. Human governments can be overthrown. The form, shape, or administrative dimension of any human plan, system, government, or organization changes on the basis of time, conditions,

and circumstances. God's government (doctrine or word in practice) is consistent, eternal. It is absolute. It is *perfection* in action.

Though that way of life—the very Word of God—was given to the first man, Adam, he was not created with a nature which was subject to spiritual concepts. His nature was that of defiance and rebellion against the way of God. Mankind, following in the footsteps of Adam, authored various human forms of government by which he purposed to be ruled. But, true to human nature, he could not be consistent. In time, those not in power gained the ascendancy and overthrew those who had power and responsibility. Then another form of government was tried—eventually destined to failure, comparable to its predecessors. Man's existence has been a chronicle of changes, down to the present. Today we are no different. Our present governments will eventually deteriorate and be discarded in favor of others. This cycle will continue until genocide occurs—or until, as the Bible reveals, there is a favorable intervention on the part of a much greater power. Such is the inevitable fate of the doctrines and decrees of men. What man *teaches* is subject to change and eventual rejection. What a contrast with the way of God—a way based on doctrines and teachings which are eternal! Those doctrines are unchanging and absolute. Therefore, even though the first man and all of his human progeny—as well as the nation of Israel—could not obey the spiritual concepts of an everlasting form of government, a provision was made whereby man could develop the character and nature to implicitly obey and serve his Creator. That provision was not an afterthought on the part of the Creator God. It was a part of His plan from the very beginning—prior to the creation of man. In that plan was an eternal provision for the creation of obedience to God's government (doctrine—the Word of God).

In order for man to obey the true doctrine—the eternal Word of God—it was first necessary for God to reveal the truth to man. Then, He had to set the correct example and provide for the necessary power to obey. How was this given? Who set the example and made it possible for us to have the power and capability of obedience?

Christ was a part of the Godhead. He was eternal with the Father. All things were created by and through Him. But according to the plan blueprinted from the beginning, He was to come to the earth and become a sacrifice for humankind. Prior to this required death in our stead, He was commissioned to bring to light the true doctrine of the Father. He not only came to live it; He was the doctrine *in the flesh*—He was the Word of God, living in human form. What He taught, by virtue of His commission, He taught *as* the Word of God. He was the true doctrine, personified. And that which He taught, He received from the Father. What Christ was, in the flesh, was the manifestation of absolutes—of divine perfection. He *is* the Word which cannot be changed or altered. No wonder Paul was inspired to write that Christ was the same yesterday, today, and forever! For, in Him there is not even the shadow—hint—of turning (changing).

God's unalterable way forms the basis of all things. His whole plan and purpose hinges upon the *certainty* of that way—the Word or doctrine. If there is any interruption, the purpose of God cannot stand. Is it any wonder that Satan has continually tried to destroy the continuity of God and His way (government)? Of course, Satan cannot succeed in changing or altering the plan and purpose of God. But, he attempts to indirectly accomplish his mission by convincing men that God does change and that He is not the same yesterday, today, and forever. Tragically, except for the conviction of a tiny handful of chosen servants, he has nearly destroyed loyalty and obedience to that revealed, absolute way of life. In reality, those who now reject the revealed way of life no longer believe in the veracity of government. For, all government and authority proceed from the Father, and the predication of that government *is* the Word (doctrine) of God. If we are not obedient to the source of government, we cannot be spiritually responsive to any segment of it. We most certainly will fail to respect that power and authority which God has vested in human beings for the purpose of preaching the spiritually blueprinted plan from the foundation of the world.

The Bible is a long chronicle of human disobedience to that revealed way of life. Despite man's record of disobedience, the validity of the unalterable way of life—truth—has existed from Adam to the present. Truth cannot change. What Adam and his progeny, for approximately 4,000 years, failed to loyally obey, Christ, the second Adam, came to obey perfectly. The only changes Christ instituted were in administration, a facet of government which will be discussed later. There is no concept of Christ which stands out in sharper relief than the fact that He changed *nothing* and that He implicitly obeyed the instructions of the Father.

Prior to the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, He commissioned chosen ministers to continue to proclaim that way of life. There is not one shred of evidence that what Christ commissioned His chosen ministers to proclaim, until His own Second Coming, was any different from that which His Father had sent *Him* to proclaim. On the contrary, all the evidence is that the ministry of reconciliation is to preach exactly the same gospel which was taught to ancient Israel and that which Christ Himself taught during His three-and-a-half-year ministry here on the earth.

The only changes which Christ instituted during His earthly ministry were administrative. For, administration today is of the spirit—of the heart—and not merely of the letter, as it was under the terms of the Old Covenant. As we analyze the subject of administration, these factors will become more clear and understandable.

The way of God—laws, statutes, judgments, and commandments—has never changed. It is *of* God. It *is* perfect. It cannot change. That way is the express nature and character

of the Father. To change or abrogate that way is tantamount to changing or destroying God. How is such a consideration even remotely possible? The called and chosen servants of God know that there has never been, and never will be, any change in that way. This is the manifested evidence of conversion.

As the true doctrine of God, it is received by the chosen ministry as a divine revelation. Then, it is carefully and faithfully proclaimed, in accordance with the commission given. Therefore, the obvious manifestation of the *true* ministry is the simple fact that those chosen of God are proclaiming the same message as that given, from the beginning of time, in the recorded history of God's dealing with man. Any hint of change or transition is ample evidence that the one proclaiming the change is not of God.

On the other hand, the only human beings who can receive the message and comprehend it are those chosen by God. For, only the called can understand and live the requirements of the New Covenant.

The Kingdom is God's. As owner and possessor of that kingdom, He has the right of choosing and training whom He pleases. The full volition and purpose of man is applicable only after God tenders a call. After that call, we are held accountable for positively accepting and living up to the conditions and terms of it. For the sake of emphasis, let me once again state: The terms are exactly the same as those given to every other called and chosen servant, regardless of the time and era of that call. The terms of the contract have never changed. Only the principals who are involved differ, over the years.

The contract is a spiritual one. Spiritual things are not tangibly seen by human beings. They can be spiritually comprehended, only. Therefore, since the conditions—the laws and ways of God—are not physical but spiritual, opportunities for the development of deception, perversion, hypocrisy, and unfounded claims (in the form of change) have presented themselves. And man—created with a nature which is not, and cannot be, subject to the Law of God—came under the very adverse influence of an archenemy, Satan the Devil. Satan is opposed to God and His way of life. And, he is opposed to all men called and chosen of God to fulfill His purpose. Satan is *very subtle* in effecting his adverse influence in the lives of human beings.

What are the results of man's living in this adverse environment? Remember, even his own nature is against him! How does he cope with his unusual problem? How does he avoid self-condemnation?

To live with himself, man has created a world of religions. He refuses to live in a state of condemnation. To assuage this element of conscience, he chooses the church of his

choice. And, of course, the church of his choice will always be one which allows him the liberty and license to do what he pleases. In this way, he "kids" himself that he is fulfilling his spiritual obligation to "God" while, at the time, making little if any real sacrifice in the physical domain. The result of all this cunning of man and of his major influence, Satan, is the creation of a host of doctrines which are the fabrications of men and demons. Since the truth can be understood only by the called, there is no way to effect a "scientific" evaluation or test by which one way or the other can be *physically* substantiated. Therefore, mankind in general continues a life of smug confidence and ignorance. For, though the called know, they cannot convince the uncalled. God alone can call and make His way known to men.

The priceless gift of God to any man is a spiritual call. For, by that call, man can understand and live a way of life totally beyond the grasp of all other human beings. The called can KNOW the truth. They are called and have become the recipients of that confidence and assurance. It is the faith once delivered. When lost, through apathy and indifference or trial, it cannot be regained.

The greatest trial of man is to remain faithful to the original faith—the doctrine of life. As Jesus said, you are His disciples *if you continue* in His doctrine. It is not a matter of how a man begins his life, but, rather, how he concludes it. If we endure the trials of our faith until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, we shall receive our reward—a place in the Kingdom of God.

The doctrine of God has never changed. But, there was a change in the administration of that doctrine. What was the change? How does administration affect us today? And, how have administrative difficulties rendered the Church of God in our day vulnerable to the attacks of Satan and man? These are vital questions and must be understood.

## **Review of Administration**

"Administer" is a verb of action. It means to execute a charge or office. It is the carrying out of responsibility. It means to mete out or dispense an item—though, at times, that item may be intangible.

In no way does the concept of administration equal that which is administered. For instance, the administration of law in the framework of our constitutional democracy changes from time to time. But, such a change does not alter or abrogate the law. The only change is that of the "how." The laws and the Constitution remain the same.

This principle applies to the change of administration from the old to the new. The manner of administering or dispensing justice changed.

The laws and statutes of God have never changed—and, indeed, never will. It is this change, from the old administration to the new dispensation of the laws of God, which we must understand.

Under the terms of the Old Covenant, the Children of Israel—as a physical people—were required to obey the letter of the Law. They were not held accountable for intent of heart and mind. If they failed to live up to the physical requirement, the usual penalty was death. The penalty for the following sins was immediate death—no mercy or forgiveness was afforded:

Assumption of spiritual office or responsibility (Ex. 19:12–13; Num. 3:10, 38; 18:7).

Any and all Sabbath-breaking (Ex. 31:14–15; 35:2; Num. 15:32–35).

All murders (Ex. 21:12–14; Lev. 24:17).

Adultery (Lev. 20:10–12).

Disrespect toward parents (Ex. 21:15; 21:17; Lev. 20:9).

Homosexuality (Lev. 20:13).

Kidnapping (Ex. 21:16).

Incest (Lev. 20:17).

Divers sexual sins (Lev. 20:18–21; Deut. 22:13–30).

Blasphemy (Lev. 24:16).

Idolatry—departure from truth which God had given (Ex. 22:20; Lev. 20:2–5; Deut. 13:6–11).

Bestiality (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 20:15–16).

Witchcraft (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:6, 27).

Arrogancy of spirit (Num. 15:30–31).

Rebellion of children (Deut. 21:18–21).

Manslaughter—some cases (Num. 35:6–34; Deut. 19:4–13).

Violation of office or responsibility (Deut. 13:1–5).

False witnessing—where the intent was to destroy another party (Deut. 19:16–19).

In many other ways and for various reasons, the death penalty was exacted for national sins. Suffice it to say here that, in nearly all cases of failure to respond to the *spiritual* requirements imposed by God, the penalty was death. For instance, to break any of God's Holy Days was to suffer the immediate consequence of being cut off from Israel—meaning death.

Besides administering the death penalty, those responsible for the administration of justice were held accountable for making diligent inquiry—judicial investigation—into the allegations of sin in the camp of Israel. They were required to diligently seek out all sinners and apply the appropriate penalties (Deut. 17:2–13; 19:15; 21:22–23; 24:16).

In many cases, the penalty was not death. There was the whole system of sacrifices, washings, and other ordinances. These sacrifices were very costly in both time and money. They were a very weighty burden which our forefathers could not bear. However, they were a true representation of the terrible weight of sacrifice and payment which Christ had to make for us.

Then besides the death penalty, sacrifices, washings, and carnal ordinances, there was the system of "tooth for tooth and eye for eye" which had to be administered for varying reasons (Ex. 21:23–26; Lev. 24:18–22; Deut. 19:16–21). To say the least, this system of justice was a very exacting one. It had the effect, if Israel had ever really practiced it, of creating a healthy fear on the part of all who lived in the bounds of the nation of Israel. If one sinned, he was found guilty and faced the exaction of the law—whatever that requirement might be. There was absolutely no mercy. If a mistake was made, the price had to be paid. Indeed, a very heavy burden.

History reveals the fact that Israel never really obeyed God or practiced His way of life. Why not? With the threat of death or some other very exacting requirement held over the heads of the people, it would seem that an outward carnal obedience would exist. However, the facts show that such obedience is not possible.

The Children of Israel had been privileged to see many of the most miraculous events ever to transpire. Their separation and expulsion from the land of Egypt was a miracle of major magnitude. To soften the rulers and people of Egypt, God made them experience ten plagues of awesome proportions—miracles which should have horrified any human being. They were: Waters turned to blood; frogs; lice; flies; murrain of beasts; boils and blains; hail; locusts; darkness; and the killing of Egypt's firstborn.

Who could fail to be cognizant that some *great* intervention had occurred? The eyes of all the Israelites had seen these things come to pass. Could they ever forget what happened?

Once they had begun their journey out of the land of Egypt, they encountered situation after situation which required the intervention of God. The Children of Israel were led by a cloud during the day and by a pillar of fire during the night. And just when all looked hopeless, God intervened and opened up the mighty Red Sea so the Israelites could walk across the bed of the sea on dry ground. Then, who could forget the journey through the wilds of the Sinai Peninsula? The journey, itself, is a major miracle in its own right. There was the miraculous healing of the waters at Marah. Manna dropped from the heavens for many years—the only food by which their lives could be sustained. And on occasion, when gratitude failed and complaining was rampant, God sent innumerable quail. Then there was the significant miracle by which water rushed from the rock to assuage their thirst in the parched desert. God marvelously intervened when Israel was confronted by the hostile Amalekites—the time when Aaron and Hur had to uphold the arms of Moses to insure victory over these assailants. And, what an emotional impact to personally hear the voice of God proceed from the top of Mount Horeb—uttering into codified law the Ten Commandments! There was the burning judgment of God against the two Sons of Aaron who were not faithful and honorable in the discharge of their responsibilities. What miracles! What awesome intervention by God! Surely, no one could have doubted the validity of the instructions which the Children of Israel had received. Yet, history reveals total intransigence on the part of the people. What was wrong? Why could they not obey their God?

God had, Himself, stated that the Israelites were honest in their affirmative response to the covenant agreement. The problem was not the initial intent and purpose. The people wanted to obey God—probably for the purpose of receiving the rewards offered for obedience. Regardless of the motive, they wanted to obey. Yet, they did not.

The answer to the above problem lies in the fact that their nature would not allow them to obey. The carnal mind is not subject to the Law of God. It cannot obey the spiritual intent and purpose of that perfect law. At the very time of their offer to obey and honor

God, He said: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deut. 5:29).

Therefore, even the dread and fear of the uncompromising penal system—a system of death and grievous works—was inadequate to keep the carnal Israelites in conformity to the Law. History proves this very fact. For, the Children of Israel sinned from the time of the Old Covenant ratification to the coming of Jesus Christ. Consider the multiple thousands of Israelites who died as a result of sins—at times, 50 to 100 thousand died. Yet, they continued to sin.

Perfection was not possible under the conditions of the Old Covenant. And since the Law is eternal, it cannot change. Some other provision had to be made in order to bring human beings to perfection and fulfill the purpose for which they were created. That provision was instituted under the terms of the New Covenant.

Immediate death was the fate of all who sinned a sin of death, under the Old Covenant. There was no mercy extended (Heb. 10:28). Death was inevitable. Now, since man's nature is contrary to the intent of the Law and God's spiritual way of life—and since the fabric created by human beings (that is, our society), as well as a host of supernatural beings (fallen angels), are all against us—what hope do *we* have?

Salvation was not offered under the Old Covenant. Israel received the Law and paid the terrible price of disobedience to write lessons for you and me. The letter-of-the-law administration could not produce spiritual results. *To resort to ANY form of letter obedience, under the assumption it is a part of spiritual administration, is to grievously misunderstand the transition from the old to the new.*

What was physically administered, under the conditions of the Old Covenant? The Bible plainly reveals that God gave them His laws, statutes, and way of life. It was the *Law* which God had codified and given to Israel as their national constitution. Those very laws are spirit and life. They existed from the beginning. But as spiritual laws—codified for ancient Israel—they could not be observed by carnal, fleshly beings. Israel repeatedly trampled upon the Law of God! They paid a tragic price for that disobedience.

If the old administration was letter-of-the-law obedience to the laws and statutes of God, what is the new administration? How does it differ from the old?

Christ introduced the new administration. He is the perfect example of the new administration in action. We shall see, shortly, how Christ carried out the principles of the new.

The new administration is of the spirit. Of course, letter observance of the Law is essential. As faith without works is dead, so is an intangible concept of obedience without letter obedience. In other words, tangible obedience *is* required. And tangible things can be seen. Therefore, obedience to the spiritual intent of the Sabbath is manifested by literal, physical obedience to the fourth command.

Spiritual observance is an expansion of the letter. Christ made it very clear that He did not come to destroy or annul the Law. He came to live it—to obey, from the heart and mind, the concepts of the Law. And He is our perfect example. We must walk in His very footsteps.

Christ made it abundantly clear what He meant by the addition of a spiritual dimension to the Law. It was not abrogated but, rather, expanded. For, He said that murder was no longer a matter of physically killing someone. Under the conditions of the spiritual intent of the Law, to hate anyone is murder (Matt. 5:21–22). Spiritual adultery is not merely the physical act between consenting parties. It is any physical lust after a woman—or man (Matt. 5:27–28). Under the terms of the New Covenant administration, we must not swear. Swearing was permissible under the conditions of the old. As a physical nation, Israel was required to act in a legal manner. But, as indicated earlier, this physical relationship never kept the Children of Israel from sinning. And finally, letter responsibility required the employment of the principle of "eye for eye and tooth for tooth" (Matt. 5:38–39). But the new administration requires love at all times. We are to suffer wrong and not retaliate. We must patiently wait for the intervention of God. Vengeance is His, we are told. And herein lies the basic difference between the old and new administrations.

Under the conditions of the old administration, punishment was meted out speedily. It usually required death. There was no mercy or forgiveness. But under the terms of the new administration, mercy was granted. Punishment was postponed. There is no question: Punishment will come, but it is not meted out immediately. Time and space for repentance are granted to offenders. It is in this context we are informed that grace (unmerited pardon) and truth came through Jesus Christ. By His death, burial, and resurrection, He paid the penalty for us. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ now lives in us—fulfilling all the requirements of the Law, as He did in His own flesh body. The laws and statutes are not abrogated. They are eternal and binding upon all men, regardless of the time in which they live. But we now have the power to live the intent and purpose of that spiritual Law—obedience which was not possible when we had no help.

Ultimate punishment is inevitable for those who reject God's way. The severity of it will far exceed that which was administered under the conditions of the old administration. Why? Because we will have done despite to the spirit of grace, if we disobey and willfully

sin. God views this as an act of intentional sin, because we are afforded the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome our carnal natures and to resist the influences of Satan and his cohorts. Those who reject God's way of life will have deliberately trampled upon the shed blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:26–31).

The old administration required death, there was no mercy, and even letter obedience was difficult. The new administration requires spiritual intent, affords grace (unmerited pardon), gives life, and grants time for repentance and change. The contrast is awesome.

How did Jesus Christ carry out the principles of the new administration in His day? He is our perfect example. And since we must walk in His footsteps, it is imperative that we understand just how He conducted Himself as the first-begotten Son of God and as the true Shepherd. He is an example for us all, regardless of station or responsibility.

In His *personal* life, He became an example: He became poor, though He had been rich (2 Cor. 8:9). He completely emptied out Himself (Ph'p. 2:1–8). Physical achievement was not His objective in this life. He came to become a complete sacrifice for the people He would serve. In other words, He gave of Himself completely. He did not take advantage of position or power.

With respect to the terms of the new administration, the conditions became more exacting. He said our obedience had to *exceed* the letter-of-the-law obedience of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). Love of friends, only, was insufficient (Matt. 5:43–47; Luke 6:27–35). Christians are now obligated to love and do good to those whom they may consider enemies. He expanded the basic requirement of spiritual perfection (Matt. 5:48). *Complete* spiritual orientation is essential (Matt. 6:30–34). Under the old administration, the judicious care of self was acceptable—sufficient. But under the administration instituted by Christ, purpose has to transcend the physical. In the new administration, the golden rule is critical. We cannot react in a purely physical manner. On the contrary, we must now perform or live in accordance with the intent or expectation of our hearts (Matt. 7:12). The "tooth for tooth" concept is no longer applicable. We must suffer wrong without the desire for retaliation.

Christ taught the necessity of covering sin—not exposing it as a witness (which was required in the letter application). He stressed the new command to avoid judgment of others (Matt. 7:1–5). Rather than exacting the letter penalty, the need now is to forgive and forget (Luke 6:36–37). The new administration, under the direction of Christ, is a time for mercy and compassion. It is not a time in which a physical sacrifice is demanded (Matt. 9:13).

The administration of grace is effective only by personal introspection, honest volition, and total determination. We must come to recognize the *source* of problems and offenses (Matt. 15:7–8, 16–20; Mark 7:18–23). Personal obligation requires mastery and overcoming. Sin is still sin. Paul was inspired to write that, under the condition of grace, sin becomes exceedingly sinful. But spiritual obedience, with the help of God and Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, is easy and not cumbersome (Matt. 11:28–30). To manifest a complete attitude of forgiveness, compassion, and mercy is far less demanding than the Old Covenant requirement of witnessing. And the scope of that attitude of forgiveness is to be almost unlimited, according to the teaching of Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:21–22). Spiritual administration, however, goes *beyond* the need of continual forgiveness. If at all possible, we must—according to the instructions of Christ—avoid all offense (Matt. 17:27; 5:39–42; 18:6).

Under the conditions of the new administration, the ministry does *not* exercise the responsibility of judgment and execution of any required penalty. Jesus set an example for the true ministry, as well as an example of how all Christians should live. He came to serve, not to be served (Matt. 14:14; 20:28; 23:1–12). He gave His life for mankind. In a sense, we—as ministers of Jesus Christ—must give our lives for the people, on a daily basis.

How did Jesus handle His responsibility as the commissioned minister of God? The manner in which He handled Himself is a classic example.

He manifested a complete and genuine interest in teaching all who were interested in the *truth* which He brought (Mark 6:32–34). The weightier matters of the Law—intent and purpose—were stressed, not just technical obedience to the letter-of-the-law requirement (Matt. 23:23). Of course, de-emphasis of letter-of-the-law application does not abrogate *technical* or letter obedience in *any* spiritual matter.

Jesus did not become involved in the incessant need to resolve disputes between men (Luke 12:13–15; Matt. 18:15–17). As a court of last resort in disputes among church brethren, the ministers—representatives of the church—were sought out, and the decision reached was final and bound by God (Matt. 18:18). Such decisions, however, do not involve the laws and statutes of God—relative to their validity or binding nature in the lives of all human beings. The decisions involved in Matthew 18 are those which affect our human relationships, only.

Mercy and compassion were the characteristic behavioral traits of Jesus Christ. He did not condemn the adulteress who had been caught in the very act. On the other hand, He did not condone her action. He said: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). He fulfilled two responsibilities, here. He manifested kindness and compassion; yet, at the same time, He fulfilled His responsibility to teach the truth.

Christ did not allow the legal and technical requirements of the Law to supersede the spiritual requirement of loving and manifesting concern for human beings. He healed the infirm on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1–5). Did this abrogate the letter requirement of obedience? Absolutely not!

All through His personal ministry, Jesus kept the Sabbath. This is ample proof that His acts of kindness on the Sabbath did not change the need for physical obedience to the fourth command.

Latitude for compassion, mercy, and forgiveness is not condonation of sin. Many texts in the Bible make it quite clear that since the days of Jesus Christ, people have indeed frustrated the intent and meaning of grace and forgiveness. Paul wrote to the Hebrews—probably the church in Jerusalem—that grace and mercy, in effect, magnify the severity of punishment *yet to be meted out for disobedience*. At the same time, Paul was indicating that mercy and compassion have definite time limits. There is an appointed day of judgment. At that time, the penalty—which has been held in abeyance for many years—will be administered. The new administration affords *time for change*—not a change of doctrine which defines sin, but a change of attitude and spirit in relationship to the truth. When the penalty for disobedience is meted out under the conditions of the new administration, there will be no eluding it (Heb. 10:26–31). In Old Covenant times, the result of disobedience was physical death. It was the basic penalty for sin. But, such death was the mere loss of physical life. Under the considerations of the new administration, when the death penalty—requirement for disobedience to the conditions of the New Covenant—is exacted, there will be no resurrection. That death will be the second death. It is permanent, final! As Paul said, it is much more severe.

Why such an interruption of time, today, for the fulfillment of the penalty which was immediately required under the old administration? Because it is the only means by which space and time can be granted for man to recognize the enormity of his sin, change his spirit and attitude, and repent and develop a posture of spiritual obedience to the laws and statutes of God. Yet, under the influence of Satan, man has perverted the intent and purpose of this delay as ordained by God (Rom. 3:5–8; Jude 3–4; Gal. 2:16–21).

Until the appointed time when *Christ* will execute all judgment, the wheat (Christians) and tares (false brethren) will dwell together. To take any definitive action, today, against a calloused and perverted individual—as was required under the Old Testament administration—would most surely injure the true Christian in some way. For the sake of those who are truly called and chosen of God, we are not presuming to exercise judgment now (Matt. 13:33–43).

How did Jesus respect His trainees during His earthly ministry? He gave them the message which they were to teach. He gave them power and authority to carry out that commission. And He backed them up. He supported them in the fulfillment of the commission at that very time. But, more importantly, He will completely back them up in the future judgment (Matt. 10:13–15). What assurance and confidence those young disciples had!

Despite Christ's example, it was not uncommon to see an opposite relationship develop in the church of the last days. Young trainees were subjected to peculiar and ridiculous situations and activities to "test their attitudes." In the latter years of the church, people could by-pass the ministry and go directly to someone at "Headquarters"—where the member was usually believed and the minister was impugned. This is not to say that there were not situations where the "Headquarters" decision was right. But, logic should tell us that no one side could *always* be correct.

The life and ministry of Christ is the perfect example for us to follow. How merciful and compassionate He was! Yet, how powerful and straightforward He was in proclaiming the truth which the Father had given Him! *Today*, we must proclaim the truth and take the oversight of the church for its own good. The church must be protected from the wiles of Satan and any men who are under his influence. But, much mercy and compassion must be administered to those who are trying but need help and time to overcome. Their judgment will be finalized at the appointed time—and by the responsible One.

### **Problems of Administration—Last Days**

From the prophecies which were quoted in earlier letters, it is clear there were to be *major* administrative problems in the Church of God during the last days. Those problems involved abuses in areas of finances, service, and responsibility. Many of God's people were taken advantage of for personal gain.

The big question: What was the *premise for the development* of these administrative failures? How could such abuse and failure gain acceptance—even from those who were the recipients of the injurious and restrictive effects?

The motive and purpose of the past administration was not evil. The intent could be considered honorable. There was an intense desire to keep the church clean and pure, to resist the incursion of error and individualization. But what became apparent—from the actual, historical facts—was quite different from the initial anticipation. The very conditions Jesus Christ instituted—conditions and circumstances by which character is developed—were frustrated, altered, and rejected altogether. How?

In the intense desire to keep the church unified and untainted, there was an overt attempt to apply the Old Covenant judicial system. Judgments were rendered. Hearts and minds were *not* read. The actual, physical facts became the basis of that judgment. Weaknesses were not countenanced. Though the death penalty was not administered, its counterpart—excommunication from the corporate body—was religiously carried out. Little, if any, real mercy and compassion were evidenced in the dealings of the ministry with the laity.

In an overall evaluation of the past, the following definitely apply. Variations which existed were the result of the individualization of the ministry. No two ministers necessarily carried out responsibilities in exactly the same way.

First: There was a very strong intent on the part of many, primarily emanating from the administrative responsibility of Pasadena, to apply all the letter requirements of the Old Covenant administration. Second: There existed a spirit and grace—versus letter—administration of responsibility. Third: As would naturally be expected, there was a vast sphere in which a confusion of the letter and spirit applications prevailed. Fourth: Not without historical precedent, there prevailed a spiritual administration tainted by human carnality—often resulting in dereliction of responsibility, arrogance and conceit, wrong motives, and failure to recognize personal liability. The church membership was made the scapegoat for all difficulties and problems. Fifth: Due to the greed and lusts of the natural self, the letter application was often tainted and corrupted. Yet, even a pure and uncorrupted letter administration would have had physical acceptance by God.

It was failure to comprehend the purpose for personal liberty, freedom of expression, and action—coupled with inability to recognize the pitfalls of the various forms of administration—that led the early New Testament ministry, following the apostles, to develop administrative deviations which parallel those we experienced in the church during the past several years. There is abundant historical proof that the corporate body of the first-century Church of God became the Catholic Church. For the very reasons employed by administrative personnel in the church of our days, the early Catholic Church attempted to regulate and rule the churches of the first, second, and third centuries. But, as history reveals, they soon recognized the unique problems involved in the development of a hierarchical administrative system and its accompanying philosophy of rule. They came to recognize there was no way by which they could keep the physical church pure and untainted. For considerable historical information related to this concept, please refer to the book-length article: "God's Church—Revelation to Apostasy," chapter four, section entitled "Development of Hierarchical System," pages 66–73 [Contemporary Caveat: Subsequent to the time of this letter, some have attempted to apply a definition of the term "hierarchy" that differs significantly from that to which Mr. Cole is here, and elsewhere, referring—as

the context demonstrates. For further clarification see the June 2001 *Monthly Letter* by Mr. Jon Brisby entitled, *Church Government and Delegation*, under the section "Hierarchy—A Dirty Word?"].

There is, in reality, no way to control rebellious man. He must become converted and *act* on the Word of God. When he is converted, and then only, He will fear God and His Word. He will then obey from the heart, changing his natural life. His mind will be attuned to the spiritual. And when this condition prevails, there is no need for physical application of administrative control. He censors himself. Daily, he is crucifying the flesh and all its natural proclivities.

Historically, the lessons written by Israel were recorded for our admonition and learning. But what must we learn from them? In an overall sense, the lesson we should derive from all those examples is this: Fleshly obedience, derived from fear of penalty, *will not—indeed, cannot—change the heart and mind*. Real character, that which is essential for the inheritance of everlasting life, is produced in the heart and mind. It is not the result of physical obedience accomplished through fear and coercion. Real oneness and accord are achieved, by all called and chosen of God, when they divest themselves of natural inclinations and, from the heart and mind, will to obey perfectly. To achieve this kind of perfection requires the latitude and freedom Christ instituted under the terms of the new administration. Thus, the applicable penalties for disobedience will be administered only at the appointed time of judgment.

The list of abuses, evidenced in all relationships of human beings, encompasses the whole domain of authority and responsibility. Are there any abuses in the husband-wife relationship? Have all parents handled their responsibility toward children perfectly? What about leaders in the domain of human government? Is their conduct honorable and above reproach? What about employer-employee relationships? Have difficulties arisen from this human relationship?

To any thinking mind, the answers to the above questions are obvious. In every area, major problems *have* developed. Did the responsibility borne by the employer, the authority of the husband, the charge of parents, or the office of national administrative jurisdiction come to a conclusion because abuses existed in those areas of responsibility? Of course not! Why, then, do we attempt to justify any concept which would eliminate all responsibility and authority from the ministry? Jesus Christ came in the power and authority of God the Father. He was given *total control* over the operation of God, here on this earth. And Christ gave all needed authority and rule to His commissioned servants who were held accountable for proclaiming the revealed way of life. That authority is no more abrogated than is the authority of the husband or the parents. Satan, the rebel—rebellious against all authority and control—has deceived man into believing that all authority and control no longer apply.

Abuses and dereliction of responsibility do not render government and authority null and void. On the contrary, that is *the why* of all Christian activity. True Christians are qualifying to replace all rebels in the future Kingdom of God. To do away with authority and government is tantamount to a rejection of the Kingdom of God. Satan is the author of any such concept.

What are the consequences of abusing government and authority? The *normal* human reaction? To understand this is to understand *our* thinking and attitude, *if* we are sufficiently objective to evaluate properly.

### **Emotional Reactions of Abused People**

In the awakened moments of a major crisis—such as the sinking of a ship, an impending accident, saddening news—people react completely emotionally. Reason is abdicated. Careful analysis and thoughtful evaluation are forgotten. The same is true in the mental world. When mental concepts are abruptly changed or dropped, when confidences are shattered, when "convictions" are found to be foundationless, the people involved react in bizarre ways—crazed, violent, vindictive, hateful, resentful, and individually defensive. It is a pattern which has been repeated thousands of times in the history of human beings.

Order, control, authority, and government—of whatever the nature—are categorically rejected. The only perceptive meeting ground is negative in nature—the obvious opportunity to vent feelings, contempt, disbelief, hate, and all other volatile human reactions. Since there are only two possible spheres of influence—that of Satan, as the god of this world, and that of the true God, to those called and chosen of Him—these emotional ventings, which are *not* a part of the influence of the Holy Spirit, must proceed from the influence of Satan, man's adversary. But, little does the emotionally charged man realize the nature of his influence and very probably could care less at that point in his life. For, the appeal to his own vanity and nature is extremely great. He *wants* the opportunity to vent his feelings.

In such crises, the troubled man forgets the initial purpose of his belief or actions. He forgets that the basis of his trauma—the behavior or change of another—should not (indeed, cannot) change *the reasons* for his initial beliefs or the beliefs themselves. And because of the heat of wrath, he sets about to create concepts of self-justification which are acceptable—to him, at least. If troubled, he refuses to evaluate rationally the situation at hand.

Since we are specifically dealing with a traumatic religious situation, the emotional responses will affect one's present beliefs. Why did people reject their past convictions? What beliefs, at the present time, will justify their feelings of abhorrence, contempt and resentment toward those whom they feel adversely touched their lives? They now feel they can trust themselves, only. Their religion becomes a "one-on-one" contact with God. They feel no need to be taught. After all, they can read the Bible for themselves. Inadvertently, they reject the authority of God's Word. The natural follow-up to this rejection is the *creation* of beliefs and practices which cater to the whimsical nature of the individual. These people will not be ruled by man *or* concept. For, when rejecting the truth they initially accepted, they deceived themselves into believing they rejected only the man who proclaimed it.

With the rejection of the authoritative dimension of truth, and by relegating it to the personal philosophy of the man or men who proclaimed it, the distressed are consciously able to construct a total defense of belief and practice—or lack of it. The avenue for this operation brings up the "who" and "what" questions. What is the truth? Who are Christians? What is the Church? What is required, really, for salvation? What did Jesus abrogate by His death? When did the New Testament church begin? What did the apostles believe and practice?

By rejecting divine revelation, the people now feel free to argue—to advance their own beliefs (After all, are not *their* arguments just as valid as those of any other human beings?). And by the rejection of revelation, troubled members are able to circumvent *any authority*—which begins with God and His Word—and thereby convince themselves that there is no government and control necessary. God, they believe, no longer uses other human beings to teach and instruct. In a word, there is no valid ministry.

Academically, arguments are advanced to justify the spiritual stance which they have assumed. Yet, in reality, their arguments and subsequent behavior belie what proceeds from their lips. Why are they so intensely troubled? Why do they not just disappear into anonymity? Why do they not assume the same unemotional stance which was assumed when they left other organizations? Why is there a consistent attempt to remain knowledgeable about happenings in the organization from which they have departed? Why are there consistent attempts to justify themselves for the doctrines and actions which they now hold? Do not all these activities indicate a deeper, inner fear and doubt?

What, then, was the real problem? As a result of counseling and careful evaluation—regarding beliefs advanced in much literature, written by those emotionally troubled people—it becomes plainly obvious that the real difficulties are not those found in the explanations of self-justification for departure from the church. First: It is obvious

there was a total loss of faith. Is it possible for them to ever again give heart, mind, and body for belief or conviction? Second: There was no longer any confidence in a call from God, the miracle of conversion, or the revelation of divine truth. Far too many people actually allowed themselves to believe that their entire past commitment came as a result of a "hard-sell" job by a man of enormous charisma. The very leading and inspiration of the Holy Spirit was now attributed to the deceptive charisma of a personality. And yet, there are men in the world of much greater power, influence, and charisma, to which these people never gave a moment's attention. How is it possible for them to explain this paradox? Third: By total denial of past conviction and belief, which included acceptance of divinely revealed truth—and by the now-assumed stance of a mobile, flexible, and self-oriented concept—these people were left without a real premise for evaluation. Friend turned against friend—merely because one failed to accept the same concept as the other. People were left bewildered and confused. How could a situation of this dimension and severity have possibly developed? Fourth: Because of *emotional* concepts and beliefs, these people came to deny both past and present fruits. They now believe *no good* ever came to them as a result of obedience to the way of life to which they were called. In fact, great effort is now exerted to produce evidence that they actually were cursed and sustained loss and difficulty because of their beliefs and practices. Also, their present conduct is completely justified, regardless of what they now experience. But, time and chance happen to all! We must recognize we are merely experiencing the aftermath of what happened in our former affiliation. The very people who once spoke confidently of their great blessings, and of the joy which was theirs due to obedience to God, will now deny it unequivocally. As God said: "... evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13). Honest appraisal is no longer considered important. Fifth: Seizing the opportunity—condition of unrest, faithlessness, and resentment—Satan broadcasts his propaganda: concepts which cater entirely to individual whims. After all, who does not enjoy his own ideas and concepts? Only those who accept revealed truth can come to abhor the self and to love and respect the commands and rule of God.

Today, there is a worldwide cry against government. Almost with one voice, troubled dissidents manifest contempt for government. It is oftentimes considered *the sole problem* encountered within the Church of God. It is viewed as the basis of all difficulty. Why is there such volatile objection to rule—government?

1) Rejection of government is a necessary justification for the rejection of truth. God's ways are *commandments!* Absolutes! Imperative dictates! Therefore, resorting to "individualism" allows one to *reinterpret* commands, doctrine, or the entirety of the Bible, to his own liking. But revealed truth is authoritative! It allows for no flexible ("I think" or "I believe") premise. It is absolute. But, such a premise is not acceptable to carnality (Rom. 8:7)—especially to those who were once converted and have *turned back* to the ways of the flesh.

2) Satan rebelled against God. He willed not to be ruled or to come under any authority but his own. He was not teachable and subservient. He hates the government of God. Since he is the god—one who exerts the principal influence—of this world, is it strange that those who turn from the government of God—manifested in the absolutes of the revealed doctrine—should hate government, also? Of course, all peoples are really unaware of what forces actually influence them—above and beyond the visible and tangible—in their behavioral patterns. They do not know *why* they think as they do. And they have no conception of why they react as they do. Yet, regardless of their ignorance of such an influence, the Bible plainly reveals that all—outside of that small, rejected, and persecuted group called of God, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and possessing of the mind of Christ—are mentally manipulated and controlled by the god of this world. The Body of Christ is one. God's mind is one. *He* is not divided and confused. That oneness is primarily of the mind—of the doctrine, belief, and practices. It has very little to do with the physical. The physical body can degenerate and ultimately break apart, as did the first-century Church of God; yet the spiritual, with a mind of doctrine and belief, can remain viable and strong—even though there may be a greatly reduced number of people remaining faithful to the perfect way of life. Only those called will KNOW WHO THEY ARE. Others will either live in initial darkness—never having received the light of God's Truth—or they will *revert* to darkness because of physical appeal, dislike for the truth, or fear of the physical dimension (excommunication, persecution, etc.).

3) God's way is authoritative! His Word is absolute, unchanging. He gave commands! But to be authoritative, absolute, and inflexible is contrary to human nature. For, the nature of man is a nature of rebellion. It has the tendency to rebel against all constituted authority! God, the Word of God, national rule, local rule, rule of a husband, rule of parents, any and all rule. Therefore, it is not strange that even some of God's chosen people should rebel against the truth those authoritative absolutes once accepted in faith—when a crisis develops and rewards of a significant nature are promised.

4) Revolt is the means of breaking the shackles of control—once accepted in faith, but now resented and hated. It is the means of securing independence for *self*. Standing in *one's own right*. In the ultimate analysis, it is a demanded freedom to do whatever one pleases, while not existing with a stricken conscience. For, when one presumes to know what is right in the sight of God, he has figured it out by his own rationale and study.

In contrast, God's way is not freedom of self, but self-control. It is the ability to control emotions, intents, and purposes. It is the way of character.

I am sure there are other methods by which those who turn from the Truth of God justify themselves. But the above is sufficient to show the depth of deception and the

imperative need to safeguard the self against such carnal rationale. Let us now turn our attention to the *results* of this assumed "new freedom."

It is openly expressed in contempt for government! It is a demand for absolute personal freedom—freedom from any and all control, or rule. Both Jude and Peter wrote of this "latter-day" problem.

Jude records: "Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, *despise dominion* [rule, government], and speak evil of dignities [men in office or responsibility]" (Jude 8). These rebels of the last days (verse 18) are within the church—not outside (verse 12). And this very fact attests to the development of some very evil condition within the church! How could people, called to the truth and responsive to the rule of God—obedient to the doctrine—turn to contempt and rebellion? Only because they did not really love the truth and could not retain that love through the trial of their faith. (2 Thess. 2:10–11; 1 Peter 1:7).

The author of rebellion (rebellion is possible only if there exists an absolute standard, authority, rule)—Satan—sways this world. He is the god of this world. But, coincidentally, when God's chosen servants rebel against His rule—going contrary to the revealed way of life—they revert to the *same mind and spirit* which dominates the world. And usually, their demeanor is *worse* than the behavior of those who never saw or understood the truth (2 Pet. 2:21–22; Rom. 1:20–32; Eph. 4:17–21; 1 John 2:3–11).

Picking up the same thought, Peter wrote:

But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and **DESPISE GOVERNMENT**. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are NOT afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as *natural* brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption (2 Pet. 2:10–12) [emphasis mine].

This chapter is a prophecy for the last days. And, as indicated earlier, it is written about people who once knew and understood the truth (verses 20–22).

God is the author of government! It must be respected. And, those who occupy an office must be respected until removed by God (Jude 8–9).

What are the consequences of rebellion against rule, authority, and government as established by God (Jude 8–13)? Jesus Christ made it clear that all rule and government is by the express permission of God the Father (John 19:10–11).

Another consequence of rebellion against rule is a tendency toward the eventual total breakdown of all constituted authority and responsibility. Citizens against established rule, employee against employer, one segment of society against another, poor against successful, wife against husband, children against parents and adults in general. The results? Society torn asunder! Family breakdown! Homes devastated! Tyrannical government emerges! Creation of a welfare state. Joblessness! The whole fabric of society is ravaged. As the physical goes, so goes the spiritual—unless true Christians endure the trial of faith—amidst ridicule, slander, and eventual persecution—and continue in the unalterable way of rule, government, and authority as established by God. By continuity of belief, faith, and practice, we shall prove our worthiness—by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit—to be the RULERS in the Kingdom of God.

By their fruits shall all men be known. In this regard, only the faithful are responsive to the instructions of 2 Timothy 3:16. By rationalization, all others will rebel against the rule of God—the authority and force of the Word of God. True Christians must always LOVE that WORD! Humbling the SELF—bringing the natural mind into captivity to Christ—is imperative.

Finally, revolt against God manifests itself in *total individualization*. Each begins to trust himself, only. *He* becomes the discerner of all truth. In order to make the Bible fit his subconscious conclusions, he will emphasize certain texts—usually out of context—and completely overlook all others which seem to be contradictory to his pet conception. He refuses to manifest confidence in any other human being or organization. He trusts his own mind, alone, to ferret out "truth." By his own study and reason, he determines what he "thinks" is right. Therefore, he does that which is right in his own eyes.

The past, present, and future are therefore interpreted in the light of his own thinking. Revelation of all absolutes is categorically rejected. He attempts to hide in uncertainty and doubt. Irrelevancy is the order of the day. Each does that which *seems* right to him. Apparently, many now feel they can appeal to the mercy of Christ in the day of His return. Little does it dawn on them that those called of God, in the last days, had the TRUTH revealed. Whoever are those servants of God, they once existed in unity, accord, and agreement. Subsequently, apostasy occurred. As a result, people became troubled and confused. Why? Because they did not hold to the faith once given to them. God is not responsible for their failure! When He called them, *He* made the truth known. Those called of God KNEW THE TRUTH. The just shall live by faith—the faith once delivered. Christians can build up faith through study and prayer; but it will never be given again to those who lose it due to human failure. Therefore, it is *our* daily responsibility to keep that FAITH alive and vibrant in our lives—even in the times of severe trial. We cannot hide in doubt and uncertainty. Such actions will not be acceptable in the day of judgment.

Hold to the body of faith—the truth which God gave to you initially (Heb. 3:6–15; 1 John 2:24–27).

Do not individualize. Such behavior is not of God. We are called to be ONE—one in the mind (truth) of Christ and God.

### **People Have Always Rebelled Against Rule!**

The Bible is a long chronicle of human rebellion and its accompanying sordid behavior. It is only an insignificant minority who have been faithful to any God-given responsibility. Such continuity of faith and conviction always bears an incredibly high price tag. Most faithful Christians were brutally persecuted, tortured, socially rejected. Paul was inspired to write of them: "Of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb. 11:38). They are people who counted it an honor to bear the marks and sufferings of their Captain, Jesus Christ. They are servants who found it more honorable to obey God than to obey man.

But, most of God's people rebelled. Rebellion can only transpire when the truth is previously known. These are people who knew—people who understood. Who are they? Why did they rebel? And what is the purpose of recording all these events for those upon whom the ends of the world are come?

Light is synonymous with truth. Lucifer was called the "light-bringer." He was a high-ranking angel who *knew* the truth. One whom God had given awesome responsibility and power. But he did not elect to abide in the truth (John 8:44). He rebelled against God (was not faithful to the truth which had been given him) and became the adversary of all righteousness. He was not content to abide by himself in his defiance and rebellion. As is characteristic of all revolutionaries, he sought those who would agree with his opinions. He immediately set about deluding and deceiving his peers. As a result, one third of the angels followed in his rebellion. That rebellion was not defiance against organizational structure within the ranks of the angels. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that the rebellion was *against the truth* which God had given to them. It is amazing how men follow Satan and invariably transfer spiritual things to the physical. Once respect for the absolute truth is lost, all efforts of men are devoted to areas of self-justification. Of course, in Satan's rebellion, areas of spiritual responsibility were disrupted. Satan had decided to rebel against God. But, one must ask, did the angels who remained faithful to God rebel against the *government of God* when they refused to subscribe to the mutiny advocated by Satan? Remember, he was *their* spirit leader. If they did not rebel against God in resisting the intent of Satan, then obviously there is a duty which is superior to loyalty or faithfulness to a physical or spiritual head. That obligation is the necessity of obeying God *first*. How? By faithfulness to the

unalterable truth. For, in that truth is the expression or manifestation of the character and purpose of God. It is the unchanging nature of the Eternal God—the irrevocability of His way. For, Christ is the Way and He does not change.

Supernatural beings existed in the very presence of God, possessing awesome knowledge—yet, many of them rebelled against the one and only perfect way of life. How could this be? Are not human beings now struggling—as manifested in personal mastery—to qualify to enter the Kingdom of God, where *that way of life* will be lived and practiced for all eternity? What a paradox! Knowledgeable spiritual beings revolted against the truth which they possessed and lived. Should it seem strange that mere human beings—regardless of station, call, or responsibility—should also lose sight of the perfect way of life and turn from it because of vanity, prestige, assumption, or other human foibles?

Following Satan's rebellion—in due process of time—man was created and placed on the earth, the domain of the angelic beings who had turned from the truth to a way of error and ultimate hurt. Man was instructed in the perfect ways of God. He had a perfect teacher—God—and was afforded the knowledge of happiness, joy, abundance, and every good thing. As the created of God, Adam and Eve did not painstakingly discover the way of life. It was revealed to them by a most benevolent God. Once they became possessors of that perfect way of life, God wanted them to love and cherish that way of life. He wanted them to resist all outside temptations and pulls which compromise that marvelous way of life. But, as history shows, Eve yielded to temptation, listening to the voice which appealed to her own vanity and desires. She, in turn, used all her inherent powers of persuasion on her husband, Adam, and he succumbed. Thus, the first human beings placed on this earth unitedly rebelled against God, their Creator and Sustainer. They were so blinded by their own carnal desires and expectations that they lost all knowledge of God's promises and blessings for continued obedience to the one and only way of life. What a tragedy! It seems almost incredible to believe that a human family that was instructed directly by its Creator could rebel against God! Christians are expected to believe and subscribe to, in faith, the truth which has been taught. Yet, here is an example of people *taught directly* by God. What a deceptive force exists within our make-up! Most assuredly, none of us should ever take the capability of human rationalization and self-justification lightly! We are prey to our own selves unless we can sustain faith and honor God in continuity of belief and practice. Human beings need to forsake the tendency to deprecate Adam and Eve, instead concentrating upon their own potential for error—wickedness, self-justification, and above all the uncanny way of turning from spiritual responsibility. Too many human beings see this physical life and all its glitter, only. Things eternal—spiritual in nature—are not seen with the physical eye. They must be accepted on faith. But, this faith must be nourished and sustained by consistent contact with God.

If Adam and Eve had truly believed God's instructions, surely they would not have departed from the way which He gave to them. But, they had been led to rationalize in their own minds that there were grave and serious questions about the validity of that way and about the One who had taught it. The practice is no different today. It is a repetition of what transpired in the days of the apostles. The voice of defiance is exactly the same. The problem is that most people cannot read the evidences of Satan's power, intent, and purpose. For, his way seems too appealing and acceptable to man, who is being deceived.

Many hundreds of years later, God called and established a nation—according to a blueprint consideration designed from the foundation of the world (Acts 17:26; Deut. 32:8). To that nation He gave His eternal, spiritual way of life (Heb. 4:2). Israel was miraculously and benevolently guided and sustained by direct intervention from that very God. Israel saw such miracles and spontaneous intervention that it would seem no human being could deny the verity and validity of that way of life given to them. They *heard* the very voice of God—as He uttered into codified form the TEN GREAT LAWS. They saw God's chosen servant Moses sustained, time after time. How could it have been possible for them to reject him (Moses)?

Enemies of Israel were extirpated. Its borders were miraculously protected. They were promised peace from outside intrusion—if they would be faithful to the truth which they had been given. They did not have to worry about their possessions while they were in attendance at the great feasts. For, God assured them that the neighboring countries would not desire their possessions.

According to the instructions of God, Israel's leaders had to qualify under severe proving. They had to hate every evil way. They were required to be servants of the people—without ambition of personal gain. They were to rule and administer the perfect laws of God, in kindness and consideration.

Yet, despite this awesome beginning, it was not long before misgiving, distrust, and outright rebellion characterized human nature. They rebelled against Moses, asserting that they could not prove whether he was the true servant of God (Acts 7:34–39). They rebelled against God, feeling that their resistance was only against assumed *interpretations* of those whom God had placed in responsible positions. Of course, not one Israelite believed—in his own mind—that he was rebelling against God. His objections were against the "assumptions" of men who had "assumed" office.

All human beings are able to read history—to whatever extent seems necessary to them. But few, if any, have been able to read the *present* and ascertain the *future*. Moses was rejected in his day. The prophets were rejected in their respective days. Christ was

rejected in His day—by all but a tiny handful. The apostles were eventually rejected—even by many of those who initially accepted the truth through their preaching. Is it any wonder that the people called and chosen of God, today, are rejecting not only the truth but also the fact that there was a servant called to preach it? Time has not changed the nature of man. Man is the same carnal being that he was from the beginning.

From all observations, it would seem that the nation of Israel had everything working for them. It seems utterly preposterous that they could have rebelled against God and against His chosen servant, Moses. Yet, history is plain! Israel was the recipient of the TRUTH. They had experienced the awesome intervention of God, time after time. They had been sustained when it appeared that all hope was lost. Could more have been done for them (Isa. 1:2–6; 5:1–7)?

Those terrible and costly experiences of ancient Israel—lessons for today—were written for you and me. We are the recipients of the object lessons which were taught. Lessons which tell us that *we* must be faithful to the truth given us (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11).

In due time, God sent His own Son into the world. His Son, Jesus Christ, was the Word made flesh. He came to live the perfect way of life and to set an example for us. The Word which had been given to Israel, and which they had rebelled against, was now sent in the flesh—in the life of Jesus Christ—and was authoritatively proclaimed by that wise and perfect servant of God. It was the unchanging Word—the Word which Satan once knew and understood, the Word which God had taught to Adam and Eve, the Word which had been miraculously given to Israel through Moses, the Word which God had now commissioned Christ to proclaim.

In the life of Christ was found perfection, in every sense of the word. There was absolutely no justifiable reason to reject Him. And yet, He was spurned and rejected by all except a mere handful—approximately 120, at the time His work was completed.

Human beings are no different today than they were in the day of Christ, or in times past. They are rebellious against God—not subject to the laws or ways of God. They possess their own minds—minds of independence of thought and conviction. They are not subject to God and His ways. The word "SUBJECT" inherently carries with it the conception of voluntary submission. "Not subject to" means that there is open hostility toward, and rejection of, the ways of God. Man's nature is a nature of defiance and rebellion—yet, at the same time, a nature which completely deceives itself, exonerating every action and belief. The outside influence of God's Spirit must be exerted against this nature, in order to produce conversion—a change of heart and mind. But that conversion

is not absolute, at this time. For, the process of conversion is like every other natural conversion process in nature—there is the constant tendency to revert to the natural state of equilibrium. That is, the tendency to seek normalcy once again. Unless the ingredients of conversion are kept active, this reversion is inevitable. Daily prayer and study is a necessity—a required activity. The tendency to return to the natural impulses will continue until a great, miraculous change transpires—a change from the natural state to the spiritual. At that time, the spiritual state will be the normal one.

Therefore, it should not be surprising that the people rejected Christ as the very living Word of God, just as much as they had rejected all the other servants of God who proclaimed the true way of life—the spiritual way, which is totally contrary to the flesh (Gal. 5:17).

Christ had come to live the way of God perfectly—to set us an example. At the same time, He had come to establish a church—a spiritual body into which we could be inducted by meeting necessary requirements. He also called and trained disciples, who were later to be commissioned to preach the message which He had taught them—the same message which had existed from the beginning. The commission given to the twelve apostles was the beginning of the New Testament ministry—a ministry which must continue to the day of His (Christ's) return.

The results of the apostolic preaching were significant. Thousands of people turned to the way of life which these men taught. The converts were welded into the oneness of the Body of Christ—the Church. The church grew mightily for a number of years under the preaching of the original twelve apostles, aided greatly with the added power and conviction of the Apostle Paul. The scope of the church and its activities engulfed the known world.

But, the force and deception of human nature began to assert itself before the death of the original apostles. Lack of conviction and purpose became evident. The people had begun to accept personalities—instead of "the faith" which the apostles taught. From within, ministers and lay members began to espouse heresy. Larger and larger numbers of the people began to accept these strange new concepts—believing them to be the Truth of God. Then, after only about forty years of truly proclaiming the truth, the church almost totally apostatized from the truth. By the time of the waning years of the Apostle John, the church had lost its direction, even *expelling the true servants of God*. Before this happened, however, the faithful servants of God were warning the people to withdraw from every brother who walked disorderly and did not live according to the revealed truth which God had given and which they had taught the people. Faith in *the way of God*, which He had given through the called and trained ministry, was all but lost. Sometime near the end of the original apostles' ministry, Jude was inspired to write that it was necessary for the true brethren to contend for the faith which was first given.

Human nature had asserted itself again. This period of human history was no different than all others which preceded it. And, man's nature has not inherently changed. Only by willful subjugation—on the part of those individuals involved (in conversion)—can that nature be changed. That is the purpose of our call and conversion. The continuation of that process is entirely dependent upon the retention of faith and conviction—a real and genuine love for the truth. Otherwise, the truth will be changed and the nature of man will justify it. It is a process as old as man.

Yes, mankind has always rebelled. It makes little difference what the circumstances are. To summarize: Every conceivable arrangement existed whereby men and angels could be tried—tested with respect to the truth. And the only consistency which we shall see is that of carnality. We can *count* on it to be evil, rebellious, and indifferent—regardless of circumstances or conditions.

First, Satan is living proof that character is the vital ingredient to perfect existence in God's way of life. Merely being a spirit being of power and might is insufficient. Satan was "perfect in his ways." But he lacked character—character which can be developed only by the crucible of trial and experience. Without that significant ingredient of character, not even spirit beings remain faithful to the truth. Lucifer lacked character and a real, genuine love of the truth with which he was entrusted from the beginning. He allowed jealousy, greed, resentment, and contempt for authority to destroy his purpose and direction.

Second, Adam and Eve were not tainted by society, nor were they required to accept the Truth of God secondhand. They were the only two human beings on the face of the earth. Their teacher was their Creator. They were given the undiluted, perfect way of life. They were not frustrated by degeneration of flesh, ill health, or other physical weaknesses. They were physically perfect. Yet, in this condition they rebelled against God, listening to their own desires and to the subtle voice of Satan, archenemy of God and archenemy of all truth. They believed Satan, the adversary. They thought God was unfair. They rebelled against government—the authority and control of God. They desired freedom to do as they thought—to live up to their own concepts and ways. Therefore, even with a perfect beginning and under perfect conditions, human beings cannot obey God. People today assume that they would listen to God, if only He would appear to them directly. The example of Adam and Eve proves, beyond doubt, the fallacy of this rationalization. Carnality is in opposition to God. It is imperative that we recognize this fact and admit it. Jesus said, if we can accept those sent by God—the basis being acceptance of the Word of God—then we can accept Him. On the other hand, if we will not accept the messenger of God—who bears the true and unalterable way of life—we will not accept Christ. Why? Because He was and is that true way of life, personified in the flesh: During His existence on this earth, He personified that way in His own life; and presently, He manifests it in the spiritual body of the Church—the continued embodiment of the Truth.

Third, Israel was formed into a nation. They were established as a total society. Their boundaries were protected by God. And they were given the perfect way of life as a constitution for their nation. Circumstances could not have been better for any group or people. The society created was that of God's way of life. No one would have been penalized for obedience to the truth. There would have been no stigma for perfect obedience. Their government would not have hindered them. There would have been no false churches—churches espousing heresy and contempt for God's Law. Employers would have been in accord and agreement with the employees, in their desire to obey God. Yet, even in such a society, human nature could not obey or honor the government of God. The nation of Israel rebelled against God in ways which were to their own detriment. Therefore, a perfect human society and protected boundaries, as well as direct intervention by God, did not assure perfect obedience.

Fourth, Christ came and lived the perfect life in the flesh. He set us an example to follow. He was the very Truth, living and moving here on the earth. He was God's way of life in action. Surely no one could require a greater revelation and substantiation of the true way of life! Yet, of those called—those who knew and understood—only a very few remained faithful. The very Son of God, living and walking with them, did not enhance their obedience—faithfulness to the truth which they had been given. One must accept the authority and control of the truth, and bring his own life into total obedience thereto, before he can remain faithful to it. Those who feel that they would spontaneously follow (obey) God or His Son, Jesus Christ, if He were to live here, indicate by the very concept that they do not understand the validity of history. Such circumstances have already existed. And the called and chosen of God, for the most part, rebelled against the truth. Why? Because the problem is not by whom we are taught, but the very fact that human nature is opposed to the government of God—the authority of the truth—and is by its very nature unalterable. The Truth of God is absolute. Human beings do not like absolutes, because by accepting them they are rendered unable to flex the licentious desires of their own minds.

Fifth, Jesus Christ established a church. He came to call and train a nucleus of servants, for the purpose of proclaiming the message given and establishing a body of believers. To that church was given the spiritual responsibility of preserving the truth. That responsibility was borne by both the ministry and the laity. Yet, just as the physical nation of Israel rebelled against the truth, so the spiritual body of the church departed from the truth. Even within the confines of the church to whom had been given the truth and the Holy Spirit, human nature asserted itself in defiance and rebellion against God. The church was not a haven or sanctuary from the adversities of human nature.

All the optimum conditions and circumstances possible will not guarantee obedience on the part of human beings. In the final analysis, it is only character and genuine love for

the truth which enables Christians to remain faithful. Those ingredients are found in continuity of belief: the manifestation of absolute faith—faith in the truth which was initially given. The manifestation of that faith and continuity is found in the abhorrence of self and the genuine acceptance of the government of God. God's way is absolute. It is the basis of government. That government is distributed according to the will and purpose of God. To reject it, in any of its applications, is to reject the authority and purpose of God.

## **Basis of Revolution**

The whole history of man—approximately 6,000 years—is a sordid experience. People have murdered one another, individually. Nations have gruesomely fought and annihilated one another. In the name of political philosophies, peoples have tortured one another. Bizarre and wild religious concepts have enthralled millions.

Why?

In a word, humanity has always rebelled against the authority of God—the controlling tool of order, stability, and government. Standards of control—absolutes or otherwise—are categorically rejected. Individualization reigns supreme. This is not as quickly recognized or comprehended in the realm of governments—due to sheer size, numbers of people involved, diversity of responsibility, and length of time taken to accomplish. In families, the breakdown is quick and alarming. The results are seen within a single lifetime—children rebelling against parents and wives rebelling against husbands. Likewise, employees rebelling against employers. Nations go the same route. The family breakdown represents what will happen to the nation, except that it requires a much longer period of time.

The very concept of "revolution" demands rejection of a time in which absolutes existed. From that point in time, revolution took its diverse turns. This is because revolt against absolutes precipitates subsequent rebellion, which in turn generates still more violent revolt. It is a vicious cycle. Given enough time, due to the natural tendency toward degradation, the human family would sink into total individualization (with its resulting anarchical terrorism, indescribable fears, and finally genocide).

Although man is inherently (by nature) defiant and rebellious, the agitator of this weird internal conflict is man's archenemy, the god of this world—Satan the Devil. He rebelled against God and has duped man into pursuing his natural tendencies for doing the same thing. Therefore, the salvation of man can come only through the reestablishment of perfect rule (based on perfect laws which were initially rejected), as well as the elimination

of that nature which tends to rebel. This is the Biblical process called conversion. Conversion is the call from God to reject "individualization," which is manifested by a willingness to accept rule. For that reason, the called of God respect all rule and authority—for it comes from God. But they always obey God first because He is the source of *all* authority and government.

## Can't Avoid Rule

There are only two ways of living: either in accord with the plan and purpose of God, or by subscribing to the way of the flesh—a way which is as diverse and multifaceted as humanity itself. Despite the variety and complexity of the way of the flesh, it has one common characteristic—the need to satisfy self.

The paradox of it all is that man wants to subscribe to the ways which are naturally appealing to him, while at the same time deceiving himself into believing that he is doing the will of God. This factor, alone, attests to the need for honesty and character in evaluating oneself. It further demonstrates the need for an absolute standard—a standard which *never changes*—by which *flexible humanity* can correctly judge its own direction.

Rule is inevitable—inescapable. We are ruled either by whimsical self or by God. This determination is easy, providing we are honest, objective, and knowledgeable—and take the necessary time to evaluate seriously what we think, believe, and practice.

We need not exist in doubt. We need not second-guess. We can KNOW, if we will perform the necessary proving required. For, by the *fruits* borne we are able to determine clearly which direction we follow.

What are the respective fruits—the ways by which we can know?

First, if we are following the rule of God—if we are obedient to Him, being ruled by His Word—we are in complete harmony with the Word of God. That word cannot be known until it is revealed. The Bible clearly states that the truth was revealed to the chosen of God in these last days. Therefore, the proof of our being ruled by God is *faithfulness to the revealed truth*. Obedience is not possible, except through the indwelling Spirit of God. That Spirit is a force of good, oneness, and love. If hate or contempt exists, it is evident that people thus dominated are not ruled by God. If we tend to individualize, we are not ruled by the power and authority of God. The proof of God is love, oneness, and a spirit of love and concern.

Second, the proof of carnality is an implicit trust of the *self*. It is characterized by individualization. It basks in an aura of distrust toward everyone. It rebels against all rule and authority ordained of God—family, parents, civil law, ministry, etc. It gropes for answers, in a state of uncertainty—ever learning, but never sure of conclusions. It is sensitive, vindictive, ever concerned with what others may say or do. It is no longer teachable. Humility, confidence, and joy are fruits of the past. It seems to find its "satisfaction" in a consistent condemnation of others and in its loyal support of the "self." Above all, it rejects the idea of oneness of mind and heart. Though continuing in its religious bent—for the sake of conscience—it justifies personal isolation, abhorrence of others, and distrust of all affiliations. In this sense, it rejects the concept that the Body of Christ is one.

Many of those once called, having turned from the truth, are so ruled today. They are *again* in bondage to self (Rom. 6:1–23). The "self" is the tyrant. The nature with which we were born becomes the worst slavedriver of all. No one yielding to its dictates will escape ultimate brutalization. But, minds and hearts deadened can no longer comprehend the true light—the way of freedom *from self*, by total obedience to the will of God.

### **Anarchy: A Curse of the Last Days**

Human beings, injured and so abused, revert to animalistic behavior. Paul apparently fought such beasts (uncontrolled human beings) in the area of Ephesus. Once established on that course, man's nature becomes "self-feeding." It grows worse with each thought or remembrance of past troubles and difficulties. The ultimate end is complete rejection of past truth, as well as degradation of self—both completely justified in the perverted and twisted mind.

Consider: As it goes with a family, church body, or organization, so goes it with nations. Nations are only enlarged families or corporate bodies.

God is responsible for order in the universe. He set and established peoples, tribes, groups, and nations—in numerical and geographic order—as it pleased Him. But, human beings have revolted against the order and instructions (commands) of God, from the very beginning. Nations, and peoples within those nations, have reacted comparably. Those nations established and positioned by God in less responsible positions have rebelled. Those in superior responsibility have failed in the performance of that responsibility. Revolt, which characterizes man, has been evidenced at every level of charge. It is a rejection of God's authority. We would do well to note and understand the order which God decreed and established (Deut. 32:8; 28:13, 43–44; Gen. 48:13–22; 49:1–32).

All problems extant today stem from man's revolt against the authority of God—His government or RULE. By listening to the god of this world, Satan, men have been incited to a complete rejection of order and authority.

As a result of *national* rebellion, each individual is eventually affected, for the same spirit of defiance prevails universally. The result is absolute anarchy—every man (human being) doing that which is right in his own eyes. These conditions have existed, in many isolated areas of the world, during the whole course of human history. Yet today, the rebellion is worldwide. Nations are opposed to nations (Matt. 24:6–7)—a terrifying reality. Yet, an even worse condition will develop. This heated rebellion will be so rampant and perverse that it will reach to every level of individuals. It will manifest itself in the most sadistic, evil, contemptuous, and frightening ways ever experienced. Indeed, the times will be most perilous (Rom. 1:16–32; 2 Tim. 3:1–8; 2 Pet. 2:1–22; Jude).

Much—if not all—of this chaos, rebellion, and violence will come in the guise of religion. And all because man rejects rule, authority, government.

The majority, it seems, would rather exist in anarchy than admit to the validity of government and willingly subscribe to it. Or, perhaps some individuals would prefer that all other human beings subscribe to their particular convictions. After all, is not truth what *that individual* believes?

For the intelligent, it is plain to see that government as such is not what people oppose. It is simply a matter of submission. If all others would submit to that individual, that particular individual would not find government objectionable. No, *subservience* is the real problem. The ultimate subservience of all human beings is to do the will (truth) of God. Revolt is against God. All areas of self-justification exploited for the purpose of individualization, personal isolation, departure from the truth, and depraved conduct are mere screens of deception. As always, the one most seriously deceived is the self.

The result of each person's assuming rights of interpretation, belief, and practice is anarchy. It is everyone's doing what *he* thinks is right. The result of this behavior is a world of turmoil, evil, violence, and murder of those who disagree or in other ways interfere with these so-called rights. The results? In a word, the Bible clearly tells us that if God does not intervene for the sake of humanity, there will be no flesh left alive.

### **Government Must Be Respected**

Government *is* of God! He, by His authority, set and established levels of responsibility (John 19:10–11; Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Cor. 12:18). Those offices of responsibility

must be respected. Christians must not show contempt for authority and rule. Contempt for government is a serious sin in the sight of God (Jude 8–9; 2 Pet. 2:11).

The very purpose of Christianity is that the called and chosen of God should someday assume the reins of government (Luke 19:11–27; Rev. 2:26–27; 3:20; 5:10; Dan. 2:44; 7:27). But, man must qualify by learning complete submission to God, along with the art of serving others. The sole purpose of RULE is to *serve*—to benefit others in acts of love, outgoing concern, and help.

Since all authority proceeds from God, no human being has been—or ever will be—given authority which transcends that of the author of government, God. Man's rule is limited to specific bounds—geographic limits of nations, family units, organizational limits, other. When arrogance of position affects one in authority, the called servants of God must first obey the will of God, if a contrary decision is demanded (Acts 4:18–19; 5:29; Dan. 3:16–18).

*All* human beings sin. When they do, they must repent. It is the same with leaders (those in authority), as well as with the populace (those ruled). Those bearing responsibility are under greater pressure to correct their errors and show love and affection for the RULE of God. For, they cannot correctly rule unless they respond to rule. And God rules over ALL.

If rulers—all those in authority—stoutly manifest the support for "self," and do not humble themselves to the rule of God but demand Christians to do things contrary to God, Christians must first obey—or continue to obey—God, honoring His office of authority, regardless of the consequences.

### **Basis of Acceptable Rule**

The problem is not a question of whether there is any rule (government). It is a question of what rule is acceptable to God.

The rule of God is benevolent, just, equitable, and beneficial to those ruled. Self-rule is criminal to all involved. It is eventually devastating to those who subscribe to it.

The basis of all good rule is "SERVICE"—a genuine element of concern and benefit to all concerned. Bad rule is characterized by selfishness, personal gain, and taking advantage of others. It is the application of that which destroys harmony, confidence, order, and stability—the real purpose of rule.

Therefore, all rule—responsibilities ordained by God—must be honored. To violate those responsibilities is to reject the RULE of God, for *He* is the author of rule. And, all subservience to them is a matter of obedience "in the Lord." Authority and rule are not contradictory in nature. They establish order. This is possible only when there is an uninterrupted flow of power, authority, and rule from top (God) to bottom (whoever). This fact, alone, dictates the necessity of honoring the *Source* of that authority *first*. Any abuse in the line of responsibility is not to be honored. The revealed directives of God are to be respected, honored, and obeyed—even if a disruption occurs in the line of authority, or if there is a departure from truth. The character of God's rule is, and will always be, SERVICE. It manifests itself in forgiveness, mercy, humility, kindness, love, and compassion. It gives honor and preference to others. Abuse of office and power—which is contrary to God's way—is manifested in taking advantage of others, in a spirit of haughtiness and arrogance, in abuse of people, and in failure to satisfy the needs of those under that authority.

Correct spiritual administration was manifested in the life of Christ—a perfect example for all ministers. The doctrine with which He was empowered remained absolute. It is the basis of all judgment by Christ. Yet, to make clear the difference between letter and spirit administration, Christ evidenced much mercy, forgiveness, and compassion toward the weaknesses of the people. He was always kind and forgiving. Yet, He never altered or changed the message.

As our example, Christ manifested correct *spiritual administration*. Administration is the application of government—the force of the doctrine and way of life which cannot be altered or changed. We must walk in His footsteps—regardless of station or position—for we all bear some level of governmental responsibility.

### **Questions Deserving Answers**

Because of administrative abuses in the past—coupled with unauthorized doctrinal changes—many people are troubled, perplexed, and unsure of the concepts and beliefs previously held. Few seem to be able to separate doctrine from administration. Let us tackle a few of the specific problems.

*Question Number One:* At what time did God reveal the truth to His chosen servants in these last days?

Revelation is essential! There is no other way by which to acquire a knowledge of spiritual truth (Matt. 16:17). We must be ready, initially, to admit that fact. Next, we must

admit to ourselves that Jesus Christ gave that truth to the one and only true church in the last days (Matt. 28:20; 2 Thess. 2:1–3). Finally, we must acknowledge the fact that the one church, to whom God gave the truth, went into error—it departed (apostatized) from the truth (2 Thess. 2:10; 1 Tim. 4:1). Since man, once called of God, is accountable for living by *every word of God*—including the recognition of the validity of the historical examples of ancient Israel (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11)—the true Church of God in the last days was to be faithful to that total responsibility. Search as you may, *no other church except the Worldwide Church of God came close to teaching and practicing all of God's Word*. The only TRUE Church of God, about which we have any knowledge whatsoever, was the Worldwide Church of God. God and Christ did not fail! There was a church established in the last days, by Christ, which attempted to live up to all those principles. Also, it was that one true church which apostatized. It forsook the truth—reverting to the ways of flesh. NO other church but that one—the Worldwide Church of God—could possibly fit the Biblical description.

Christ and God the Father did not fail. That church came into existence by decree and plan, and there is no other *single* church which fits the necessary requirements. It is obvious that church received the truth by revelation, and chosen messengers were commissioned to proclaim that message.

When did the called servant of the last days receive the message? All historical data points to one incontrovertible fact: A message from God was always given *before* the messenger was sent. However, there was often a short, or sometimes more protracted, training period for the servant before he commenced his work. Moses spent several years in requisite training. The twelve disciples spent three and one-half years in the scope of their training. The Apostle Paul spent three years in Arabia, under the tutelage of Christ.

The Bible very clearly indicates a training period was required by God and Christ. Would they require any less today? Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He can always be counted upon for consistency. Therefore, the latter-day servants of God must have been subjected to some form of training—with obvious ministerial apprenticeship (recall the ministerial responsibility of the twelve and seventy)—before the commencement of the divine commission.

The Bible specifically reveals the *time* of training and instruction required, in the examples of the twelve apostles and Paul. Suffice it to say that, as far as the "last days" are concerned, a training charge had to precede the beginning of the major "work." As a result of that commission—preaching the Gospel—you and I came to a knowledge of the truth. It was the truth which convicted us. We were baptized. The Bible clearly tells us to remain steadfast in that which we were taught and for which we were baptized—the basis of our covenant agreement with God.

Therefore, the training and preparation required for "the last days" preceded the time *you* heard the truth. *Not one of you* had any doubt at the time of baptism. You were not forced into it. You voluntarily requested it. You were convicted by the truth which you heard. Why should we now attempt to affix an actual year to the beginning and conclusion of a training period which preceded *our* conversion? Let us remember, the end-time servant was *called* and the *truth was given*. To deny that truth now is to accuse Christ of malfeasance and failure. There was, and is, no other church which taught the comprehensive way of life.

Some, today, are attempting to reject the truth by reading articles and material which predated *their* call and baptism. They now wish to practice concepts they were *never* taught, nor ever practiced. In the name of intelligence and common sense, how can such people "hold fast" to what they were taught and honor their covenant agreement with God, when such material had no part in their call or conversion?

When God called us initially, we accepted the truth willingly and were thrilled with baptism. What we presently need is the courage to hold fast to that which we accepted. Based on the Biblical examples, the training of a called messenger precedes his commission. What was the result of that commission? *Your call and baptism!* When did God reveal the truth to His servant? Before any of us were called! We heard that truth and are now responsible for faithfulness to it!

Let us understand the time relationship with respect to revelation. Jesus Christ personally taught the twelve apostles. He revealed the truth to them. At the appointed time, they began proclaiming that way. People, according to the will of God, began responding to the truth! They were pricked in heart (the beginning of conversion) and asked what they should do. The answer: Obey God. They were to live by the words which God had committed to the apostles!

Some years later, God called Saul of Tarsus. He led him into a desert area of Arabia. Christ personally taught him, for a period of three years. Following his training, he was commissioned with the Gospel. It was exactly the same Gospel which was given to the original twelve apostles (Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 2:13).

During the latter half of the first century, the faith of some weakened, and heresy became rampant. As a result, the Apostle Paul was subjected to much questioning. The Gentiles were not sure about the call and verity of the Apostle Paul. They feigned acceptance of the original twelve—probably because they were not chargeable to them.

The point is this: Truth is truth, regardless of the time in which it is revealed to us. It is the knowledge of a "way of life," made understandable by revelation and corroborated by the inspired Scriptures—the Bible. This is what the Bible makes plain—but can we accept it totally, at face value, and not argue?

*Question Number Two:* What is doctrine?

Doctrine is the *subject* classification of the Word of God. That Word is truth (John 17:17)—the truth by which man shall live. Jesus said man should not live by bread only, but by observing *every* word of God. Why? Because every word is pure (Prov. 30:5). Yes, even very pure (Ps. 119:140). It is a tried and proven way (Ps. 18:30; 12:6). The Word magnified above the very name of God (Ps. 138:2). That Word has existed from the beginning—it is true and irrevocable (Ps. 119:160). Time, conditions, and circumstances can never—indeed, will never—change or alter it. The facts, power, and purpose of that Word have been settled in heaven—FOREVER (Ps. 119:89). It is the Word established from the beginning, to stand forever (Isa. 40:8).

The tried and proven WORDS of God are *spirit* and *life* (John 6:63). As such, they cannot be comprehended by physical man (2 Cor. 4:18). For man to have any grasp of the conduct required for his life, those spiritual ways had to be revealed (Deut. 29:29) and made accessible in written form. God used human agencies for that phase of His work (Heb. 1:1–2), concluding it with the activities of Christ and the apostles (Eph. 2:20). What God spoke to His servants was required to be set down in written form (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The word "Scripture" here, simply refers to the holy, pure, unalterable Word in written form. The purpose for that written Word is made understandable in 2 Timothy 3:16–17. More about this later.

As a called nation of God, Israel was given the perfect and unchanging Word (Heb. 4:2; Ps. 105:8). But as physical human beings, they could not obey from the heart (Deut. 5:2 9; Josh. 24:14–25). The fault for the covenant failure was not with the Word of God. It was a problem of flesh—the people themselves (Heb. 8:7–8).

The truth (Word) given to Israel was the pure, eternal, tried, and spiritual Word of God. It had been miraculously reduced to a physically codified form—written in a book (Rom. 5:13, 20). Where there is no law, there is no sin. Yet, sin reigned long before the time of Moses. Until Moses' day, the Law existed in spiritual form only. Then God gave it in written form, to become the constitution for the new nation of Israel. Why? By comprehending it in written form, the offense (sin) became exceeding sinful (Rom. 5:20). It entered (in Scripture form) in the days of Moses. As spirit, it had always existed.

But if man could not possibly live up to the conditions of that Word, why should it exist at all? First, man had to write the physical lessons of disobedience (1 Cor. 10:6, 11; Rom. 15:4). Next, that very Word in codified form pointed forward to the coming of Christ (compare Deut. 18:15–20; John 5:39–47). He was that Word, reduced to flesh (John 1:1, 14)—the very Word which existed from the beginning. As a flesh entity, Christ set us a perfect example of obedience (2 Pet. 2:20; John 11:25; 14:6).

Why, then, was the spiritual and eternal Word of God codified—made Scripture? And why did Christ come in the flesh—the very Word of God made flesh?

As a physical son of man, Jesus lived the Word of God perfectly—without sin. After living perfectly, He was received back up into heaven. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, He can return to the earth and take up His abode in us. He thus enables us, as Christians called of God, to obediently live according to that eternal, unchanging Word (John 16:15–20; 6:48–57). He became the perfect example for us. Further, His recorded Word serves, in our relationship with God, as the standard of judgment for all (Deut. 30:10; 31:24–29).

The recorded (codified) words of God are the Scriptures by which we find LIFE. They are the written form of the tried and proven, spiritual words. We must *search* the Scriptures—read them to understand. We must fear and tremble before the Scriptures—the written words of God (Isa. 66:2, 5). So absolute and obligatory are those codified words—the Scriptures—that great care must be exercised in avoiding the rejection of one single point or carelessly inserting additional concepts (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18–19).

One other point must be clarified. Since the Bible is the Word of God reduced to Scripture form, can one just read it and understand? The answer is an emphatic NO! Jesus Christ was the living Word in the flesh—the written Word in action—yet, people could not know Him or follow Him except by a revelation (Matt. 11:25–27; 16:16–17). Man cannot comprehend the truth and obey it except by a specific call and revelation from God.

Now, carefully note this instruction from God! "To the law and to the testimony [the Word of God, now in Scripture form]: if they speak not according to *this word*, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

To understand the Word of God, one must be called and receive a revelation of that truth. Then, that which is revealed to you will be *corroborated by the Scriptures*—the written Word, the Bible. Further, that which is revealed will precisely match that life lived by Christ—for He was the revealed Word living in the flesh.

It is vitally important to remember that revelation does not cancel out the recorded Scriptures. There will always be agreement between true revelation and the recorded Word—as seen in the life of Christ.

Those living in darkness (deception of this world) will not recognize the truth. Until they are called of God, they cannot be convinced. Those who have apostatized from the truth are much worse off (2 Pet. 2:21–22). Only those who maintain faith—that faith once delivered—will really KNOW the truth. There is no way others can comprehend; otherwise, a call would not be essential.

Again, what is the doctrine? Those beliefs which were revealed to the church, and which perfectly correspond to the recorded Scriptures—that which Christ lived and practiced in His fleshly body. It is the same way of life taught to God's chosen people of the last days. It is that truth which we were taught and must maintain steadfastly. How can we be sure that which was revealed to us is the truth? Easy! The revealed truth harmonizes with the codified Word of God—the Bible. If one cannot find a cherished practice, belief, or law in the Bible, it should be immediately suspect. We are going to be judged by that recorded Word. Obviously, we must live in harmony with it.

Again, what is the true doctrine? The entirety of the Bible—as revealed in the whole life of Christ. He was the total Word made flesh (John 1:14). Christ—living within us—will live the full, complete Word. He did not live the Word partially, and He will not live a partial life in us.

What, then, is the doctrine? It is the truth as manifested in the life of Christ! It was, and is, the totality of the Bible—the Scriptures. It is the truth given to God's servant of the last days—that Word which His called servants must obey and practice. It is that which they were taught. If the Worldwide Church of God was the true church—and the incontrovertible facts prove it was—then the doctrine we were taught is the revealed Word of God. However, as the Bible also makes clear, as a church it was far from perfect in administration. And in the area of prophecy, it failed miserably. But these failures do not disprove the validity of the church. On the contrary, they substantiate the fact it was the Church of God. Why? Because God said these failures *would* occur within His Church in the last days.

Those called and faithful to God—and those, only—KNOW the doctrine (John 7:17). Questioning such is an evidence of a weakening FAITH—the faith (doctrine) once given.

*Question Number Three:* How should we understand church tradition? Are we not obligated to walk according to the tradition we were taught?

Tradition may or may not be wrong. It can be in complete harmony with revealed doctrine. When in agreement, we should live according to it. On the other hand, tradition can oppose truth. When opposed to truth, it is often religiously upheld by its advocates. But in such cases, the servants of God are not obligated to hold to tradition. They must live by every word of God, not by the force of organizational tradition or individual tradition.

Let us note the usage of the word "tradition." The *physical* church frequently resorts to tradition (Matt. 23:2; Acts 7:37–39; John 1:11; Rev. 12:1–5—compare with Matt. 15:1–9 and Mark 7:6–13). And, it judges others on the basis of that tradition (Matt. 15:2–3). *Human* tradition is usually contrary to revealed doctrine (Rom. 8:7; Matt. 15:6–9). In order to substantiate human tradition in belief and practice, people often reject the Word of God—the Scriptures, as manifested in the life of Jesus Christ (Mark 7:6–13).

However, all tradition is not wrong. Tradition can be truth—the Word of God. As such, it is the revealed doctrine (1 Cor. 11:2—"ordinances, here, means tradition). Such tradition must be kept as delivered. But, what did Paul deliver to the people? That which he received (1 Cor. 15:3). In other words, Paul delivered to the people what he had been taught! What he was taught, he received from Christ! Those traditions which are in full harmony with the codified Scriptures must be kept—they are not contrary to the revealed Scriptures.

God's Word warns us to be judicious and extremely careful about philosophy and vain deceit—traditions of men (Col. 2:8).

If there are both traditions of *men* and traditions of *God*, it is our responsibility to properly differentiate. How? The recorded *Scriptures* are the basis of all evaluations and judgments (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

By properly understanding tradition and KNOWING the revealed Word, we can truly observe and walk in the *traditions of God* (2 Thess. 3:6). We will be faithful and hold fast to the truth, which is the tradition fully and completely corroborated by Scripture—the holy Word of God.

Certainly, God's tradition will not conflict with the Scriptures, the Bible! *But to use the concept of tradition as proof for a particular practice when it does not have Biblical substantiation*, is utter foolishness. For, God is not in conflict with Himself. What He reveals is always in harmony with what was recorded and preserved—the Scriptures.

This presents a paradox! If some are going to insist on holding to tradition which is not substantiated by the inspired Scriptures, they are caught with the necessity of returning

to many traditions formerly practiced by the Worldwide Church of God. For, tradition would require them to participate in altar calls before or after services on the Sabbath; they would have to conform to the tithe-of-the-tithe concept (with respect to second-tithe contributions); a building fund would have to be supported and maintained; a love fund would be necessary; all, regardless of embarrassment, would have to believe 1972 was the end of any church responsibility on this earth, and that they had been taken to a place of safety; they would have to believe in the four seven-year cycles of Leviticus 26; they would have to return to Sabbath School practice; and the ministerial rank system would be absolute. They would have to believe the concept of the spirit in man; that human nature is basically good; that Messrs. H.W. Armstrong and G.T. Armstrong are the two witnesses; that Pentecost should be observed on the sixth of Sivan, not on Sunday or Monday; that Big Sandy, Texas, is the only place where the Feast of Tabernacles should be kept; that it is essential for them to believe in and be a part of the "end-time Work"; that the church eras are valid; that the third tithe should be collected on every third and sixth year, with no seventh-year release involved; and that recalcitrants must be "marked" from the pulpit. How can anyone be honest in appealing to tradition for one Scripturally unprovable point, while either rejecting or avoiding the concepts mentioned above?

On the other hand, we can hear the voice of Christ through His servant, and *prove the way of life corroborating it WITH THE BIBLE*.

*Question Number Four:* Regarding tradition, what about offerings—should they not be taken up on every Holy Day? And, what about the third tithe—should it not be paid on both the third and sixth years of a seven-year cycle?

Considerable study—relative to "doctrine," "change," "revelation," "tradition," and other significantly related subjects—made plain the absolute necessity of holding fast to the truth which we had been taught.

However, in the early 1970s, some had begun to question certain administrative practices of the Worldwide Church of God. What had been a source of myriad questions to the whole ministry, in times past, was now open to review by every member in the church. Honesty, therefore, dictated the necessity of logically and *Scripturally* answering those questions. Resorting to tradition only, as an explanation for retaining these practices, would have been most ludicrous. The enemies of truth had presented their case. Any attempt to circumvent the necessity of giving Scriptural answers would have been dishonest and hypocritical. Therefore, an in-depth study was undertaken, with the initial intent and purpose of upholding the "tradition" we had been taught. We would have been most happy to have found Bible substantiation for the practices. But, such proof could *not* be found. The conclusions were obviated by the fact that we had to explain both issues (offerings on

all seven Holy Days and two third-tithe years during a seven-year cycle) from the *Biblical* vantage point. We could not predicate *faith* and *conviction* on the basis of statements from Jewish historians or other secular works. We demanded proof from the inspired *Scriptures*. Our articles speak for themselves.

If we have failed to see any *Scriptural evidence* relevant to either issue, we sincerely seek your input. However, the usage of tradition and clever arguments based on secular works will not engender further study into the matter. Tradition can be the wrong tradition. Our faith must not be premised on the beliefs and conjectures of historians. We must base our convictions on absolute evidence and proof from the Scriptures—the revealed Word of God.

Concerning the offerings on God's Holy Days, the Hebrew word for "times" (Deut. 16:16) refers to an ordinal number. It literally means three *TIMES*. It does *not* mean seasons. Of course, offerings were made on every day of the year. But these daily offerings had nothing to do with the offerings on Holy Days. While many varied and differing offerings were required, they cannot possibly explain the unique and specific offerings *on* the Holy Days. Those offerings were required *three times*—not seven. There can be no other meaning for the expression in Deuteronomy 16:16!

Concerning the third tithe, the Bible clearly says the *third* year was the year of tithing. It is only Jewish historians who *seem* to say three and six—and a close examination of their explanations reveals an extreme vagueness. Their statements are *not* concise and clear. Since the only cycle of time mentioned in the Bible is the seven-year cycle, the years are numbered in relation to that cycle. The third year is the third year of the seven-year cycle. The 50 years of jubilee are not a cycle. For, jubilee is counted off by seven seven-year cycles plus one. But if the 50 years were the cycle, then the third year would come only once in 50 years. Though the 19-year cycle is a calendar calculation, it is not mentioned in the Bible. The only cycle used by God, relative to counting and fulfillment of plan, is the seven-year cycle. Any other claim cannot be substantiated by Biblical proof.

Administratively, the Worldwide Church of God enforced God's laws in an unscriptural manner in years past. We cannot conscientiously continue those administrative practices. If it is a matter of faith, tradition, and conviction—for you to continue previous practices—no one will hinder that effort. God grants everyone the privilege of going above and beyond the level of duty. However, for the ministry to teach an unsubstantiated tradition *as a necessity for Christian conduct today* certainly would be adding to the Word of God. We will refrain from such practices. And we will continue to do so until we are shown, from the Scriptures, to be in error.

For those who question these matters, prepare your Scriptural papers and submit them to us.

*Question Number Five:* What were the *real problems* of the Worldwide Church of God?

First, the church should have stayed out of areas involving prophetic interpretations. A 100 percent failure certainly proves that conclusion. Prophecy should have been examined and the general principles applied to our lives. However, *times* and *other specifics* should be left up to God. He will make events and circumstances known in His own time and to whomever He pleases.

Second, the administrative approach needed much revising. Many indictments in the Bible make it abundantly clear that God's people were abused, injured, and taken advantage of.

Doctrine is revealed. The principle of "service" should have been taught. Faith should not have been coerced. Faith should have been taught, and Christians should have been allowed to apply it according to their individual levels of understanding. Latitude for growth should have consistently been allowed. Spiritual growth should not have been compared to doctrinal change. Growth adds to our previous level of understanding and spiritual status, but it never contradicts revealed doctrine.

Ministers should have taught God's Word powerfully. The laity should have lived by faith, not by coercion. Much tolerance and understanding was essential, on the part of both ministry and laity.

Government is absolute. But, it should have been administered spiritually and with maximum love.

Changes were essential. But, doctrine is revealed from God. It is unalterable. It is the *administration of that doctrine* which needed considerable revising. But, to solve the problem, the baby was thrown out with the bath water.

Other questions are significant. What are we (the ministry) doing? Should we be performing a "work"? These answers will be held for a later letter. They are questions in their own right!

## No Power—Except God's—Is Absolute

In the human and angelic domains, no power is absolute. In every case, God makes the transfer of power conditional. Obedience to the Lord is the basic requirement. In other words, if one vested with authority steps out of bounds, he carries no further authority from God. No authority can supersede the power of the One who gave it. No human being can exercise government beyond that which God gives. If one in authority goes contrary to the absolute rules of the ultimate source of power and authority—God—the Christian must remain loyal to God and obey Him rather than man. For this reason, the basis and orientation of all government, power, and authority is the revealed Word of God. We *MUST* honor and respect God by implicit obedience to that way of life.

### Conclusion

Doctrine is the totality of the various beliefs found in the inspired *Scriptures*. It is absolute and unalterable. It is the God-given way of life. We will be judged by it. As human beings called of God, our responsibility is to become completely obedient to it. It must rule in our lives. But man's problem, in general, is his inability to keep himself subject to the Word of God. If not careful and honest, he will easily allow himself to be deceived and will avoid total obedience to God, while at the same time affording himself some latitude for individualization—the way which seems right to him and is much easier to pursue.

Administration is unavoidable. The Old Covenant was *physically* administered. The New Covenant is *spiritually* administered. Without due care, men confuse the two.

Some attempt to avoid spiritual responsibility by perverting or corrupting the true intent—the *spiritual* application. Paul was wrongly accused of this misapplication.

We simply cannot avoid rule or government. We all administer responsibility one way or the other. But, how we handle those duties in life is the very basis for the final judgment. Can we truly govern the self? Can we administer in our own lives, forcefully and purposefully—the intent and purpose of God's Word? Yet, at the same time, we can manifest love, tolerance, and understanding toward all other human beings? For, if we can authoritatively rule ourselves by the force and authority of God's Word, we shall not be harshly judged in the day of judgment! But if we are condescending to self and critical of others, we will be sorely and severely judged. The decision is ours!

Many concepts of government have not been, and could not be, covered in this series of letters. Hopefully, as the "word studies" are completed and mailed, the comprehensive details will be made apparent through your own personal study.

Work is progressing on the development of the above studies. With the many routine duties incumbent upon us daily, it will require time. But your patience will pay off. We want what we do to be as thorough and complete as we can make it.

With deep love and respect,

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

Raymond C. Cole