Church Government and Church Unity

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Is It Rebelling Against the "Government of God" to Consider Worshipping with a Different Group of Sabbath Keepers Whom You Sincerely Feel Believe and Teach More of the Truth of God's Word?

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SCENE ONE: At the Nuremburg War Crimes Trials after the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II:

- Nazi SS Officers are shown to have been guilty of the torture and murder of tens of thousands of civilians.

- Their reply: "We were just following orders."

- Analysis: In certain militaristic, dictatorial organizations, people are ***expected*** to "blindly" follow orders and do and believe ***whatever*** they are told. ***Right*** or ***wrong***, they are just to follow the current "government." But in God's word we are told: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). "Prove All things, and hold fast that which is good" (I Thessalonians 5:21). And the apostle Paul instructed: "Follow me ***as*** I follow Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1; New King James Version throughout unless otherwise noted).

SCENE TWO: At God's Throne in Heaven, millions of years ago:

- Lucifer, the Archangel, has been put in charge of the "Government of God" on earth. But word

comes in that he is ***misusing*** and ***perverting*** his post in "government." Will those angels under him blindly follow this brilliant Lucifer in his rebellion? Or will they see through what is happening and have the faith and courage to obey GOD in spite of what this clever Lucifer says?

- Result: About one third of all the angels were deceived by Lucifer and joined with him in his rebellion against GOD, their very Creator!

- Analysis: Those angels were just "following government." But they should have known that one must ***not*** follow "government," ***any*** government, if it is contradictory to the ways and laws of GOD. Since they should have known better but followed Lucifer anyway, God has them "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6).

A Misunderstood Subject

One of the greatest and most serious misunderstandings that has developed in the Church in recent years concerns Church Government and Church Unity. It is not really a complicated subject, but somehow we have had our collective minds "set" on a certain approach to this topic.

WHY?

Herbert W. Armstrong often said and wrote that among men in general, many of our ideas are "carelessly assumed and taken for granted." In this world, for instance, people somehow just "know" that good people will go to heaven when they die. They carelessly ***assume*** this because they are told so, and because the Bible talks about the kingdom "of"

heaven. So people just suppose it must mean the kingdom is "in" heaven and that Christians go there at death.

So it is with Church Government.

In his *Autobiography* (Vol. I, pp. 557-558), Mr. Armstrong wrote of his experiences with the "Sardis" Church in 1933: "In those days one Biblical subject I was completely befogged on was the matter of church organization and government. I *knew* the "Stanberry" pattern of a General Conference was not scriptural. I *knew* that voting by human preference was unscriptural. I saw plainly that Christ *chose* His Apostles—that they and the evangelists, in turn, chose and ordained elders in local churches. Consequently in the church now meeting at Jeans school house, since I was the evangelist God used in raising up this church, I chose and appointed Mr. Elmer E. Fisher as deacon, remaining as Pastor myself.

But just what truly was the Biblical form of organization I did not at that time see clearly. I was really confused on the question."

Our Early Discussions

Even after several years of guiding the college, Mr. Armstrong still did not understand much about Church Government, and said so openly a number of times. Consequently, in the early mid-1950's, Herman L. Hoeh and I each were inspired to write articles along this line. As hundreds of our older brethren remember, I wrote the article, "Judging and Discipline in God's Church" and, later, "Whose Opinion Counts?" and one or two other similar articles.

Herman Hoeh wrote articles dealing with the pyramid structure of government—from Christ down through apostles, evangelists, etc.—revealed in the Bible. He also wrote other articles along this line.

Mr. Armstrong accepted these articles and immediately

published them in the GOOD NEWS. The three of us and others discussed this topic and realized that, although there is no one ***exact*** way of organizing a church revealed in the New Testament, the ***principles*** of government from the top down, of office by "appointment" based on the "fruits" of a man or woman's life, and of ***order*** rather than confusion were all revealed in the Bible. We realized that church "politicking" and voting were ***not*** God's way and that VOTING, as such, was NEVER employed in the Bible!

Mr. Armstrong always stressed that we should follow him only ***as*** he followed Christ. He always urged us to ***study*** our Bibles. He reminded us that we would be "judged" by what the Bible said, ***not*** by following him or any other man. But he hoped we would always follow him ***as long*** as he truly followed Christ and did His Work.

To this we all agreed.

Mr. Armstrong Respected the Other Seventh Day Churches of God

Many, many times over the years and even into the last few years of his life, Mr. Armstrong acknowledged that the Churches of God, Seventh Day—headquartered in Stanberry, Missouri and in Salem, West Virginia, WERE part of God's Church—though perhaps of the "Sardis" era—as we came to understand it. He just felt that he had to LEAVE these people because they refused to grow into the full truth God was revealing.

But since we had no churches nearby, Mr. Armstrong suggested more than once that some of the college students working up in Oregon in the summer during the early 1950's worship with the Sardis churches meeting at Jefferson, Oregon, and elsewhere. College students Owen Smith, Kenneth Herrmann and I did attend the Jefferson church during the summer of 1950. We were cordially received, and found sincere fellow Sabbath keepers there.

In talking to some of the college graduates in those years and later, I learned that—although the Sardis people did have a lot of "politicking" and divisions among them, they did treat with respect and understanding anyone who left Stanberry to join the Salem, West Virginia group, etc. People were virtually ***never*** disfellowshipped when they left to join another group of fellow Sabbath keepers!

They perhaps "fussed" at them a little bit about leaving, or were even temporarily upset that they had "gone off to follow Dugger." (Andrew Dugger was the one who left Stanberry and founded the Salem, West Virginia, group.)

BUT, my friends told me they merely regarded them as "departed brothers," but ***still*** "brethren" and fellow Sabbath keepers and fellow worshippers of the true God of Creation. Virtually ***no one*** felt that those people were "rebelling against GOD" by shifting from one Sabbath-keeping group to another.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong felt that way also, though he always exhorted us that we should stay together "in order to do a really BIG WORK"—which he felt they were unable to do. Yet he always acknowledged that if this or any other church were somehow taken over by leaders unwilling to preach the truth, we should ALL leave!

Herbert Armstrong's Own EXAMPLE

The fact of the matter is that Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong themselves "shifted" from one Sabbath-keeping church to another on two different occasions. First, they left the Stanberry group to worship with the Salem, West Virginia, Church. Later, they severed all ties with that group and the "Radio Church of God" developed into a full-fledged, completely separate, church.

In Mr. Armstrong's *Autobiography* (pp. 556, 561), he writes of his decision to leave the Stanberry organization:

> At the biannual General Conference meeting of the

much more zealously! Though they were sitting in "Moses seat," Peter and the inspired apostles told the Jewish leaders of their day: "We ought to obey GOD rather than man" (Acts 5:29).

And when the leaders of the Sanhedrin had told the apostles ***not*** to preach the full truth God had revealed to them, here was the answer: "But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak things which we have seen and heard'" (Acts 4:19-20).

Herbert W. Armstrong told us over and over: "Blow the dust off and prove these things in your own Bible." And he always said: "Follow me ***as*** I follow Christ!"

Remember, I have already pointed out that Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong ***refused*** to take orders from the "Government of God" in two different branches of the Sardis church when they found they would be UNABLE to fully obey God and preach the full truth of the Bible if they submitted! So they, too, said in effect, "We must obey GOD rather than men!"

You see, God does ***not*** back up ANY human beings in government—even in His Church—if they desert the truths of the Bible or forbid that they be preached. If it were otherwise, God would have severely PUNISHED Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong and their Work would have come to NOTHING.

So let us understand, then, that dedicated men in God's Church may build an organization and direct it according to Biblical principles. If so, they will have God's overall guidance and blessings. But God "governs" only through the inspired laws and principles of His Word. And any church government that preaches contrary to those principles is ***not*** the "government of God," but the government of ***men***.

Is God's Church A "Mother"?

At this point, I would like to cover an idea that often confuses people. For we have sometimes taught that the Church is the "Mother of us all."

On the surface, this is a nice sounding idea. But, in reality, the Bible does ***not*** say any such thing! If it did, then your "Mother," the Church, would have led you into the "doctrine of the Nicolaitans" if you had lived back in the Pergamos Era (Revelation 2:15). If you had lived in the era of Thyatira, you would have had church leaders who "allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols" (verse 20).

The key passage some people use (though many scholars do ***not***) to prove that the Church is a "Mother" is found in Galatians 4:26: "...but Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all."

Note that it is "Jerusalem ***above***" who is "mother" of us all, ***not*** the human Church here on earth. Then read carefully verse 27: "For it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren, You who did not bear! Break forth and shout, You who do not travail! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.'"

It is clear that the Jerusalem above is barren—no children yet. For she is ***not*** yet married until Christ's return (Revelation 19:7). The "Jerusalem above" certainly refers to our Father, God, to Jesus Christ, our High Priest and Living Head, and to "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:22-23). Our "citizenship" is "in heaven" (Philippians 3:20) where the spirits of just men, from righteous Abel clear up to the present time, await the resurrection from the dead. Then, the "Jerusalem above" will have thousands of children!

But the Church here below is ***not*** "Jerusalem above," is not yet married to Christ, and so does not yet have children.

So the human Church—sometimes misguided and subject to false teachers—is definitely ***not*** our "mother" according to the Bible.

An Inspired WARNING

Even in His own Church, God ***allows*** leading men to turn aside, pervert doctrines, water down scripture and mistreat fellow Christians. In Rev. 2:2, Jesus told the Ephesian Era: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. **And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars.**"

Notice that then people "tested" those who claimed to be "apostles." And they found some of those so-called apostles to be LIARS!

"Nevertheless," Christ tells these Ephesians, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent" (verses 4-5).

Christ is exhorting this church era to recapture their ZEAL, and, as Mr. Armstrong would say, "to get back on the track!"

Every single church era, except Philadelphia, is described as having various ***sins*** and ***weaknesses***. So it is very clear that Christ did not plan to "govern" His church in a way so as to prevent heresy and sin—even at the very top! That is WHY Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong **had to LEAVE** the Sardis organizations!

Now notice an inspired warning in the third letter of the apostle John—the "apostle of love." "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with

malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church" (III John 9-10).

Let us analyze these passages carefully.

Clearly, Diotrephes was one of the main leaders of the developing church at that time—if not the main leader. I say "developing" because at that time they were slowly but surely deserting the foundation of true Christianity. They were "growing," but in the wrong direction! History is clear on this, and this very passage corroborates that fact.

Diotrephes ***refused*** to see and hear the last remaining apostle of that generation! He used "malicious words"—perhaps implying that John and the earlier apostles were not "up-to-date," had made mistakes, or were lacking in other ways.

And this Diotrephes would not even receive honorably the "old-timers"—the brethren still loyal to John and to the original TRUTH they had been taught. Using his position in the "government of God," Diotrephes disfellowshipped these faithful "old-timers!"

Would YOU follow Diotrephes if he were in charge today?

Think about it.

WHAT Church History Reveals

As we have already briefly noted, the annals of church history make clear the fact that VERY SELDOM, ***if ever***, have all of God's people in the New Testament Church been led by one church government under one man.

Early church history is replete with examples of groups like the "Ebionites"—the early Jewish Christians who remained faithful to the truth of God. In Jesse Lyman Hurlbut's *Story of the Christian Church*, they are described as follows: "A small section of Jewish Christians endured for two centuries, but with ever-decreasing numbers, the

Ebionites, a people by themselves, scarcely recognized by the general church and despised as apostates by their own race" (p. 43).

Notice that these zealous Christians who basically retained the teachings of Jesus were "scarcely recognized by the general church." In other words, the majority, the main body of people, regarded the Ebionites as "outcasts" who refused to "grow" into the developing ***Pagan teachings*** and customs that slowly and subtly began to take over the "Christian" church. Often, these faithful followers of Christ were "disfellowshipped" or even persecuted by the "new age" teachers of their time!

In his excellent book, The Incredible History of God's True Church, (p. 119), Ivor Fletcher also describes this situation: "Clement of Rome, writing at about the same time—A.D. 95-96—expressed deep concern over a similar situation which was developing at Corinth. The Corinthian church, less than thirty years after the apostle Paul's death, was *ejecting from the ministry men who had been ordained by the apostles*."

Again, on page 129, Fletcher writes: "By the closing years of that century, Christians who faithfully continued in the teachings handed down to them by the immediate followers of Christ were rapidly finding themselves to be in a minority position.

"Mosheim, in his church history, relates that: 'Christian churches had scarcely been organized when men rose up, who, not being contented with the simplicity and purity of that religion which the Apostles taught, attempted innovations, and fashioned religion according to their own liking.'"

So where was the "government of God" in all of this?

HOW Christ Leads His Church

In the past, we (and I include myself in this!) have mistakenly assumed that Christ directly guides His Church so that no serious errors will ever be made and no serious doctrinal deviations will ever occur. This misunderstanding arose partly because in the 1950's and 1960's everything seemed to be going so well and God was obviously BLESSING His Church in nearly every way.

But, of course, this was also obviously in the "Philadelphia Era" of God's Church—the ONLY one of the seven eras about which Christ gives no criticism whatever!

Of ALL the other eras, however, Christ prophesied in advance that errors—even SERIOUS ERRORS—would be made and at times obviously permeate the leadership and the brethren alike (Revelation 2 and 3).

Christ, the Living Head of the Church, specifically prophesied that the Ephesians would ***leave*** their "first love" (Revelation 2:4). Later, He said that there would be those in the Pergamos Era who would "hold the doctrine of Balaam" (verse 14). Then, He said, "You also have them who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I HATE" (verse 15).

Christ hates these false doctrines, yet He obviously ***allows*** them to come into His own true Church. Is it partly to "test" His people, to see where they ***really*** stand before He gives them great GLORY for all eternity?

The Thyatira leadership allowed "that woman Jezebel" to seduce their fellow servants. At this time, there was tremendous pressure to conform to the great false church (Revelation 17), for the Waldensian Sabbath-keepers and similar groups to attend mass and to have their children baptized by the priests.

Through fear and weakness, the leadership and the majority of these people often "went along" with the worldly religious practices.

But many times there was a small minority who insisted on obeying Jude's exhortation **"to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"** (Jude 3).

As we have already seen from history, the faithful brethren were often ***disfellowshipped*** by the worldly "church government" of the time. But they were ***faithful*** to God and His Word!

Where, then, is CHRIST in all of this?

Christ Does NOT Micro-Manage the Church

Like His heavenly Father guides world events only in an overall way, ***not*** trying to "micro-manage" world affairs except in a very few specific cases, so Christ guides the Church in an overall way. He makes sure that there always ***is*** a Church of God on earth (Matthew 16:18). He makes sure that the Bible is preserved. And He directs His Church to do a POWERFUL Work during certain key ages—yet prophesying in advance that in other ages the human leadership and the church as a whole would be "dead" (Revelation 3:1-2).

In Daniel 4:17, we read, "This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know that the Most High RULES in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men." So, although God "rules," He also obviously "allows" weak and misguided men to be in power much of the time so the world can write the lesson in human suffering that **Man's ways lead to death** (Proverbs 16:25).

In the true Church, Christ directs the overall pattern of things ***more directly*** than God does in the world at large. Yet, in Christ's own words in Revelation 2 and 3, it is obvious that He "allows" His Church and its leadership a lot

of "rope" to get entangled in and sometimes with which to hang themselves! He allows the Church to be ***influenced*** by the world around it. And this often heavily effects the "approach" and "atmosphere" of each church era and its leadership.

For instance, during and after World War II there was a spirit of zeal, patriotism and respect for authority in much of the Western world, particularly in America. The growing, zealous "Philadelphia Era" of God's Church reflected this approach.

But, now, after the rock music, dirty speech, "free sex" and other movements and rebellions of the 1960's and 1970's, and the crass materialism and hedonism of the 1980's, the "me" generation of the United States and much of Europe wants to "take it easy," to "water things down," to "do their own thing." And so the Laodicean Era—which the Church as a whole is obviously in—reflects this very much.

But does this "worldly" atmosphere give God's faithful people any ***real*** EXCUSE to "water down" the doctrines and the entire way of life revealed in the Holy Bible? Can they just say that, "the government of God" (actually the very human government in the Church!) says it is okay, so it must be "just fine?"

Of course not!

Follow Men Only *As* They Follow Christ

For, again, as Herbert W. Armstrong said so many times: "Follow me only ***as*** I follow Christ!" And, as Jesus said: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'" (Matthew 4:4). Yes, **you and I will be JUDGED by how zealously we have tried to live by the words of the Bible!** That is the "***key***."

We should honor all men in a high office, and especially

in God's Church. We should, in the Church, follow them ***as*** they follow Christ (I Corinthians 11:1). We ***should*** always be "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:4).

But the apostle Paul warned: "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29-30).

About two years after the death of Herbert W. Armstrong, things began to CHANGE, and change rapidly. The deep respect for Christ as our HEALER has all but disappeared in many church congregations. The fervent preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God based on God's law is slowly and subtly sinking beneath the sea. It is being replaced with a kind of Protestant gospel about the PERSON of Christ—***not*** the gospel which He Himself preached!

We are commanded to "preach the Word" (II Timothy 4:2). About one third of the Bible is prophecy. Yet the ministry is commanded ***not*** to preach about any power bloc or its fulfillment of prophecy. Do you remember the "Personal" in the November 19, 1990 issue of *The Worldwide News*? Notice these specific instructions to the TV presenters and ministers:

> Prophecy programs will not highlight which individual, which nation or which group of nations currently may be fulfilling specific end-time prophecies. Prophecy programs will present a balanced, overall perspective of the purpose and value of prophecy, instead of attempting to interpret specific prophecies.
>
> Prophecy programs will not lose sight of the gospel message by trading the true gospel for a 10-nation/save-your-skin gospel (Galatians 1:6-10). This was never the gospel. It was an interesting 'hook' to get people interested in the true gospel....

To preach that if you repent and obey God, you will not be killed in a war, taken captive, go hungry or get a disease, is to preach 'another gospel,' not the gospel of Jesus Christ (II Timothy 3:12)."

Whoever wrote that "Personal" seems to have forgotten Jesus' direct promise in Luke 21:36: "Watch, therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Mr. Armstrong's Legacy Destroyed

One of the main booklets on prophecy—a booklet that has inspired multiple thousands to see God's hand in human affairs, *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*, has been "shelved" for over two years now. Every indication is that neither it nor anything like it will appear again at least under the present administration.

The Eternal God built this present Work primarily through Mr. and Mrs. Herbert W. Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong was ordained in 1931 and served God faithfully (though he certainly had personal faults) for about 55 years! God had plenty of opportunities to get rid of Mr. Armstrong during that 55 years—but He ***did not***.

In fact, after some of the same "liberal" changes we see today occurred in the mid-1970's while Mr. Armstrong was away from Pasadena travelling a great deal, God used him to ***reverse*** this wrong trend and "put the Church back on the track!"

So ***which*** "government of God" would you choose to follow? The one Christ used to build a vibrant, growing Work that was BLESSED? Or one that is "watering down" and virtually DESTROYING virtually everything special that Christ brought into the Church through Herbert W. Armstrong?

As I said before, one of the most VITAL truths that Mr.

Armstrong introduced to the Church was the prophetic truth of the identity of the so-called "lost Ten Tribes of Israel." The booklet on this was a vital "key" to understanding literally dozens and scores of prophecies directly affecting the American and British Commonwealth peoples. These prophecies from God's Word were POWERFUL warnings from our Creator about what is going to happen to our nations and our very lives!

Yet, these prophecies are being suppressed! "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who ***suppress*** the truth in unrighteousness," (Romans 1:18).

Also, God COMMANDS all His faithful servants to ***warn*** our peoples of what soon lies ahead: "But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand. So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me" (Ezekiel 33:6-7).

Most of us older brethren and ministers realized we were helping the "watchman"—holding up his hands. We were part of the watchman's "staff."

And we knew God's warning included us if we failed to do the job. "His blood will I require at the watchman's hand." In plain language, the DEATH PENALTY is required of those who know this vital truth and yet REFUSE to preach the "Ezekiel Warning" to our people!

This is SERIOUS business!

How long can we "hide behind the skirts" of human "church government" and refuse to warn the American and British Commonwealth peoples of the prophesied coming Great Tribulation!

How long?

Let us read what now seem to be prophetic words from page 528 of the *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*:

> I know of evangelists who probably are sincere in supposing they are serving God—and who would *like* to be free to proclaim many truths they now hold back. They reason something like this: "If I go farther, and preach those things, I'll lose all my support. I'd be cut off from the ministry altogether. Then I could preach NOTHING. Better to serve God by preaching as *much* of the Biblical truth as possible, than to be prevented from preaching anything."
>
> They are relying on the financial support of MEN, or of organizations of men. Anyone in that predicament is the SERVANT OF MEN and NOT OF GOD, whether he realizes it or not."

Christ DOES Intervene

It may be that because we are in the Laodicean Era, and because perhaps most of the Church members "like it that way," Christ will simply leave this branch of the Church the way it is: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (II Timothy 4:3-4).

So, although ***not*** cleaning up the human government of the Church, Christ may intervene to SEPARATE the faithful Philadelphians. He may give us a chance, once again, to teach the full truth and do the Work of WARNING our people Israel and of preaching the full message of the coming Kingdom of God based on His Laws!

So all of you who are deeply converted, studying your Bibles, and deeply sensitive to God's will—you will know if that time has come. **You will need to pray for the COURAGE to stand up for the Truth!** You will need to say as the apostles did to the leaders of the Great Sanhedrin:

"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

Yes, Christ ***governs***. But He governs now primarily through His inspired Word those yielded enough to OBEY.

He shows us that the apostles and evangelists were supposed to organize churches, ordain elders and direct the administrative offices of the Church. And all ministers were to be "appointed"—there was NEVER any voting mentioned in the New Testament.

Of course there are times when the ministry is commanded to discipline wayward brethren for gross immorality (I Corinthians 5) or for causing division (Romans 16:17-18). Yet it is significant that in the latter case we are warned to "note those who cause division and offenses CONTRARY TO THE DOCTRINE WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED, and avoid them."

The current apostasy in the Church is absolutely based on departing and going CONTRARY to virtually every major doctrine which Jesus Christ inspired Herbert W. Armstrong to ***stress*** during the 52 years he faithfully led God's Church. WHY has the current Church leadership departed from most of the "18 Truths" written about so glowingly in the August 25, 1986, *Worldwide News*?

Is not this administration leading us directly "CONTRARY to the doctrine which you learned" under Herbert W. Armstrong? Should not we then obey God and AVOID these people even if that means leaving the Laodecian branch of the Church and worshipping with those who are trying to preserve and teach the TRUTH?

So do not let humanly devised theories of church government keep you from fully obeying God's Word!

We have always known the above facts. We have also known that God does ***not***—anywhere in the Bible—set out an exact procedure for the human government in His Church. For the broad world conditions and the immediate Church

situations may CHANGE from generation to generation.

Right Approach to Church Government

But what God ***has*** revealed is that the approach to government should always be in brotherly LOVE and outflowing concern. For Peter commanded the elders: "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (I Peter 5:2-3).

The right church government should be "collegial." That is, it should include a broad representation of ***all*** the elders and ministers of the Church as the account we read from Acts 15 makes clear. And correct church government should always be based on ***multitude*** of counsel (Proverbs 15:22).

Given that, the KEY FACTOR that we have been pointing out in this booklet is that the human church government must NEVER attempt to override or supersede the DIRECT government of God through His written Word and the inspired guidance of His Holy Spirit! Human church government must ***never*** be allowed to "water down" or do away with basic truths or any part of the basic "commissions" given the Church in regard to preaching the full gospel and the vital prophetic warnings that we in this generation are COMMANDED to preach.

Anytime ***any*** human church government attempts to do any of the above things, it should now be perfectly clear that this is ***not*** the "government of God" and should ***not*** be followed.

Rather, all of us whose minds and hearts God opens to these things should courageously respond to Mr. Armstrong's letter written to our brethren way back on September 3, 1936: "Nero fiddled while Rome burned! Many churches and religious broadcasts are today giving the

Under What Conditions Should Church Members Be Disfellowshipped?

Although the word "disfellowship" does not appear in most Bible translations, the concept appears in several passages. There are two reasons why a member may be disfellowshipped:

Flagrant personal sins. People that openly and carelessly sin, encourage others to sin: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." Removing these people from the Church serves the dual purpose of showing the sinner the consequences of his sin and showing the public that the Church does not condone sin. (I Corinthians 5:1-5, I Timothy 1:19-20)

Serious doctrinal errors. The Church is to put out people that practice or teach heretical doctrines or refuse to obey the apostolic epistles. This preserves truth and unity in the Church. (Romans 16:17-18, I Corinthians 1:10-13, I Thessalonians 3:6,14, Titus 3:10-11, II John 10) No scripture says a member should be disfellowshipped for hearing or reading the words of another teacher. Indeed Mark 9:38-40 shows the Church should not interfere with other groups teaching in the name of Christ. If the Church of God assumes their present doctrines are correct, they have a Biblical reason to disfellowship ***ministers*** for teaching different doctrines, but an organization that disfellowships ***members*** for trying to determine which teachers are of God (I John 4:1, Matthew 7:15-20, Revelation 2:2) must have something to hide!

people *a sleeping potion* in the form of nice, soothing, pleasing, comforting programs—lulling the people to sleep—while the JUDGMENTS OF GOD ARE FAST COMING UPON THEM! Why, in Jesus' name, do they not wake up and fearlessly SHOUT THE WARNING? This is no time for soft and smooth platitudes. It is time to AWAKEN people! It is time to WARN THEM!" (*Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, Vol. I, p. 616).

Brethren, even as I read these inspired words of Herbert W. Armstrong, my heart "burns" within me to once again be able to preach the full truth of God's Word and to **warn** the 400 million or so fellow Israelites of the coming Great Tribulation. Most of us know of fine, upstanding, well-meaning relatives and friends in the world who NEED to be warned! **Time is short.** Much work needs to be done.

Need for FAITH and COURAGE

Have our minds and hearts been blinded by a ***wrong concept*** of church government so that we have been "afraid" or unwilling to step out and get God's Work going again? Some may fear that such an action would be like the dissidents who left in the 1970's.

Do we realize that there is a HUGE difference this time? For back then Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was still alive, still faithful to God's Word, the ***full truth*** was being preached and the Work was being done!

Now, however, the man through whom the living Christ built this Work is being denigrated and virtually, though subtly, ridiculed. The Work is going down. The income is ***down***. Church attendance is ***down***. Baptisms are ***down***. The Pasadena college is ***closed down***. The GOOD NEWS magazine is ***closed down***. Plain Truth circulation is only about one third of what it was a few years ago. And we only have about half as many TV stations! "By their fruits you know them."

He must indeed be a blind soul who cannot see that something is ***terribly wrong*** with the Church at this time.

Of all the seven churches of Revelation, ***only*** Laodicea is so insipid that Christ says: "I will spew you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:16). The obvious indication here, and in Jesus' statement that Laodiceans need to be "refined in the fire," is that these smug, self-satisfied people will be cast into the GREAT TRIBULATION soon to fall upon an unsuspecting world!

If you stay among such people, if you begin to think like they do and agree with them, you WILL receive their reward! Is that what you want for your wives and children? For yourself?

Think about it!

In closing, I say with urgency to all who read this, please do not anymore allow a ***false concept*** of Church Government to blind your eyes! Do not use it as a "cop-out" or excuse for personally ***proving*** and DOING what the Bible says.

Down through history, Christ has guided His Church so that often—in fact most of the time—there were different "branches" of the true Church co-existing at the same time. Sometimes it was a geographical necessity. But often, as in the Sardis Era, Christ allowed His people a certain freedom of choice. Which Seventh Day Church of God would they worship with? The branch administered from Stanberry, Missouri? The one located in Caldwell, Idaho? Or the one headquartered at Salem, West Virginia? Or one of the others?

In talking with Dr. Herman Hoeh over the years, Mr. Raymond McNair, and with Mr. Armstrong himself, I found that we all agreed that ***all*** these groups were "branches" of God's Church. And as Mr. Armstrong often said, among them were ***many*** sincere people who will be in the Kingdom of God.

Again, remember that Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong ended up

in leaving ***two*** of these branches! If they had not, the Work as we have known it might never have existed.

May God grant ***all*** of us the true understanding—and the ***faith*** and ***courage***—that He granted to them to get the Work going again. Our desire should not be just for self—to have "stability" or to be "comfortable."

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" (Luke 9:24).

A whole world is waiting out there. It is in dire need of powerful, direct, inspired preaching of the ***soon***-coming Kingdom of God, the ***true*** name of Jesus Christ, and the Ezekiel Warning Message. God grant us the privilege of reaching these people with the full truth while there is still time!

For those of you interested in "reviving" The Work of God, please note that great numbers of God's people have come out to form the Global Church of God. We are faithfully preaching the truths proclaimed by Herbert W. Armstrong. If you are interested in learning more about us, please write us:

Global Church of God
PO Box 5500
Glendora, CA 91740-5500

or call our toll-free number:

800-959-1641