

ONLY ONE TRUE CHURCH?

Did Jesus Christ build only one Church? Is the true "Church of God" a corporate body of all those who believe in the name of Jesus Christ? Or, is it a spiritual organism, composed of all Spirit-filled Christians?

by Raymond F. McNair

What really constitutes the true *Church of God*? Is it merely a *corporate organization*-incorporated under Caesar's government? Or is it an invisible, *spiritual organism*, comprised of all who are spiritual members of the "BODY OF CHRIST"? Furthermore, how does one become a actual member of that spiritual organism?

Is Christ's "Body" Divided?

Many have never fully understood what the *true Church of God really* is. They have failed to recognize that God's Church is a *spiritual organism*-not a corporate entity! During the 1930s, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong incorporated the Work of God under the name "*Radio Church of God*." In about 1967, he re-incorporated under the name "*Worldwide Church of God*." Since his death in January 1986, numerous groups have come out of that *corporate body*, and have *re-incorporated* under various names, all bearing the name "Church of God." But which *one* of those churches is God's true Church? Are they *all* part of the true, invisible *Church of God*? Or, are some of them *true* churches, while others are *false*?

Furthermore, we need to ask, does Christ disapprove of church corporations? Nothing in the N.T. indicates that in the first century A.D., the apostles ever needed to *incorporate* the "Church" in the way that we now have to incorporate under man's laws. The Word of God clearly teaches that God's people must submit to the "powers that be," and this would include a church complying with the *civil laws*, thereby *incorporating*, in order to satisfy the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1-7). In many countries, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to properly carry out Christ's Work today without first *incorporating* under the laws of those nations in which God's people live.

And even among the commandment-keeping churches of God-among those who not only *accept Christ*, but also believe in keeping *all* of the Ten Commandments, the holy days, tithing, etc.-**there are, today, literally dozens of corporate bodies that use the name "Church of God" as part of their corporate name.** But does merely using the name "Church of God" make those who use that name the true *Church of God* in truth? [Note. There are now some 500 separate church denominations in the U.S. alone. Presumably, each member of those churches thinks his church is the "one true Church."]

Nearly 2,000 years ago, the Apostle Paul asked this crucial question: "**IS CHRIST DIVIDED?**" (1 Cor. 1:10). So far as we know, there were no *corporate church organizations* in Paul's day. But today it is necessary for each body of believers to incorporate itself under the laws of the particular nation in which that church is located.

Such corporate churches of God have proliferated during the last decades of this century.

Is Jesus the author of dozens of *corporate organizations* that, today, use the name *Church of God* as at least part of their denomination's corporate name?

What does God's Word mean when it says, "**There is [only] ONE BODY and one Spirit, just as you are called in one hope of your calling**" (Eph. 4:4)?

During the lifetime of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong-the then-Pastor General of the *WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD*-most of the members of the commandment-keeping Churches of God, worldwide, looked to him for leadership and guidance. Under his fruitful ministry, literally hundreds of ministers were ordained, and several hundreds of commandment-keeping churches were established. But it is a fact that numerous bona fide Churches of God never recognized him as their leader.

Mr. Armstrong never at any time even claimed to have been given authority over all of God's

people scattered through the entire earth? In fact, Mr. Armstrong often spoke of the members of the *Church of God* (7th day)-with whom he had previously fellowshipped-as true brethren in the "body of Christ."

O.T. Israel vs. N.T. Israel

Let us first compare the physical nation of *Old Testament Israel* with the spiritual "*Israel of God*" of the New Testament (Gal. 6:16), in order to better understand how those two "Israels" differ. In Old Testament times, God (*Yahweh*) proclaimed the nation of "Israel" to be His "special treasure" (Ex. 19:4-6; Deut. 7:6-11). "You [Israel] only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:3). In fact, **God took Israel to be His own wife** (Jer. 3:12-14; Ezek. 16:1-43). After freeing her from Egyptian bondage (c. 1446 B.C.), *Yahweh married Israel at Mount Sinai* (cf. Ex. 19, 20, 24).

By that solemn marriage "covenant," Israel promised to worship and obey *Yahweh*, as a faithful wife should "obey" her husband (24:3-8; cf. 1 Pet. 3:1-6). From that time forward, the "congregation of Israel" was God's "church in the wilderness" (Acts. 7:38 KJV). To become a member or citizen of the O.T. "congregation of Israel," every male had to be physically *circumcised* (Ex. 12:43-49). But when Israel became unfaithful to *Yahweh* by committing *spiritual adultery*, He "put her away [by giving] her a certificate of divorce" (Jer. 3:6-8).

In what way does the N.T. "Israel of God" differ from the O.T. Israel of God? **God's New Testament Church, or congregation, is comprised of those whom He calls out of "all nations, tribes [and] peoples"** (Rev. 7:9; cf. Gal. 3:28-29). "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jo. 3:16).

This N.T. Church is called the "bride" of Jesus Christ (Mt. 22:1-14; Eph. 5:23-33; Rev. 19:7-9). The Apostle Paul explains that *physical circumcision* is not required of N.T. Christians: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters" (1 Cor. 7:19). Further, Paul says, "For he is not a *Jew* who is one outwardly, nor is that *circumcision* which is outward in the flesh; but he is a *Jew* who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Rom. 2:28-29).

God's true Church should certainly bear *His name*-"*Church of God*"! There is no biblical authority for any church appropriating its *founder's name* (i.e. Luther, Calvin, Wesley etc.); neither is there biblical authority for any congregation naming its Church after one or more of its *doctrines*-such as "adventism," "baptism," "methodism," "pentecostalism," etc.; nor should one name his church after its particular *form of government*, such as "presbyterianism" or "congregationalism." Further, there is *no* biblical precedent for any Church calling itself "universal" (i.e. "catholic"), due to the fact that it has a worldwide membership. **Every Spirit-filled group of God-fearing believers-those who truly obey, serve and worship God-should properly be called "Church of God."**

In eleven verses in the N.T. we read of the "Church[es] of God." Since Jesus is the "Head" of that Church, God's Church is also called "the church of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). Christ had told His disciples, "*I will build My church*" (Mt. 16:18). The English word "church" is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning the "*called out*" ones. Of itself, the word *ekklesia* does *not* signify a holy or sacred congregation. Rather, this word is also used in the N.T. to refer to *non-religious* "assemblies" (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). But when the Scriptures add the words "of God" to "Church" (*ekklesia*), that designates that particular Church as being owned by *God*. Sometimes that "Church" met in the home of a disciple (1 Cor. 16:19).

As we have seen, God's N.T. Church is called the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), and is comprised of peoples of "all nations" (Rev. 7:9), both *Jews* and *Gentiles* (Eph. 2:11-21).

How, then, does one become a bona fide member of God's N.T. Church-a vital part of Christ's own "BODY"? First, God must "draw" or *woo* each member into an intimate relationship with Him (Jo. 6:37, 44, 65). Then He has to "grant repentance" (Acts 11:18), because only He can "add" anyone to His Church (2:47; 13:48). Each repentant believer must first become *circumcised in heart, or mind* (Eph. 2:19; Rom. 2:28-29; 1 Cor. 7:19).

Important Earmarks of God's Church?

How can one *know* what really constitutes the true *Church of God*? As noted earlier, God's Church is *not a physical, corporate organization*, but is a *SPIRITUAL ORGANISM*! His Church (the "called out" ones) is comprised of all who have been *called out of Satan's evil world* (2 Cor. 6:17-18; 1 John 2:15-17; Rev. 18:4).

Does God's true Church have certain *earmarks* which identifies it as the true "Church of God"? One of the *distinguishing marks* of God's Church is whether its members are truly *obedient* to God and to His law. Jesus Christ said God's people should keep His laws-especially the Ten Commandments (Matt. 5:17-19; 19:16-19). Of course, this would include observing God's Sabbath, which is one of those commands. The Apostle John also revealed that God's true Church is a commandment-keeping Church (Rev. 12:17; 14:12; 22:14).

Will God's Church always have an important "work" to do? Or will members of His Church sit down and remain idle as they await Christ's Second Coming? Christ's parable of the "talents" (Mt. 25:14-30), and also the parable of the "pounds" (Luke 19:11-27), both reveal that Christians must keep busy-making good use of their *talents* and their *pounds*, if they expect to receive a good reward from Him. We must not *bury our talents in the earth* (v. 25).

Furthermore, the Bible plainly reveals that God's true Church will most assuredly continue to preach the Word of God-especially Christ's true gospel-into all the world (Mt. 24:14; 28:19-20). "Therefore... **be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord**, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

What then is God's true Church? Is it a large church with hundreds of millions of members? Or is it a "little flock" (Luke 12:32), which travels along the "strait" and "narrow" road toward the Kingdom of God (Mt. 7:14). Is it really possible that "the Devil and Satan [has deceived] the whole world" (Rev. 12:9)? God's true Church is a rather small body of people, scattered over much of the earth, who have *repented* of their sins, *accepted Jesus* as their Savior, and received God's precious Holy Spirit. By receiving that dynamic Spirit we are inducted into the very "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12-13). That Spirit, like electricity, empowers us and energizes us with God's life and energy-and gives us His very own "mind" (2 Cor. 2:16; Php. 2:5). Through His Spirit, He also gives us "eternal life" (1 Jo. 5:11-12).

God's free gift of "eternal life" (Jo. 3:16), is the "*guarantee* of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22), that is, until we come to actually possess *immortality*, which His saints will put on at the first resurrection (1 Cor. 15:52-54).

The Apostle Paul put it this way: "But *if* the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also *give life* to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11; cf. 2:7-8). After we inherit *immortality*, we-the Church, who will then comprise the "bride" of Jesus Christ-will be joined, eternally, to our spiritual "Husband" (Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:7-9).

Some are shocked to learn that **no one can "join" God's Church! Rather, God himself must "draw" you to Him (John 6:44), and by putting His Spirit within you, He thereby "adds" you to His Church** (Acts. 2:47)-after *repentance* and *baptism* (vv. 38-39). One who is truly repentant, will always turn away from "his way" to "God's way" (Isa. 55:6-9; Prov. 14:12). A repentant person will have been truly *conquered* by God. Then, after baptism, he will be filled with, and "led by the Spirit of God" (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:14).

But does God place certain *conditions* which each believer in Christ must meet *before* He will freely give us His Spirit? He certainly does. God commands us to "*Repent*, and... *be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts. 2:38). Further, God only gives His Spirit to those who "obey Him" (Acts. 5:32).

The Word of God reveals that to be properly baptized, one must be fully *immersed* in water. The Greek word *baptizo* means to "immerse" or "overwhelm." As an example, John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River (Mt. 1:12-15), where there was "much water" (Jo. 3:22-23). When an Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip the evangelist to baptize him, "both Philip [the baptizer] and the eunuch *went down into* the water, and he baptized him... [and both] *came up out of* the water" (Acts 8:38-39). Through baptism, the truly repentant believer is "buried." By this act, he buries,

symbolically, his old past, before coming up out of the watery grave (Rom. 6:4-5). God's Spirit in him now makes him "a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17 KJV).

We must realize, however, that *water baptism* isn't really what puts us into God's Church. Rather, it is the *receipt of His Holy Spirit*, through the laying on of hands (Acts 15-18), that actually *inducts* us into the "Church of the Living God" (1 Tim. 3:15). Water baptism is merely an *outward symbol* of our *inner faith* in God and His Son Jesus Christ. Being immersed in water does not of itself insure that we will receive God's Spirit-unless we have truly repented of our sins and buried the "old man."

Paul says believers must "**put off... the old man** which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, **and be renewed in the spirit of your mind**, and that you put on the *new man* which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 2:22-24).

The Church's Temporary "Corporate Cloak"

Christ's true Church is also called the "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27). "There is [only] *one body*" (Eph. 4:4). *All* true believers are "members of His body" (Eph. 5:30). "For as we have many members in one [physical] body... so we, being many, are *one [spiritual] body* in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom. 12:4-5).

Does God's Word tell us, specifically, what it is that actually *joins* us to Christ's Body? "For as the [human] body is *one* and has many members... so also is Christ. **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...**and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12-13). Furthermore, Paul says, "**Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His**" (Rom. 8:9). These verses prove that the only ones who are members of the true "Church of God" are those who have *repented* of their sins, been *baptized*, and have then received God's Spirit-thereby *inducting* them into "**the [spiritual] BODY OF CHRIST.**"

Some people have difficulty in grasping the meaning of the biblical statements which reveal that God's Church is compared unto the "body of Christ." A good way to visualize that "body" of Christ, in relation to a "corporate organization," might be to conceptualize such an organization as having a *temporary cloak*. **The Church, as Christ's body, may temporarily clothe itself in a "corporate name," such as the *Global Church of God*. Thus, in this life, it may be necessary for Christ's "body" to use a corporate name, which will be laid aside at the "first resurrection"** (cf. 1 Cor. 15:49-54; Rev. 20:5-6).

God's people need to beware lest they become entrapped in one or more of the following snares: 1) They come to believe, self-righteously, that their particular *corporate* "Church of God" organization is the "only true Church"; 2) They begin to *feel superior* to those who are not members of the corporate body to which they belong; 3) Or they carelessly start *speaking evil* of other members of the "body of Christ" who aren't in their fellowship (Jas. 4:11; Mt. 25:48-51).

How can you *know* for sure who is actually *in* the true "Church of God," the spiritual *body* of Jesus Christ?

Jesus said, "**You will know them by their fruits**" (Mt. 7:16, 20). As we have seen, the Word of God tells us what constitutes a true Christian. He or she will voluntarily accept Jesus Christ as his or her savior. And a genuine Christian will obey the Word, laws and will of God. He will not rebel against God and His government.

Members of the true Church of God will certainly adhere to the form of *church government* which Jesus Christ established to govern His Church-and that government was *hierarchical*. But the form of hierarchical government mentioned in the New Testament was *NOT church government by autocratic rule of ONE MAN!* God's pyramidal form of government, as explained in the New Testament, proceeds from the Father down to the Son, and from Him on down to a *group* of the Church's top leaders. In N.T. times, God communicated His will through the "apostles and elders" as mentioned in the 15th chapter of Acts, and elsewhere. And God never changes (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). He still rules His Church by inspiring doctrinal and administrative decisions through His chosen Church's leaders (Mt. 17:18-20). But since there are no "apostles" in His Church today, Jesus Christ rules the *Church of God* by inspiring His *evangelists and elders*, thereby seeing that His Church continues to follow the principle of **governance through "a multitude of counsel"** (Prov. 11:14; 20:18).

False Ministers And Counterfeit Churches!

Many fail to realize that Satan has many *false ministers*, and are blind to the fact that he fabricates many *false "gospels,"* and has also established many *counterfeit churches*. We must beware lest any of us be deceived by those who *appropriate* the name of Christ, calling themselves "Christians," yet refuse to believe and practice the *doctrines* which Christ Himself has given us in the Word of God. Neither should we be fooled by those who call themselves "Church of God," yet utterly refuse to believe the *true gospel* of Christ-or, worse still, who refuse to obey Him, by not keeping-as a way of life-*all* of His commandments!

Christ said, "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.** Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, '**I never knew you; depart from Me, you who PRACTICE lawlessness**'" (Mt. 7:21-23).

Furthermore, the Apostle John also said, "Little children, let no one deceive you. **He who PRACTICES righteousness is righteous,** just as He is righteous" (1 Jo. 3:7). John adds, "Whoever has been born [i.e. *begotten*] of God does not [practice] sin, for His seed [Gk. *sperma*] remains in him; and he cannot [practice] sin, because he has been born [*begotten*] of God" (v. 9). John concludes his important point by saying, "In this the children of *God* and the children of the *devil* are manifest: **Whoever does not PRACTICE righteousness is not of God,** nor is he who does not *love* his brother" (v. 10).

We must be on guard against false teachers who preach the *name of Christ*, yet refuse to believe His true *message*, the authentic gospel, which He taught. Jesus himself said, "Take heed that no one deceives you...[for] many false prophets will rise up and deceive many" (Mt. 24:4, 11). He also warned, "For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (v. 24).

And the Apostle Paul also warned of those who would dare to teach a *false gospel* (Gal. 1:6-9; 2 Cor. 11:1-15). "For such are *false apostles*, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! **For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness,** whose end will be according to their works" (vv. 13-15).

The Word of God gives us many solemn warnings to prevent us being led astray by false teachers, with their plausible-sounding doctrines. We must never be hoodwinked by those deceivers who put on a false front so they will appear to be the true ministers of Jesus Christ.

In Conclusion

How can we know that we have His Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts and minds? "Now by this we *know* that we know Him, **if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.** But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. **By this we know that we are in Him**" (1 Jo. 2:3-5). Those are very strong words-nevertheless they're true!

But *if* you have the Spirit of Jesus Christ in you, then you can also *know* that you are "in Christ," and are, therefore, a bona fide member of the very "body of Christ"! If so, then, like Paul, you can say, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but *Christ lives in me*; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20)!

Only *God* knows those who are truly His children-those who sincerely believe Him and His Word, and live obedient, godly lives! We are told that "'The *Lord* knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity'" (2 Tim. 2:19).

In conclusion: All of those who comprise the spiritual "BODY OF CHRIST," the true "Church of God," hold these things in common: 1) They believe God and His Word; 2) They accept His

Son as their Personal Savior; 3) They have repented of their sins; 4) And, they have been baptized-consequently they will have received God's Holy Spirit; as a result, they are now being "led by" that Spirit (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:9-14)!

And, most importantly, they will show the "fruit" of God's Spirit in their lives-"**love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [and] self-control**" (Gal. 5:22-23). God's Church exhibits these, and other previously mentioned earmarks-showing that it truly is the "Church of the Living God"!

HOW SHOULD GOD'S CHURCH BE GOVERNED?

Church government is again a burning issue within the Churches of God? Did Christ intend His Church to be run *democratically*? Or did He ordain that the Church of God be governed by a *hierarchy* of *leading ministers*?

by Raymond F. McNair

The subject of "church government" is a widely discussed topic among the *corporate entities* that use the name "Church of God." In Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's autobiography, he mentions that for many years he had been puzzled by this subject of *church government*. In fact, I remember Mr. Armstrong often discussing church government in the early years of Ambassador College-as far back as 1948-1949.

In those years Mr. Armstrong openly confessed that he was still somewhat uncertain of the proper form of church government. He mentioned that, during the 1930s, some leaders of the Church of God (7th day) began writing and speaking on the subject of the "Bible Form of [church] Organization" (*Autobiography of H.W. A.*, 1986 ed., Vol. 1, pp. 555-557).

Mr. Armstrong was firmly convinced that God's government had always been *HIERARCHICAL* in form. Hierarchical government was, therefore, the type of church government used in the Worldwide Church of God during the lifetime of Mr. Armstrong-who died in January, 1986.

What form of church government does the Global Church of God practice? Our official literature and our oral statements have consistently stressed the fact that the GCG believes in and practices a hierarchical form of church government. Some, however, have carelessly assumed that *hierarchical church government* somehow means that *ONE MAN* must sit at the top of that hierarchical structure, and that he-and he alone!-is responsible for making all major *doctrinal* and *administrative* decisions.

But a careful examination of the word "hierarchy" clearly reveals that a church having hierarchical government does *not* necessarily have a man at the top wielding *autocratic powers* to make final decisions on doctrinal or administrative matters.

Furthermore, from the very beginning, the Global Church of God made it clear in its teachings and in its literature that its leaders would *not* follow a *dictatorial* (i.e. *autocratic*) form of government. An *autocrat* is one who has *sole authority* to rule. He may or may not accept the counsel of his councilors. He needs answer to no one. His decision is the "last word" on all major issues.

Global published a booklet, *When Should You Follow Church Government*, in 1993, then published a slightly revised edition in 1995. That booklet clearly sets forth the Church's teachings and practice on the subject church government.

Peter's Central Role in the N.T. Church

Did Jesus Christ, when He first established His Church, ordain that the apostle Peter would have supreme power and authority to make all the major decisions: 1) Pertaining to Church doctrine? 2) Relative to all major administrative matters? Or, did Christ build His church "on the foundation of the *APOSTLES* and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20)?

A careful study of the book of Acts and the N.T. epistles of the apostles reveals the following very important points which run counter to the beliefs of some:

1) Clearly, **Jesus Christ is called the "Head" of the Church which He built**: "And He [the Father] put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be *HEAD* over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (1:22-23). "For as the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is *head* of the Church" (5:23). "For we are members of HIS BODY..." (v. 30). So at no time did Jesus Christ ever appoint any man to be the "head" over "His body," the one true Church of God!

2) Under Christ, the true "Head" of the "Church of God," Jesus appointed a tried and tested *GROUP* of faithful "apostles" who served God's people, assisted by the faithful "elders" of His Church. Thus,

the "apostles and elders" were to be His *human instruments* through whom He would communicate all important *doctrinal* and *administrative* decisions pertaining to His Church (Mt. 16:18-19; 17:18-20).

A diligent study of the N.T. Church in Acts reveals that there is no mention of the Apostles Peter and Paul making important *doctrinal* or major *administrative* decisions *autocratically*-that is, without the counsel and input of other apostles and/or elders. The Apostle Peter was commissioned by God with the *oversight* of preaching the Gospel to the "circumcised" Jews; whereas the Apostle Paul says God commissioned him to *oversee* the preaching of the Gospel to the "uncircumcised" Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-9).

A survey of the apostles' statements and deeds in the book of Acts reveals how Peter and Paul viewed their *supervisory* responsibilities. Did they ever look upon themselves as *autocrats*-having all power to decide important doctrinal and administrative matters-or did they both realize that their respective commissions were to be carried out in full *cooperation* with the other apostles and elders?

What does the inspired record say concerning "church government," as revealed in the book in Acts? After Judas Iscariot committed suicide, the eleven "apostles" realized that another apostle had to be chosen to take Judas' place. Taking the lead among the twelve apostles, Peter said, "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us... from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us-one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts. 1:21).

"And *THEY* put forward ["ordained" KJV] two... Joseph called Barsabas, and Matthias" (v. 23). But the eleven apostles weren't sure which of the two men the *Father* had chosen to take Judas' place [cf. Mt. 20:23]; therefore, they committed that decision to God: "And ***THEY* cast lots**, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with ***the ELEVEN [apostles]***" (v. 23).. The eleven didn't vote Matthias into the office of an apostle!. Rather, they sought God's decision by casting lots.

[Note. This is the first and last recorded instance in the N.T. where *lots* were used by the apostles to ascertain the divine will. Why? At the time when a replacement for Judas was sought, God's "Spirit had not yet been given" (Jo. 7:39; Acts 1). But when the Holy Spirit came into the disciples on the "day of Pentecost... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1-4). After the apostles received the indwelling presence of God's Spirit, they could appeal directly to the Father in Christ's name, and He would in some way reveal His answer to them (Jo. 14:11-26; Mt. 18:18).]

"But Peter, standing up with the *ELEVEN [apostles]*..." then delivered a powerful sermon (v. 37), which resulted in the conversion of "three thousand souls" (v. 41). Further, we are told that these new converts "continued steadfastly in the ***APOSTLES' DOCTRINE*** and fellowship... and many wonders and signs were done through the [twelve] apostles" (vv. 42-43). It does *not* say that they continued in "Peter's doctrine"!

The 3rd and 4th chapters of Acts reveal that **"Peter and John,"** continued working closely together, resulting in "about five thousand" being converted (v. 4). "And with great power **the Apostles** [not just Peter] gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (v. 33). "And through the hands of ***the apostles*** many signs and wonders were done among the people" (v. 12)

Later, when *seven deacons* were chosen, they were *ordained* by the *apostles*-not by the brethren. **"Then the *TWELVE*** summoned the multitude of the disciples and said... Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, whom ***WE [apostles]* may appoint** over this business" (Acts 6:2). Again, it was "the *twelve*" who made these decisions-and not Peter!

Still later, when it became clear to the apostles at Jerusalem that some of them must be sent to minister to the Samaritans who had accepted Christ, how did ***THEY*** decide who should be sent? **"Now when the *APOSTLES* who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, *THEY* sent Peter and John to them..."** (8:1). Again, it was the *apostles*, rather than Peter or John, who made that decision. "Now when Simon saw that **through the laying on of the *APOSTLES'* hands the Holy Spirit was given**, he offered them money [to receive God's Spirit]" (vv. 13, 18-19).

Luke informs us that a number of Gentiles from Cyprus, Cyrene and Antioch became converted to this new Christian religion: "Then news of these things came to the ears of the **CHURCH in Jerusalem, and THEY [i.e., the church leaders] sent out Barnabas to... Antioch**" (11:22). It was at Antioch that "the disciples were first called *Christians*" (v. 26).

We are also told that in the days of Claudius Caesar (41-54 A.D.) a great famine occurred. "Then **the DISCIPLES** [at Antioch] determined to send relief to the *brethren* dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and **sent it to the elders by the hands of BARNABAS and SAUL**" (vv. 29-30). "The disciples" (v. 29), certainly *included* the *church leaders*, who were fully supported by the *lay members*.

Chapter 12 mentions the imprisonment and subsequent deliverance of Peter from Herod's prison (vv. 5-17). After an angel had delivered Peter from prison, he went to the home of John Mark's mother (v. 12), and told the disciples, "**Go, tell these things to JAMES** and to the brethren" (v. 17). James was the brother of Jesus, and served as the main overseer of the Jerusalem church (cf. 14:13-21; Gal. 1:19).

The 13th chapter of Acts reveals that when God decided to ordain two unique men to serve as His apostles to the Gentiles, He did *not* direct that Peter or any of the other apostles at Jerusalem were to go to Antioch so they could ordain Paul and Barnabas. Rather, Christ had previously struck Paul down and brought him to repentance and baptism, followed by the laying on of the hands of a disciple named Ananias (Acts 1:1-19). After this, he was "with the disciples in Damascus. And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus..." (vv. 19-20).

Later on, after Paul had spent a considerable amount of time in the city of Antioch, Jesus called both him and Barnabas to be His chosen apostles to the Gentiles. God commanded the church leaders at Antioch, "**Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.** Then after fasting and praying **THEY [church leaders at Antioch] laid their hands on them and sent them off.** So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit..."-Paul and Barnabas began their first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-4).

Though they were *both* chosen to minister to the Gentiles, Paul later explained that God had appointed *him*-not Barnabas-to oversee the preaching of the gospel to the uncircumcised Gentiles (Gal. 2: 7-9).

"Apostles and Elders" Decided N. T. Doctrine

Some years afterward, a serious *doctrinal controversy* arose in the Churches of God-especially at the Church of God in Antioch (15:1-2). In order to settle this doctrinal dispute, it became necessary to convene the first N.T. Church Conference in Jerusalem. The debate concerned whether or not Gentile converts should be required to be "circumcised" and "keep the law of Moses" (15:5).

Whom did God empower to settle the "circumcision" dispute which had stirred up quite a controversy at Antioch? Did all of the "brethren" meet with the "apostles and elders" to decide this important issue? No! "**The APOSTLES and ELDERS came together to consider this matter**" (v. 6). "**And when there had been MUCH DISPUTE**"-the Apostle Peter addressed the assembled *apostles and elders* about this burning question. He was followed by the Apostles Paul and Barnabas, both of whom gave important addresses before the Church's leaders at Jerusalem (vv. 7-12).

But the final authoritative decision was given by the Apostle James ("the Lord's brother," Gal.1:19), who pronounced the council's ruling on this important controversial matter: "Men and brethren... I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:13-20).

Notice that **after the church leaders-"the apostles and elders"-had reached a God-inspired CONSENSUS, they communicated that decision to "the whole church"** at Jerusalem: "Then it pleased the [1] *apostles* and [2] *elders*, with the [3] *whole church*, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, *Judas* who was also named Barsabas, and *Silas*, *leading men* among the brethren" (v. 22). Again, note that *this was a collective, consensual decision!* Those "leading men," sent by the "apostles and elders" were instructed to inform the brethren at Antioch of this authoritative decision made at the Jerusalem Conference.

Shortly after the Jerusalem Conference, Barnabas and Paul had sharp disagreement, resulting in their separation as an evangelistic team. "Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia [See Acts 13:13], and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so *sharp* that they *parted* from one another. And so Barnabas took *Mark* and sailed to Cypress; but Paul chose *Silas* and departed..." (Acts 15:36-41). Who was right?

Though God had commissioned Paul to oversee preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-8), both he and Barnabas were chosen by God to do that important Work. Later, Paul told Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11; cf. Col. 4:10).

This incident reveals that two of God's apostles could *disagree* on an administrative point in which the will of God was not clear. After that serious dispute, Paul and Barnabas apparently never again worked together as a team. The Apostle Peter, however, recognized Paul as a faithful apostle of Jesus Christ, through whom Christ had inspired certain N.T. Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Perhaps their disagreement and subsequent separation served to further the preaching of the gospel of Christ, as they now formed *two teams*, instead of just one.

Paul now teamed up with Silas, as they re-visited the Christian churches among the Gentiles: "And as they went through the cities, **they delivered to them the DECREES to keep, which were determined by the APOSTLES and ELDERS at Jerusalem**" (16:4).

Some time after this Paul again visited Jerusalem. "On the following day **Paul went in with us to JAMES [bishop of the Jerusalem church], and ALL THE ELDERS were present**" (vv. 17-19).

The **apostles and elders** at Jerusalem then informed Paul that he was being wrongly accused of teaching "all the *Jews* who are among the Gentiles to *forsake Moses* [and *not*] *circumcise* their children" (v. 21). The Jerusalem elders counseled Paul to make an "offering" at the Temple. "**But concerning the Gentiles who believe, WE [not just one person] have written and decided that they should observe no such thing...**" (vv. 23-25).

Paul's And Peter's Working Relationship

What kind of a working relationship did the Apostles Peter and Paul have, as recorded in the New Testament? Did God ever set Peter in authority over Paul? Did Paul receive his divine instructions and his training to carry out his ministry from Peter and the apostles in Jerusalem? No! As we have seen, Jesus Christ himself directly called Paul, and revealed to Him precisely how He wanted him to carry His true gospel to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-24; 2:1-21)?

Not long after Paul's conversion, God chose Barnabas and him to be His special apostles to preach Christ's gospel to the Gentiles, "**for the work to which I have called THEM**" (Acts. 13:1-2). Luke says, "Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, **THEY [the church leaders at Antioch] sent them away**" (v. 3).

As we observed earlier, God didn't send Peter or any of the Jerusalem apostles to Antioch to ordain Paul and Barnabas. Why not? Because Christ did not want Peter and the Jerusalem apostles to think He had placed Paul and Barnabas under their supervision. Of course, Barnabas and Paul would confer with them from time to time (Gal. 1; 2). But Paul and Barnabas never got their instructions from the apostles at Jerusalem. Christ directed their ministry to the Gentiles from their "home base" in Antioch Syria (Acts. 13; 14); whereas Peter and the other eleven apostles used Jerusalem as their headquarters. Peter, John, James and the other apostles would have plenty to do, taking the gospel to the dispersed Ten Tribes, many of whom then lived in Europe and western Asia (cf. James 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1)!

We also noted earlier that the second chapter of Galatians makes it quite clear that Peter was to generally *oversee* the preaching the gospel to the "circumcison" (i.e. to Jews/Israelites), while Paul was to oversee the gospel to the "uncircumcised" Gentiles (vv. 7-9). A further indication that Peter was *not* over Paul in authority is also mentioned by Paul himself. It is unlikely that Paul would have openly rebuked Peter to his face—because of Peter's duplicity in not fully accepting the Gentiles' equal status in Christ (vv. 11-21)—if he was *under* the authority of Peter.

What Was God's Form of O.T. Government?

Before examining God's N.T. form of government, let us note the type of government He used during O.T. times. Is God's government from the *bottom* up (*democracy*= "rule by the *people*")? Or, is His government from the *top* down (*theocracy*= "rule by *God*")? Whether we look to the kind of "government" God used in the O.T. or the N.T., we see the same thing.

The Hebrew Scriptures clearly illustrate God's Old Testament form of government over the nation of Israel was a *theocracy*. Under that theocratic form of government, "God was [Israel's] King" (1 Sam. 12:12). Moses was the LORD'S prophet-His direct representative or JUDGE, ruling Israel under divine authority (Ex. 4:14-16; Num. 12:7-8). Then, under Moses were all the leaders/judges-the "able men... rulers of *thousands*... rulers of *hundreds*... rulers of *fifties*... and rulers of *tens*" (Ex. 18:21-22). That theocratic government was "pyramidal" in form or structure-broad at the bottom and narrowing progressively toward the top. That type of government is often referred to as *hierarchical*.

[Note. Though Aaron was, in certain respects, under his brother Moses, yet Aaron's God-ordained priestly office or function (as Israel's *high priest*) was not in any sense under Moses' authority. Only Aaron the high priest (or in later years, his successor) could go into the *holy of holies* to officiate in the innermost sanctuary of the Tabernacle. Only God's high priest could use the sacred lots (the *Urim* and the *Thummim*) for determining God's decision in a matter. And only Aaron's descendants could legally function as *priests* in Israel (Num. 3:10).]

Even though *Moses* functioned both as a "prophet" (Deut. 18:15), and as Israel's supreme "judge" or civil leader over the nation of Israel (Acts 7:35; Ex. 18:13-26), nonetheless God established His priesthood through Moses' brother *Aaron and his sons*, who constituted the *priests* in Israel. Nothing in the Word of God says that God ever gave Moses authority to supervise their priestly ministry over Israel.

God communicated many of His instructions through Moses, and commanded him to pass them on to "Aaron and to his sons" (Lev. 6:25; 16:2; 17:1-16; 17:33). In numerous instances, God told Moses to speak directly to the "congregation of Israel" (Ex. 25:2; 30:31; Lev. 23:2, 10, 24, 34). Thus, we see that *Moses* functioned as Israel's chief *judge* in what might be called the *civil government* over Israel, while *Aaron and his sons*, the priests, were empowered to act for God in all *ecclesiastical matters* pertaining to the *priesthood*.

Further, in subsequent generations, Israel's *judges*-or later, their *kings*-were *never* permitted to usurp the authority that God had given only to Aaron's descendants, the priests. In fact, when King Saul took it upon himself to offer sacrifices, unlawfully, he was sternly rebuked by God. Samuel, a Levite by birth, reprimanded Saul for arrogating to himself the Levitical function of offering sacrifices to *Yahweh*. As a result of Saul's willful presumption, he was rejected as Israel's King (1 Sam. 15:1-35).

God deliberately kept the function of Israel's *kings* and *priests* separate. The kings didn't have authority over the divinely-appointed priests; neither did the priests have authority over the judges, nor at a later time, over the kings whom God appointed to rule His people Israel.

What Is Christ's N.T. Form of Government?

We have seen that God's government in O.T. times was from the top down (Ex. 18:21-26)-never from the bottom up, as in a *democracy*! Today, many churches follow the "congregational" form of government (i.e., rule by "consensus" of the *lay members*), rather than by divine *appointment* from God on down through His apostles, evangelists, pastors, elders, deacons and deaconesses! Would God change-using a different type of government to govern His N.T. Church? Or does the Bible say God never changes (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8)?

Those whom God used in His government were always placed there by His divine *appointment*-though He often used human servants as His representatives *through whom He* ordained (appointed) kings, prophets, priests, apostles, ministers, elders or deacons to a particular office or function. Thus, from time immemorial, God's form of government has been *HIERARCHICAL*! The *Father* is supreme in authority, and His *Son* Jesus Christ is under Him, lower in rank and authority

(John 14:28). Paul tells us that "the HEAD [leader] of Christ is *God* [the Father]" (1 Cor. 11:3), and "Christ is the HEAD of the Church" (Eph. 5:23). Under the Father and under His Son Jesus Christ are: "[1] apostles... [2] prophets... [3] evangelists... [4] pastors and [5] teachers" (Eph. 4:11). A close scrutiny of N.T. church history reveals that the apostles had authority over the evangelists (eg. Paul over Timothy and Titus-Tit. 1:4-16), who, in turn, were over pastors/elders and deacons/deaconess's.

The Global Church of God believes it is contrary to the New Testament pattern of government for God's people to adopt either the *DEMOCRATIC* or *AUTOCRATIC* form of government. An *AUTOCRACY* means rule by a *SOLE* individual-i. e., *ONE MAN*-who is empowered to make all major decisions regarding *doctrine* and important *administrative* matters. The N. T. clearly reveals that Peter never usurped a position of authority *over* the other *ELEVEN APOSTLES*. However, God appointed him to *oversee* the preaching of the gospel to the "circumcision," whereas Paul was given the *oversight* of preaching Christ's gospel to the "uncircumcised" Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-8).

God's people must not follow the example of those democratically-oriented *ministers* or *lay members* who may wish to have a "congregational" form of representative government ruling God's Church. You don't find that kind of government anywhere in the New Testament. The hands of the *evangelists* and *administrators* of God's Church must not be tied. God's people must not allow themselves to become mired in the quicksands of endless committee meetings. We must never yield to those who would like to see *THE PEOPLE* (Gk. *demos*) run God's Church. But, in following His form of *HIERARCHICAL* government, God's true ministers must truly be "servant leaders"!

Unfortunately, however, some have mistakenly understood "*hierarchical government*" to imply *AUTOCRATIC*, *ONE-MAN RULE*! What is a *hierarchy*? The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says that "*HIERARCHY* [is] a term commonly used in ecclesiastical language to denote the *aggregate of those PERSONS* who exercise authority within the Christian Church" (11th ed., Vol. XIII). *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines "hierarchy" as follows: "a ruling body of clergy organized into orders or ranks each subordinate to the one above it.... **a body of persons in authority**" (10th ed.). And the *New International Dictionary* defines *hierarchy* as "**A CONTROLLING GROUP of any kind**" (1966 ed., Vol. II). God's pattern of church government has been called by some *PYRAMIDICAL* in form-broad at the bottom and narrowing toward the top (cf. Ex. 18:13-26). But the top of that *pyramid* is somewhat flattened. The "apostles" at Jerusalem formed the flattened top of that pyramid, though Peter was given the *central position*, to preside over the apostles' deliberations. **However, Jesus Christ-the Church's true "Head"-forms the CAPSTONE of that pyramidal structure of divine government!**

No One Was to "Lord it Over" God's People!

Rather than acting *autocratically*, the leaders of the Global Church of God believe in the principle of *always acting on wise counsel*! "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; **But in the multitude of counselors there is safety**" (Prov. 11:14). "He who *heeds counsel* is wise" (12:15). "**Without counsel, plans go awry**, but in the multitude of counselors they are established" (15:22). "**Listen to counsel...** that you may be wise in your latter days" (19:22). "Every purpose is established by *counsel* [that is, by means of] *wise counsel* ..." (20:18). We need to learn to *seek*, then *heed*, God's solemn admonition to always try to get "a multitude of counsel" in all matters of importance.

Christ warned His disciples that no minister of His (regardless of his rank or experience) should ever act like a LORD-usurping "final authority" in deciding doctrinal or administrative matters. He said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles **LORD IT OVER** [*katakuriuo*] them, and those who are *GREAT* exercise *authority* over them. Yet it shall not be so among you" (Mt. 20:25-28). The *New English Bible* states that "**their great men make them feel the weight of authority.**"

The *Moffatt* version says, "the rulers of the Gentiles *lord it over* them, and **their great men OVERBEAR them**; not so with you." The *central idea* embodied in Christ's statement that His ministers shouldn't "lord it over" God's people is that they must never be domineering, overbearing, or *AUTOCRATIC* in the way they rule His Church. Did Peter obey Christ's instruction? He certainly did. Peter later repeated Christ's admonition forbidding God's ministers to ever *lord it over* others (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Did Christ ever place His Church under the supreme authority of one person

such as a "Pope" or a "super apostle" having sole authority over His Church? And have the ministers of Global ever taught, either orally or in writing, that the Global Church of God was governed by *ONE MAN*? Does anyone in Global have *autocratic* authority to make important decisions concerning either *doctrine* or major *administrative* matters? What form of Government does the Global Church of God use?

The Global Church of God officially teaches that the *final authority* in making *doctrinal* and *administrative* decisions rests *NOT* with *ONE MAN*, but with the members of the Council of Elders, some of whom also presently serve on the Board of Directors of the Church! The New Testament Scriptures, as well as Global's booklet on *CHURCH GOVERNMENT*, and Global's current Bylaws all exemplify the biblical teaching concerning God's type of *church government*!

In 1993, the Global Church of God published a booklet on church government, entitled "When Should You Follow Church Government?" A second, slightly revised edition, was published in 1995. That booklet explains that **in the early N.T. Church, *doctrinal* and *major administrative* decisions were made by a *GROUP OF MEN* (i.e. "apostles and elders") rather than by *ONE MAN*!**

That "Church Government" booklet also shows that in the N. T. Church, there was no "*Moses figure*" or "*Pope Peter*" figure "who towered over the other apostles and elders, giving them orders, threatening to 'fire' them.... But you do *not* find him [Peter] giving orders to the other apostles, sending them out on missions, or in any way 'lording it over' them..." (p. 12).

According to that booklet, what kind of leadership did Christ establish in the N.T. Church of God? **"It was a *COLLECTIVE SORT OF LEADERSHIP*. The responsibility for directing the Church was *NOT* then invested in a *SOLE* individual on earth. The decision was clearly through 'multitude of counsel'.... Peter... *NEVER unilaterally* decided *ANY* of those basic matters in the New Testament Church"** (pp. 12-13). In fact, Acts 8:12-25 reveals that it was "the *apostles* [who] 'sent' Peter and John to Samaria"-not a decision made by *either* Peter or John (p. 13).

The Church's booklet also mentions that "evidently **the local Church's *CONSENSUS-BUILDING LEADERSHIP*** [at Antioch]" sent the apostles Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to thrash out a doctrinal problem which then troubled the Church. **"Paul did not *unilaterally* make this decision [to go to Jerusalem]!** It was obviously made-*in concert with* the other ministers and leaders of the local church" (p. 14).

While attending that important Jerusalem Conference, **"God guided *many* apostles and elders to work in a brotherly, non-threatening atmosphere, and *no single ONE* of the apostles or elders towered over the others at that conference"** (p. 14).

The Church Government booklet adds, **"There is no *hint* of any *AUTHORITARIANISM*, highhandedness or threatening behavior on the part of *ANY* of the apostles.... And no one ever threatened to *fire* or *disfellowship* their fellow ministers except in the cases of plain heresy, directly causing division or moral turpitude"** (pp. 16-17).

Hierarchical Millennial Government

What kind of *world government* will there be when Christ's millennial Kingdom rules over the whole earth (Zech. 14:9; Jer. 3:17; Isa. 2:1-4)? Will it be hierarchical? Democratic? Or will it be some new form of government?

In that soon-coming Kingdom of God, David (ruling under Christ) will reign as "king" over all Israel (Ezek. 37:24; Jer. 30:9; Hosea 3:5), while each of the twelve apostles will be a ruler/governor over one of the "twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28-29). Other then-glorified Christians-those who "overcame" sin in this life-will then be given authority over "five cities," "two cities," etc. (Luke 19:17-18).

And when the glorious millennial Kingdom of God is set up on this earth, that *government* will be placed on the "shoulder" of Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Isa. 9:6-9)! His government will *not* be in the hands of a fickle "committee" of fallible humans who usually don't know very much about good government and therefore often find it difficult, if not impossible, to reach a *consensus*. As we have

seen, **Jesus Christ's ministers were never put in their offices by the vote of men.** Rather, they were *appointed* (ordained) directly by Him, or by His duly ordained ministers.

How should God's Church be governed? The Bible reveals that God has always governed through a *hierarchical* form of government—from God the Father, down through Jesus Christ, then to those human servants whom He appointed as His leaders.

Further, Christ established that same form of government to rule the N.T. Church of God. **He chose a group of God-fearing men**, the "apostles and elders," to direct the affairs of His Church. Through those men He would reveal His will and govern His Church.

But, most important of all—those who rule in God's government must be God-fearing, men and women of character and ability (Ex. 18:21-26; 1 Tim. 3:1-13)! God told David, "**He who rules over men must be just ruling in the fear of God**" (2 Sam. 23:3).

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(This is a *preliminary* "Doctrinal Study Paper")

CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Need to Clarify the Global Church of God *Bylaws*

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Addendum # 1 The Church's booklet on *CHURCH GOVERNMENT* plainly says the N. T. Church was governed by *GROUP OF MEN*, rather than by *ONE MAN!*

Addendum # 2 Some of the Powers of the *COUNCIL OF ELDERS* and the *BOARD OF DIRECTORS* of the Global Church of God

Addendum # 3 *Why did God's Church suffer such a DEVASTATING LOSS-following the death of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong?*

CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Does the New Testament clearly reveal the kind of *church government*

that Jesus Christ established to govern the N. T. Church of God?

by Raymond F. McNair

Should the Churches of God use the "democratic" principle of leadership? Or, should they follow an "autocratic" form of government-that is, *ONE MAN* having the "final say" on all important *doctrinal* and *administrative* matters? Why do some of the Churches of God believe the *local congregations* should run God's Church? Should God's people use a *congregational* form of church government? Or, is there some *other* kind of government which He wants His Church to utilize?

In order to find the answers to these questions, we must carefully examine the New Testament which clearly reveals the *basic principles of CHURCH GOVERNMENT* that God intended His people to follow!

The Need to Clarify the GCG Bylaws

Numerous members of the Council of Elders have felt it was necessary to clear up some of the potential *ambiguities* and *conflicts*, in the Bylaws of the Global Church of God, dealing with *church government*. This potential *confusion* needed to be eliminated, because "God is not the author of confusion... as in all CHURCHES OF THE SAINTS" (1 Cor. 14:33). One of the points of seeming conflict concerned whether one man (the Presiding Evangelist), or the **Council of Elders** and the **Board of Directors** should have the final say (the *authority* to determine) in all important issues which must be decided by the leadership of the Global Church of God.

Let us examine the Scriptures to see what they say regarding church government. Do the New Testament scriptures place the final authority for making important *doctrinal and administrative* church decisions in the hand of *ONE MAN*? Or, does the Word of God place final authority for deciding those important decisions in the hands of *A GROUP* of Spirit-led, God-fearing *MEN*?

Why Were *Twelve Apostles* Set Over God's N.T. Church?

Did Jesus Christ set *ONE MAN* in authority, under Him, over His Church? Did Jesus *not* understand the weaknesses of *human nature*-that all humans are subject to pride and vanity, greed, envy, feelings of self-importance and, especially in men, a lust for power? Didn't Christ understand that, generally speaking, *power corrupts*, and *absolute power corrupts absolutely*? Let us scrutinize the New Testament record to see what it says concerning the kind of *church government* that Christ set over His Church.

After Jesus had spent "all night in prayer to God... He called His disciples to Him; and from them He chose *twelve* whom He also named *APOSTLES* [*apostolos*, "one sent forth"]" (Luke 6:12-13). They were *sent forth* by God bearing His authority.

But what kind of authority and *leadership* did He expect His apostles to exemplify in their lives? Did He intend His *servants*, the ministers, to be *autocratic*-acting arbitrarily, without restraint? Or, did He intend that the leaders of His Church would base their *beliefs* and *actions* solely upon the Word of God-as understood and applied by a duly-authorized and empowered group of "apostles and elders"-or, as in our day, by a group of "evangelists and elders" of God's Church?

In other words, did Jesus Christ ordain *checks and balances* in His Church to serve as a *restraint* on those who might later seek to "lord it over" His people? Did He intend that a specially-chosen group of men govern His Church by faithfully using the biblical principle of decision-making through *CONSENSUS*, after first seeking "**a multitude of counsel**" (Prov. 11:14; 12:15; 15:22; 20:18)?

After Peter confessed that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," (Mt. 16:16), Jesus declared, "And I also say to you that you are Peter [*petros*, a little stone], and on this rock [*petra*, a massive stone-Christ] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give *you* the *keys* of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever *you* bind [forbid] on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever *you* loose [permit] on earth will be loosed in heaven" (vv.18-19). [Note. The N.T. Scriptures indicate that Peter was to take a leading [but *not* domineering] role among the *twelve apostles*. He took the lead in first preaching the gospel to the Jews (Acts 2), and was also the first apostle to take the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10).]

But did *only* Peter receive authority to *bind* and *loose*, or did *all the apostles* receive that same authority?

After Jesus had told His disciples how they were to handle problems which came up in His Church that would soon be established, He said: "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will *not* hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, *tell it to the CHURCH* [to adjudicate-cf. 1 Cor. 6:1-6]. But if he refuses even to hear the *church*, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

"Assuredly, I say to you, **whatever *YOU* [Christ's ministers] *bind* on earth will be *bound* in heaven, and whatever *YOU* loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that *if TWO OF YOU* shall agree on earth concerning anything that *THEY* ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where *two or three of YOU* are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them"** (Mt. 18:15-20; cf. John 20:23).

Was Christ implying that if any *two LAY MEMBERS* of His Church asked any thing, He would grant their request? Or, was He speaking specifically to His *CHOSEN MINISTERS* -meaning that whenever *THEY*, as *leaders* of the Church which He would soon "build," came together in prayer, asking God for an answer, it would "be done for them" as they requested? As we shall soon see, the book of Acts clearly reveals that God never gave the "brethren," the laymen, the authority to direct the affairs of His Church. They were not to be *directly* involved in making the important decisions which affected the *DOCTRINES* or *GOVERNANCE* of His Church.

The Apostle Paul clearly stated that Jesus was the "cornerstone" of the Church's unshakable "foundation," but the "apostles and prophets" were also part of *that foundation*: "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the *household of God, having been built on the foundation of the APOSTLES and PROPHETS, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone...*" (Eph. 2:19-20). The writings of the O.T. prophets and the N.T. apostles, including Christ's teachings, form the bedrock foundation of the N.T. Church. Both apostles and prophets functioned in the early New Testament Church. "Now Judas and Silas, themselves being *prophets* exhorted and strengthened the brethren [at Antioch] with many words" (Accts. 15:32; cf. 21:10-14). Silas soon teamed up with the Apostle Paul on his second missionary journey to encourage the brethren (vv. 34-41).

And Jesus Christ is Himself called an "Apostle" (Heb. 3:1).

Christ's Ministers Must Never "Lord it Over" Others!

What kind of leaders did Jesus intend His ministers to be? Were any of the apostles to "lord it over," in an *autocratic* manner, either their fellow apostles, or the brethren whom they were to serve? He makes that very clear: "**You know that the rulers of the Gentiles LORD IT OVER them, and those who are GREAT exercise authority over them.** Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become *great* among you, let him be your SERVANT. And whoever desires to be *first* among you, let him be your *slave*-just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to *serve*, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28).

Notice how the *New English Bible* translates verses 25 and 26: "You know that in the world, rulers *lord it over* their subjects, **and their great men make them feel the weight of authority; but it shall not be so with you...**" The *Moffatt* version says, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles *lord it over* them, and **their great men OVERBEAR them; not so with you.**" This world's leaders are arrogant, haughty, overbearing-AUTOCRATIC, dictatorial! But Christ's servants must not be autocratic/despotic!

Note how *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (10th ed.) defines the word *autocrat*: "AUTOCRAT [means] **ruling by oneself, absolute...** 1: a person... ruling by **unlimited authority** 2: one who has **undisputed influence or power.**" This same dictionary defines "autocratic" as "ABSOLUTE... DESPOTIC." And an "AUTOCRACY... [is] government in which **ONE PERSON possesses unlimited power.**" Of course, no one, either in *civil* or *ecclesiastical* governments, actually possesses, or can possess, completely "unlimited power."

Nearly all English translations of Matthew 20:25 use the English expression "lord it over." But what did Jesus really mean when He said His apostles were not to "lord it over" those to whom they ministered? *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary* says that "lord it over [means to] **DOMINEER**" (1991 ed.). Here are a few of the many titles of *lordship* still used in Britain: Lord Bishop, Lord Chamberlain, Lord High Chancellor, Lord Chief Justice, Lord Mayor.

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed.) defines the English noun "lord" as follows: "one that has achieved *mastery* or that exercises leadership or **GREAT POWER** in some area... a man of rank or high position." It speaks of one who "[lords] it over his friends"-to act like a lord; esp: *to put on airs.*"

Thus it is clear that Jesus did not want His ministers acting like "lords." They were not to "domineer," or "act like a lord [or] put on airs." They were not to have "**UNLIMITED AUTHORITY**"-were not to "possess unlimited power." Rather, they were to act like, and, in fact, they were to *be* truly humble *SERVANTS* to the flocks entrusted to their prayerful care and concern!

[box # 1]-----

Notice Mark's account of Christ's words concerning *not* lording it over God's people: "You know that those who are considered *RULERS* over the Gentiles *LORD IT OVER* [Gk. *katakurieuo*] them, and their great ones *exercise authority* over them. Yet it shall not be so among you" (10:42).

Luke's account of Christ's words are as follows: "The kings of the Gentiles *exercise LORDSHIP* over [katakurieuo] them that are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who *governs* as he who serves" (22:25-26).

What does this Greek word, *katakurieuo*, really mean? "**KATAKURIEUO**... *kata*, down (intensive)... to exercise, or gain, dominion over, to *LORD IT OVER*, is used of (a) the lordship of Gentile rulers, Matt. 20:25, A.V., 'exercise lordship,' R.V., 'LORD IT;' (b) the power of demons over men, Acts 19:16), A.V., 'overcame,' R.V., 'mastered;' (c) of the evil of *ELDERS IN LORDING IT OVER THE SAINTS* under their spiritual care, 1 Pet. 5:3" (*W.E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words*, 1970 ed., art. "DOMINION").

A Critical Lexicon And Concordance to the English And Greek New Testament, by Dr. E. B. Bullinger also defines the Greek words used when referring to "lording it over" someone: "[exercise] *LORDSHIP OVER*... 1. *kurieuo*... [margin renders this as 'OVERRULE'] 2. *katakurieuo* [means] to lord it against or over ANYONE" (p. 468).

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, by Arndt and Gingrich (1957 ed.) defines *katakurieuo* as follows: "1. *Become master, gain dominion over, subdue*... 2. *Be master, lord it (over), rule...over someone or something*." It then gives certain scriptures where this sense of this word is apparent: Gen. 1:28 (in Gk. transl.); Mt. 20:25; Mark 10:42.

[end of box #1]-----

The Apostles' Role in the Jerusalem Church

How did the early N. T. apostles-Peter, in particular-conduct themselves, according to the inspired record found in the book of Acts? Were they truly *humble* men, *servant leaders* of the Church of God? Or did they "lord it over" one another and the brethren? Furthermore, **how well did Peter, the leading apostle among the Twelve, follow Christ's instruction not to "lord it over" his fellow apostles and the people of God? Did Peter ever act autocratically-as though he were a "Pope"? Does the book of Acts reveal that Peter ever acted arbitrarily-or did he habitually, consistently work with the other apostles, as well as with the elders of God's Church?**

Peter's first epistle clearly reveals his attitude in regard to whether or not he believed in "lording it over" either his fellow apostles, or the brethren. He said, "The *ELDERS* who are among you I exhort, **I who am A FELLOW ELDER** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd ["feed" KJV] the *flock of God* which is among you, **servicing as OVERSEERS**, not by constraint but willingly, nor for dishonest gain but eagerly, **nor as being LORDS** over those entrusted [by God] to you; and when the *CHIEF SHEPHERD* appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Does the book of Acts show that, though Peter naturally took the lead in the early Jerusalem Church, he ever acted in an autocratic manner-ever "lorded it over" the other apostles or the brethren? Let us see how *he* and the "other apostles" worked together, as recorded in Acts.

Luke tells us that after Christ's resurrection, "Jesus... had given commandments to *the apostles* [not, just to Peter] whom He had chosen" (Acts 1:2). "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and *YOU* [all] shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (v. 8).

Shortly after Christ ascended to heaven, we see Peter exercising his servant-leadership position among the apostles. Realizing Judas was now dead, "**Peter stood up** in the midst of the disciples" and told them that since Judas had committed suicide, one had to be chosen to "take his office" (vv.15-20). He explained to the disciples that the one to be chosen must have been an eyewitnesses of

Christ's entire ministry, and His resurrection-"beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up..." (vv. 21-22).

"And **THEY proposed** ["appointed" KJV] *two*: Joseph called Barsabas... and Matthias. And *they prayed* and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two **YOU have chosen** to take part in this ministry and *apostleship* from which Judas by transgression fell.... And **THEY cast lots**, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with **the ELEVEN [apostles]**" (vv. 23). [Note. There is no mention of "casting lots" *after* the Day of Pentecost.] With Matthias' ordination as an apostle, this brought the total number of the apostles back up to *twelve*.

The second chapter of Acts tells us about the coming of God's Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, causing many of the Jews to wonder what was happening. Some even thought the disciples had had too much wine to drink (vv. 1-13). "**But Peter, standing up with the ELEVEN [apostles]**, raised up his voice..." and delivered a powerful sermon showing that Jesus, whom they had just crucified, was indeed the Christ: "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to **Peter and the rest of the apostles**, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do'" (v. 37). Verse 41 says that 3000 souls were baptized that very day!

"And they continued steadfastly in the **APOSTLES' DOCTRINE** and fellowship.... Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the [twelve] *apostles*" (vv. 42-43). We are told, repeatedly, that "the apostles" were all involved in this great Pentecost experience, with the result that thousands were converted. Note that those converts continued-*not* just in Peter's doctrine-but continued in the "apostles' doctrine."

Chapter 3 tells us that *the apostles, "Peter and John,"* worked closely together (vv. 1-11). Chapter 4 informs us that "about five thousand" believed the Word which they preached (v. 4). Peter and John were still working together (vv. 13, 19). "And with great power **the APOSTLES** [not just Peter] gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (v. 33). Then we learn that there were several disciples, including *Barnabas* (later called an *apostle*), "who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds... and laid them down at the *apostles' feet*" (vv. 35-37).

We then read about Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to Peter and to the Holy Spirit, and as a result of their terrible sin, they both dropped dead in Peter's presence (5:1-11). "And through the hands of **the apostles** many signs and wonders were done among the people" (v. 12). It was "the apostles"-not just Peter-who worked many miracles, resulting in "multitudes of both men and women" being converted, and many others were healed (vv. 15-16). God was working through all *twelve apostles*.

But the apostles' powerful ministry "filled [the Sadducees] with indignation [who then] laid their hands on **the APOSTLES** and put them in a common prison" (vv. 17-18). However, God sent an angel to release them from prison; but after the Jews again apprehended them, they reprimanded the apostles for preaching in Christ's name (vv. 19-28). "Then Peter and the *other [eleven] apostles* answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men' (v. 29). After beating the "apostles," they "let them go" (v. 40).

Chapter 6 tells us about the ordination of *seven deacons*, because "the number of the disciples was multiplying" and some of the widows were being "neglected." "**Then the TWELVE [apostles] called the multitude of the disciples unto them**" and told them, "seek out from among you *seven men* of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, *whom WE [apostles] may appoint* over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (vv. 1-4).

After choosing seven men, "*they set [them] before the apostles;* and when **THEY** [the apostles] had prayed, they laid hands on them. And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (vv. 6-7). Chapter 7 tells us about the death of one of those seven deacons named Stephen-the church's first martyr!

The Apostles Sent Peter And John to Evangelize

The eighth chapter of Acts informs us that, at this early period in the Church's history, a zealous, fanatical persecutor named Saul, spearheaded a "great persecution... against the church which was at

Jerusalem; and they were all *scattered* throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, **except the APOSTLES**" (v. 1). That severe persecution actually promoted the preaching of Christ's name and message because "those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word" (v. 4). As a result, many in Samaria repented and were baptized, including a "false convert," a sorcerer named "Simon" (vv. 5-15).

"Now when the **APOSTLES** who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, **THEY** [the apostles] **SENT** Peter and John to them, who when *they* had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.... Then *they* laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (vv. 14-15). A sorcerer named Simon was quite impressed by the apostles' power. "Now when Simon saw that **through the laying on of the APOSTLES' hands the Holy Spirit was given**, he offered them money [for God's Spirit]" (vv. 13, 18-19). But the apostle Peter sternly rebuked Simon and told him he had better repent of the wicked thought that he could purchase God's Spirit.

"So when **THEY** [Peter and John] had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans" (v. 25). **Notice that it was "the apostles" at Jerusalem who sent Peter and John to Samaria to assist the newly baptized Samaritan converts.** When they returned to Jerusalem, they reported back to the apostles and elders concerning the success of their ministry to the peoples of Samaria.

Chapter 9 recounts the conversion of *Saul* (renamed *Paul*), and says that God sent a disciple named *Ananias* to heal Paul's eyes and to be instrumental in Paul receiving God's spirit; after he was baptized, Ananias laid his hands on him, and he received the Holy Spirit (vv. 1-19). Immediately after Paul's conversion, he began preaching Christ in the synagogues at Damascus (vv. 20-25), then shortly afterward, went to Jerusalem. "And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But **Barnabas took him and brought him to the APOSTLES....** So he was with them at Jerusalem.... And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus... but they attempted to kill him," so the disciples sent him to the city of Tarsus (vv. 26-30). Barnabas' hospitable treatment of Paul caused the two of them to become very close friends. Later, they would be closely yoked together as God's chosen apostles to the Gentiles.

Chapter 10 gives an account of the conversion of Cornelius and his whole house. It shows Peter's natural *reluctance* to accept the Gentiles' conversion; he informed them that God, through a special vision, had shown him that He had *cleansed the Gentiles*, even as He had the Jews (vv. 1-48). But when Peter returned to Jerusalem, he was taken to task by those of the "circumcision" party, for having fraternized with the Gentiles: "Now **the APOSTLES** and *brethren* who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, 'You went in to *uncircumcised* men and ate with them'" (vv. 1-3). Peter then explained how God, by a vision, had revealed to him that he was to go to the house of a Gentile named Cornelius. After preaching the gospel to Cornelius' house, he baptized him and his family; further, Peter explained that God also gave them His Spirit (vv. 4-30).

We then learn that a number of Gentiles from Cyprus, Cyrene and Antioch were converted. "Then news of these things came to the ears of the **CHURCH in Jerusalem, and they [i.e., the church leaders] sent out Barnabas to ... Antioch**" (v. 22). "Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch" (vv. 25-26).

Next, we learn "that in the days of Claudius Caesar [Emperor, 41-54 A.D.]" a terrible famine occurred (v. 28). "Then **the disciples**, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the *brethren* dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and **sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul**" (vv. 29-30). "The disciples" (v. 29) included the *church leaders*, who were fully supported by the *lay members* at Antioch.

Chapter 12 mentions that King Herod "killed James the brother of John... [then] proceeded further to seize Peter also," and threw him into prison just before Passover (vv. 1-4). Again, God sent an angel and opened the prison doors for Peter, who then rejoined the disciples, telling them of his miraculous deliverance (vv. 5-17). He then told the disciples, "**Go, tell these things to JAMES** and to the

brethren" (v. 17). This particular James was the brother of Jesus, and served as pastor or overseer of the Jerusalem church (cf. Acts. 15:13-21).

We again pick up the story of Paul and Barnabas. "And Barnabas and Saul returned [to Antioch] from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they took with them John whose surname was **Mark**" (v. 25).

From this point onward, the book of Acts mentions very little concerning Peter or John. Hereafter, most of Acts is concerned, primarily, with the ministry of Paul and Barnabas and their fellow laborers, who ministered with them in their missionary journeys to Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia and much of Asia..

Paul And Barnabas Ordained Apostles by the Antioch Church

It is interesting to note that when *Paul* was baptized, and Ananias laid his hands on him, none of the apostles at Jerusalem were involved. Also, **when God determined to have Barnabas and Paul ordained as His apostles to the Gentiles, again the Jerusalem apostles had nothing to do with it.** Why was that? Because God did *not* appoint Peter to supervise the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles; but the evangelizing of the "uncircumcised" Gentiles was reserved, primarily, for Paul and his helpers (Gal. 2:1-9).

"Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: BARNABAS, Simeon... Lucius... Manaen... and SAUL. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me *Barnabas and Saul* for the work to which *I* have called them.' Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, **THEY [the Church leaders in Antioch] sent them away**" (Acts 13:1-3). When they began their evangelistic work among the Gentiles, we first read about the deeds of "*Barnabas and Paul*" (v. 7); but before long Paul took the lead, and thereafter **we find Paul mentioned before Barnabas**, except in a few places where Barnabas' name is put before Paul's. (vv. 43, 50). They continued working together in harmony for some years.

After Paul miraculously healed a lame man at Lystra, the people were ready to worship him and Barnabas, thinking they were gods (14:8-13). **"But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes"** and told the people it was wrong to worship them as though they were gods (vv. 14-18).

On Paul's and Barnabas' return trip to Antioch they revisited the cities where they had previously preached, and at that time they "*appointed elders in every church*, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (vv. 21-24). "Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to *Antioch*, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. And when they had come and gathered the *CHURCH* together, they reported all that God had done with them, that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed a long time with the disciples [at Antioch]" (vv. 25-28).

The Church's First Conference at Jerusalem

Shortly afterward, a perplexing problem arose in the Churches of God over whether the Gentile disciples had to be *circumcised* and keep the entire *law of Moses*.

The 15th chapter of Acts tells us about that Jerusalem conference-the first Christian church council ever held. Notice some of the very important decisions that took place at that all-important council of "apostles and elders" of the Christian churches.

What provoked the need for such a conference? "And certain men came down [to Antioch] from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are *circumcised* according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' Therefore, **Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, THEY [the Church leaders at Antioch] determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the APOSTLES and ELDERS about this question**" (vv. 1-2).

As they journeyed from Antioch to Jerusalem they "passed through Phoenicia and Samaria,"

informing the disciples about the "conversion of the Gentiles," thereby causing "great joy" among the disciples (v. 3).

"And when they had come to Jerusalem, **they were received by [1] the CHURCH and [2] the APOSTLES and [3] the ELDERS;** and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who *believed* rose up, saying 'It is necessary to *circumcise them* [Gentile converts], and to command them to keep the *law of Moses*'" (vv. 4-5). Apparently, this important issue was fanning the flames of *dissension*, not only in Antioch, but also in Jerusalem and certain other areas where Christ had been preached. What would the apostles and elders do about this divisive problem?

Who actually took part in the Jerusalem Conference? Were the decisions at that conference made by the *Church's leaders*? Or, did the "brethren" (i.e. the "Church," or laity) participate in that all-important council?

"**So the APOSTLES and ELDERS came together to consider this matter.** [Note. This church "council" only included the "apostles and elders," though the council's decision was *later* communicated to the church brethren in the Jerusalem Church.] "**And when there had been much dispute, PETER...**" explained to those assembled that God had already used him to open the door of evangelism to the Gentiles, and had graciously favored them, just as He had the Jews (vv. 6-9). "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (v. 10). It was only through God's "grace," said Peter, that both Jews and Gentiles would be saved. (v. 11).

Next, it was the turn of Paul and Barnabas-the "outsiders" at the conference-to speak up: "**Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to BARNABAS and PAUL declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles**" (v. 12).

Finally, *JAMES*, the pastor (Gk. *episkopos*, "overseer") of the Jerusalem Church, spoke up and corroborated what Peter, Paul and Barnabas had said (vv. 13-18). James, the "Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19), summed up the apostles' and elders' decision: "Therefore *I* judge that we should not trouble those from among the *Gentiles* who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood..." (Acts 15:19-20).

That settled the matter. It was *James*, the overseer of the Jerusalem Church of God, who pronounced the authoritative decision of the "apostles and elders." "**Then it pleased [1] the APOSTLES and [2] ELDERS, with [3] the whole CHURCH, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas, who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren [of the Jerusalem Church]...** They wrote this letter: 'The *APOSTLES*, the *ELDERS*, and the *BRETHREN*, To the brethren who are of the *Gentiles* in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greeting...'"

That official decision of the "*APOSTLES and ELDERS*," who had participated in the Council's debate, was then communicated by James and the other apostles to the Churches of God-through their epistle. They also sent chosen representatives from the Jerusalem Church to further verify the authenticity of their hand-delivered epistle. In their epistle, the Council informed the Gentile converts that physical *circumcision* and certain other O.T. *rituals* were not required of Gentile converts under the N. T. covenant. "And when *they* [the brethren at Antioch] read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement" (v. 31). "Judas and Silas [emissaries of the Jerusalem Church], themselves *PROPHETS* also, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them" (v. 32). *Judas* then returned to the apostles and the Jerusalem Church; but *Silas* preferred to remain in Antioch (vv. 33-34).

Shortly after the Jerusalem conference, Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement, which resulted in them separating. What caused their separation? Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them, but Paul strongly objected. "Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia [see Acts 13:13], and had not gone with them to the work. **Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.** And so Barnabas took *Mark* and sailed to Cypress; but Paul chose *Silas* and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God" (Acts. 15:36-41).

Note this important fact. Even though God had specially called Paul (Acts 9:1-31), and had commissioned him to oversee the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal. 2: 7-8), nonetheless **God had "called" both Paul and Barnabas to minister to the uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 13:1-4). Who was right in that sharp dispute between Paul and Barnabas? Later, the Apostle Paul came to see that Barnabas had been right in his assessment of John Mark.** Paul told Timothy "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11; cf. Col. 4:10). Clearly, this shows that two of God's ministers could *disagree* on an *administrative* point in certain situations in which God's will may not have been perfectly clear. In the case of Paul and Barnabas, from the time of their dispute, they apparently never again worked together as a team. However, Peter did recognize Paul as a faithful apostle of Christ, through whom God inspired certain New Testament Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Perhaps Paul's and Barnabas' disagreement and subsequent separation proved to be to the furtherance of their preaching of Christ's gospel, as they now formed *two teams*, instead of just one.

Paul and Silas then re-visited the Gentile churches, delivering the decision of the "apostles and elders" at Jerusalem to the churches which they visited: "And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, **which were determined by the APOSTLES and ELDERS at Jerusalem**" (16:4).

Paul Revisits Jerusalem Before Imprisonment in Rome

Some years later, Paul went back to Jerusalem, after first being warned that he would suffer imprisonment at Jerusalem if he did so (21:1-16). "And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day **Paul went in with us to JAMES [bishop of Jerusalem church], and ALL THE ELDERS were present.** When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry" (vv. 17-19).

They said to Paul, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed..." (v. 20). The *apostles and elders* at Jerusalem then informed Paul that he was being wrongly accused of teaching "all the *Jews* who are among the Gentiles to *forsake* Moses, saying that they ought not to *circumcise* their children..." (v. 21).

They counseled Paul, "Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken *a vow*. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and *keep the law*. **But concerning the Gentiles who believe, WE [not just one person] have written and decided that they should observe no such thing**, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality" (vv. 23-25).

Paul heeded their advice and saw to it that "an offering should be made for each one of them" (v. 26). He knew it was all right for him to do this, even though animal sacrifices were no longer *required*. Therefore, he even paid for certain offerings to be made at the temple, in order to keep from offending those Jews who did not yet understand the *liberty* which Christ had given to true Christians who believed on Him and His message (2 Cor. 10:32).

But, in spite of Paul having bent over backward in an attempt to avoid offending the Jews, it was not long before they made a number of false accusations against him; he promptly appealed to Caesar, and was soon on his way to Rome, to witness before many in that city. Apparently, it was not long afterward—after receiving a degree of liberty while in Rome (28:16-31)—that Paul was martyred, probably by Nero [Emperor, 54-68 A.D.] during Nero's persecutions (2 Tim. 4:6). Thus ended the life of a stout-hearted apostle, the most zealous of them all (2 Cor. 11:16-33)!

Did Christ Ever Put Paul Under Peter's Authority?

God's people have often pondered the matter of the proper type of "church government." Many have wondered just what was God's form of government, and how it was to operate. When we search the entire New Testament, we clearly see that God never authorized the Apostle Peter, or any other apostle, to act as an *autocrat* over His Church. Rather, Jesus Christ jealously holds the position of "Head" of the Church of God, the very Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23).

Why did Christ appoint *TWELVE APOSTLES*? As mentioned earlier, Christ fully realized that *power corrupts* and that *absolute power corrupts absolutely*. Even in the world, many despise those who are *overbearing*. They don't like to see one person exalt himself over others (Mt. 20: 25-28). [Note this modern example: When President Ronald Reagan was shot by a would-be assassin in March 1981, U.S. Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, told reporters, "**I'm in control here!**" But Haig was not the one who was authorized to take charge in case the president was incapacitated. Some believe Mr. Haig never recovered, politically, from his blunder of arrogating to himself such a place during that national emergency, following attempted assassination of Mr. Reagan.]

Through His chosen apostles, God would provide a balanced, stable government by which He would rule His Church. As divinely-appointed human leaders-under the living spiritual Head, Jesus Christ-the apostles were to always seek His guidance and blessing through a "multitude of counsel." There is not one *command*, or a single *example* anywhere in the New Testament, showing that Peter, or any apostle, was ever given autocratic authority over the other apostles. Under Christ's direction, Peter was to help guide God's Church in concert *WITH-not OVER!*-the *other apostles*, all working together in a cooperative team effort. Christ had commissioned him to exercise the general oversight of preaching of the gospel to the circumcision (Gal. 2:7-9).

The book of Galatians reveals that Christ called Paul in a special way and revealed His true gospel to him (1:11-14). "But when it pleased God... to reveal His Son in me... I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were *APOSTLES* before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see *PETER*, and remained with him fifteen days. **But I saw none of the *OTHER APOSTLES* except *JAMES, the Lord's brother*....** I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy'" (vv. 15-23).

Paul continues, "Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with *BARNABAS* and also took *Titus* with me" (2:1); and while at Jerusalem, he conferred with the apostles. "But those who seemed to be something... added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that **the gospel for the *uncircumcised* had been committed to *ME*, as the gospel for the *circumcised* was to *PETER*** (for He who worked effectively in *PETER* for the apostleship to the *circumcised* also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when *JAMES, CEPHAS [Peter], and JOHN*, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that *WE* should go to the *Gentiles* and *THEY* to the *circumcised*. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do" (vv. 6-10).

This scripture shows that the Apostle Paul was *not* under Peter's authority. Paul says, "**But when *PETER* had come to *Antioch*, I withstood him to his face, because *he* was to be blamed;** for before certain men came from *JAMES*, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even *BARNABAS* was carried away with their hypocrisy. **But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to *PETER* before them all,** 'If you, being a *Jew*, live in the manner of *Gentiles* and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews," (vv.11-14).

Clearly, God had never set Peter in authority over Paul. Furthermore, the inspired accounts found in the book of Acts reveal that it was "the apostles" who had made the decision to "send" certain of their numbers out to evangelize the Samaritans (Acts 8). Also, it was "the apostles and elders" who made the binding doctrinal decision at the Jerusalem Conference, mentioned in Acts 15:6-33. *Never* once do we see the Apostle *Peter* unilaterally making major *doctrinal* or *administrative* decisions. Neither do we see the Apostle *Paul* lording it over his long-time friend and co-worker, Barnabas.

How the Church Was Taken Over by "Grievous Wolves"

How was it possible for the *Worldwide Church of God* (formerly called the *Radio Church of God*-led by Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong for over 50 years) to be dismantled within a short span of a little over a decade? What caused church attendance at the Feast of Tabernacles to plummet from over 150,000 worldwide, to a small fraction of that number? What brought about the reduction in the worldwide distribution of *The Plain Truth* from about 8,000,000 to just a few hundred thousand? What caused

about three-fourths of the members of the WCG to leave? Why was Satan allowed to confuse, divide, discourage, embitter and scatter scores of thousands of disillusioned members, causing many of them to go back into the world?

The answer to those questions lies primarily in the fact that the WCG was run *autocratically*-with *ONE MAN* having full authority to make all major decisions. The WCG merely had an *ADVISORY COUNCIL OF ELDERS*, with no power to serve as "checks and balances" on any mistakes or excesses which the leaders of the corporate organization (the WCG) might wish to indulge in. Such an "Advisory Council" served the Work reasonably well under the wise leadership of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong; but such a *limited* "Advisory Council" proved to be a total disaster in the hands of unwise leaders.

What *inescapable conclusion* should we draw from examining the foregoing N.T. Scriptures-as noted in the Book of Acts, the first epistle of Peter (5:1-4), and Matthew's gospel (20:25-28)? **God never at any time put ONE MAN over His entire Church, either in the early N.T. Church, or anytime since!** Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong himself *never* claimed that God gave him the oversight over *all* of the members of God's Church scattered throughout the whole world. He never said that the only members comprising the spiritual Body of Christ were in the fellowship of the *Worldwide Church of God*. Mr. Armstrong did believe, however-and I think most of us so believed-that the majority of the Spirit-begotten children of God were at that time members of the WCG. On numerous occasions he said that he knew there were a number of true members of Christ's Church in the fellowship of the Church of God (7th day).

Many believe that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, in his capacity as an *apostle* in the Church of God, had a special commission from God. volume one of Mr. Armstrong's AUTOBIOGRAPHY illustrates a copy of his ordination certificate, stating that he was ordained an "apostle." As an *APOSTLE*, Mr. Armstrong wielded an authority *utterly unique* in our time. We know of no one in any of the scattered "Churches of God" who today even *claims* to be an apostle.

Someone might ask: "Well, didn't God bless Mr. Armstrong and those who voluntarily put themselves under the *corporate organization* of which he was the founder? Didn't God bless the Work very greatly under his leadership?"

Yes, He did. But we ministers-we who sincerely loved and highly respected Mr. Armstrong -have many times discussed the fact that Mr. Armstrong never established an empowered "Council of Elders." Rather, he appointed an "Advisory Council of Elders"-whose *responsibility* was limited to merely giving *advice* and *consent*, when called upon, concerning any important point of *doctrine*, practice, or pertaining to major *administrative* decisions relative to the Work. However, after the establishment of the Advisory Council of Elders in March 1981, I recall not one instance when Mr. Armstrong *ignored* the advice of the Advisory Council of Elders, that is, after a clear *majority* of members agreed on a particular point.

It is important to recall that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote a letter to the "Brethren and Co-Workers" of the Worldwide Church of God on March 19, 1981, in which he explained to the brethren and co-workers why he was establishing an *Advisory Council of Elders*, in the wake of the traumatic events which the Worldwide Church of God experienced, as a result of the California State-imposed "Receivership."

Mr. Armstrong says, "Beginning with the massive legal attack on this Church by the State of California, January 3, 1979, sweeping changes were necessarily made in the organizational structure of the Church and Work.... Through Solomon God says that IN MULTITUDE OF COUNSELORS there is safety. I have always followed that principle, calling from time to time on various ones competent in whatever field was in question, for advice and counsel before making the decision. I have used the board members of both the Ambassador College corporation and the Worldwide Church of God, Inc., board as counselors...."

"I have formed **the new ADVISORY COUNCIL OF ELDERS**. That Council, at present, is composed of the following experienced elders, all of many years' faithful and loyal experience as ministers in God's Church. The [Advisory] Council of Elders, as of now, consists of **Dibar Apartian**, Dean Blackwell, Robert Fahey, Ellis LaRavia, **Raymond McNair**, Leroy Neff, Joseph Tkach, Leon Walker and, as adviser to the Council, Ralph Helge" (p. 5).

Not long afterward, Mr. Armstrong added a few more members, including **Dr. Roderick C. Meredith**, to the Advisory Council of Elders. But, again note, that neither Mr. Armstrong, nor his successor, Mr. Joseph W. Tkach, ever empowered the Advisory Council with any real authority to block any unwise *doctrinal* or *administrative* decisions that a new Pastor General might make in the future. **We on the Advisory Council were limited, primarily, to giving counsel-with NO REAL AUTHORITY!**

That *powerlessness* of the Advisory Council of Elders almost proved to be the Church's "Achilles' heel"! Speaking of the Church which He was about to build, Christ solemnly promised that "**the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it**" (Mt. 16:18). That alone explains why remnants of Christ's true Church still survive the apocalyptic devastation which God recently allowed to befall the corporate organization, the WCG.

The utter *impotence* of the WCG's Advisory Council was made painfully manifest-both to God's Church and to the world-in the wake of what happened, shortly after the death of the Pastor General in January 1986. Did the Church of God learn an important lesson from that bitter experience? Or, must we have a repeat of this sad chapter of our history before learning that God never intended His church to be run autocratically-by the decisions of *ONE MAN*?

In Retrospect-What Might Have Been!

Some believe that *if* Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong had truly *empowered* a Council of Elders before his death, giving them the authority to make all of the BIG DECISIONS-all *doctrinal issues, major financial and administrative decisions, and supervision of the hiring and firing of all employees, ministers and top-level officers of all the Church-run corporations*-it is highly unlikely that God's Church would have suffered the traumatic disasters that we experienced.

What was the result of an *unempowered* Advisory Council of Elders? Would they have the power to check a wholesale slide toward apostasy? Certain ministers, who later proved to be totally *against* the Church's teachings, were given control of the WCG, including its corporate assets-lock, stock and barrel! God's true servants lost everything-except those faithful brethren who had to leave their former corporate organization in order to *re-form* into various corporate bodies that have continued to teach and live by the Word of God. This made it possible for "grievous wolves" to be seated in the cockpits of power in the Church, and enabled them to scatter God's flock (Acts 20:28-29). Why did the Great God permit this great *apostasy*? God Almighty *allowed* this to happen in order to test each and every member of the true Body of Christ. He wanted to see who would faithfully follow the Word of God, rather than blindly follow the words and dogmas of puny men!

If Mr. Armstrong had entrusted the top-level decisions of Christ's Church to a group of Spirit-filled, God-fearing, competent men (a properly functioning Council of Elders-instead of an *Advisory* Council of Elders), I feel certain that the corporate organization known as the Worldwide Church of God would have continued to maintain the true doctrines of the Bible. Further, the corporate assets would, I believe, still be under the control of the spiritual leaders of God's true Church.

Even though Jesus Christ has always retained the title of "Head" of the Church of God (the Body of Christ), nonetheless the New Testament record clearly demonstrates that the kind of *Church organization/government* which Jesus established was never intended to function *autocratically*, but was to be under the supervision of a *group* of tried and tested leaders, the "*apostles and elders.*" By extension, when there are no apostles, God's Church should be guided by a group of "*evangelists and leading elders.*" The Bible and secular history reveal that the apostles faithfully kept God's Church on track, both *doctrinally*, and *administratively*. That "group" of chosen, Spirit-filled men did steer God's early N.T. Church safely through those very troublous times-in spite of the many persecutions and other trials that befell the Church during that first century A.D.

In like manner, today, in the Global Church of God, a group of faithful, tried and tested Church leaders (working through the **Council of Elders** and the **Board of Directors**) must, collectively, steer that corporate body, which is known as Global Church of God, through the "perilous times" in which we are now living (2 Tim. 3:1-5)?

The real strength of Christ's Twelve Apostles lay in the fact that they, augmented by the *elders* at

Jerusalem, served as the early N.T. Church's "council of elders"-whom Christ empowered to decide all important matters of *doctrine* and *administration*-by exercising the principle of "multitude of counsel"-rather than any *ONE* of the apostles acting arbitrarily, autocratically, or dictatorially. **Christ had strictly forbidden His ministers, the apostles, to "lord it over" (act autocratically) in administering God's Church** (Mt. 20:25-28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). However, this does not mean to imply that the apostles ever resorted to *democracy*, allowing the congregation (i.e. the non-ordained *brethren*) to dictate how His Church was to be run. Of course, the apostles needed, and undoubtedly received, much input from the *lay members* of the Church; but the *brethren* were never authorized by God to run His Church. Christ placed that responsibility entirely upon the shoulders of a small group of trained, tried and dedicated ministers-God's *APOSTLES* (including Paul and Barnabas), as well as the *elders* at *Jerusalem*.

Furthermore, God *did* establish *loving authority* (i.e. *government*) in His Church, from God the Father through Christ, the Head of His Church, then on down through the evangelists, pastors, deacons and the brethren. "And He Himself [i.e. God] gave some to be *APOSTLES*, some *PROPHETS*, some *EVANGELISTS*, and some *PASTORS* and *TEACHERS*, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the *BODY OF CHRIST*..." (Eph. 4:11-12). Today, however, the ministers of the Churches of God agree that there are no *apostles* or *prophets* functioning in the true of God.

[box # 2]-----

However, the *leader* of one church (the Philadelphia Church of God), claims to have received a special revelation from God, called *Malachi's Message* (Gerald Flurry, *The Philadelphia Trumpet*, Sept./Oct., 1992, art. "The Little Book"). Mr. Flurry says, "Some of us may have known a few details of *Malachi's Message* BEFORE IT WAS PRINTED. Two or three people have said they understood most of it before it was written. THAT IS A HORRIBLE FALLACY! *Malachi's Message* was delivered to me and the PCG [Philadelphia Church of God] in 1989. A MIGHTY ANGEL DIRECTLY FROM GOD REVEALED IT! There was no need for a *mighty angel* to come if a few already understood the message! I hope all of us would challenge such views. *Malachi's Message* is a *new vision from a mighty angel*. It's a NEW REVELATION-not something somebody already knew! This *new revelation* [in *Malachi's Message*] is God's way of saying that we must give the little book a special importance and the majesty it deserves" (p. 8).

Mr. Flurry appears to sincerely believe his *little book* entitled *Malachi's Message* is the "little book" mentioned in Revelation 10:1-11. But God's people must heed Christ's stern warning: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book; **If anyone adds to these things [that is, adds to God's Word], God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book;** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19).

[end of box # 2]-----

Does God's government extend further than to God's true ministers? In a larger sense, the government of God extends right on down to each *lay member* of the congregation. However, **God's ministers have absolutely no authority whatsoever to interfere with a husband's/father's God-given duty to serve as "head" of his own family** (1 Cor. 11:1-3; 1 Tim. 3:4-12; 5:8). Every male householder has been given divine authority to function as the "head" of his own household (1 Tim. 3:5; 5:8). God plainly says that "the HEAD of every woman is *man*" (1 Cor. 11:3). And God's government even includes the "older women" who are empowered by God's Word to be "*teachers* of good things-that they admonish the young women [and] to be *homemakers*..." (Tit. 2:3-5).

Women are not, however, to teach from the pulpit (1 Cor. 14:34-37). When it concerns *ecclesiastical matters* God says, "Let your women keep silent in the churches; for *they* are not permitted to speak; but they are to be *submissive*, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church"(vv. 34-35).

Even though there are no *apostles* in God's Church today, it is certain that God still wants us to follow the same biblical principle that the early N.T. *apostles* utilized-making important decisions regarding all important doctrinal and administrative Church matters through the *combined* input and

counsel of those tried and tested men who serve on the Council of Elders, some of whom also serve on the Board of Directors. The Board, in fact, serves as a *smaller council*, which for legal reasons is necessary to handle important day-to-day decisions of the Work. Six of the seven members of the Board are also members of the Council of Elders.

All members of the Council of Elders agree that we should *not* take the same route that some of the Churches of God have recently taken in regard to *Church governance*. The leaders of one newly-formed Church corporation did *not* confine their decision-making authority to the *ministers only!*

The Global Church of God believes it is contrary to the plain N.T. pattern of government to allow God's Church to be ruled by a SOLE individual-i. e., ONE MAN-who is empowered to make all major decisions regarding *doctrine* and *Church administration*. The N. T. clearly reveals that Peter never *usurped* a position of authority over the other *ELEVEN APOSTLES*. However, God did appoint him overseer over the preaching of the Word to the "circumcision" (Gal. 2:7-8). Likewise, Paul was given the oversight of proclaiming the Gospel to the "uncircumcision" (same verse).

Those of us who serve as members on the Council of Elders of the Global Church of God must not follow the example of those democratically-oriented ministers or lay members who may wish to have a "congregational" form of representative government ruling God's Church. You will never find that kind of government anywhere in the New Testament. We must not tie the hands of the leading *evangelists* and *administrators* of the GCG. We must not allow ourselves to become mired in the quicksands of endless committee meetings. We must never yield to the pressure of those who would like to see *the people* (Gk. *demos*) run God's Church. By following God's **HIERARCHICAL form of government**, we ministers must prove to God's people that we truly are "servant leaders"! Unfortunately, however, some have mistakenly understood "*hierarchical government*" to imply AUTOCRATIC, ONE-MAN RULE!

What is a *hierarchy*? The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says that "HIERARCHY [is] a term commonly used in ecclesiastical language to denote the *aggregate of those PERSONS* who exercise authority within the Christian Church" (11th ed., Vol. XIII). *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines "hierarchy" as follows: "a ruling body of clergy organized into orders or ranks each subordinate to the one above it.... a body of persons in authority" (10th ed.). And the *New International Dictionary* defines *hierarchy* as "*A CONTROLLING GROUP of any kind*" (1966 ed., Vol. II). God's N.T. pattern of church government has been called, by some, *pyramidal* in form-broad at the bottom and narrowing toward the top (cf. Ex. 18:13-26). But the top of that pyramid is somewhat flattened. The "apostles and elders" at Jerusalem formed the flattened top of that pyramid. **But, Jesus Christ-the Head of God's Church-forms its topmost CAPSTONE!**

Conclusion-Government Through "Multitude of Counsel"

The leadership in the Global Church of God must heed God's Word concerning the necessity for us to *always act on wise counsel!* "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; **But in the multitude of counselors there is safety**" (Prov. 11:14). "He who *heeds counsel* is wise" (12:15). "**Without counsel, plans go awry**, but in the multitude of counselors they are established" (15:22). "**Listen to counsel** and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days" (19:22). "Every purpose is established by *counsel*; By *wise counsel* wage war" (20:18).

Today, perhaps as never before, God's people are locked in a titanic spiritual battle (Eph. 6:10-18). More than ever, we need to learn to follow God's Word which admonishes us all to *seek*, then *heed*, God's solemn admonition to always try to get "a multitude of counsel" in all matters of importance.

The people of God must learn from the **wretched example of Rehoboam**, king of Judah, who rejected the "counsel of the old men" and as a result lost ten of the twelve tribes of Israel (1 Kings 12:6-20)? The Global Church of God strives to do more than pay "lip service" to God's command to always seek "a multitude of counsel" in all important undertakings. We must not only *seek*, but need to *heed*, the combined wisdom and experience of the men who have been appointed to the Council of Elders and the Board of Directors of the GCG.

Christ's admonition found in Matthew 20:25-26 shows that no one minister (regardless of his rank or experience) should have "final authority" in deciding all important doctrinal or

administrative issues which come up in God's Church! Isn't that the *central idea* embodied in Christ's statement that His ministers should never "lord it over" God's people (Mt. 20: 25-28)? And didn't the Apostle Peter reiterate Christ's admonition that forbids God's ministers to ever *lord it over* others (1 Pet. 5:1-4)?

The members of the Council of Elders must always seek to have a free, open, and *unemotional* approach to all matters submitted to the Council for a decision. Jesus Christ has promised that where "two or three" of us meet together to implore His decision, He will definitely answer our heartfelt prayers (Mt. 18:19-20).

On February 24, 1998, the Council of Elders of the Global Church of God passed a unanimous resolution declaring, and reiterating, the Church's position that the final authority in making doctrinal and major administrative decisions rests not with ONE MAN, but with the members of the Council of Elders, some of whom also serve on the Board of Directors! The Council also confirmed that the New Testament Scriptures, the Bylaws of the GCG and Dr. Roderick C. Meredith's statements-as published in *When Should You follow Church Government?*, pp. 11-19-correctly express the biblical teaching concerning *church government*, and therefore, should be followed by the Global Church of God.

We members of the Council of Elders know that our loving heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ (the real *Head* of His Church!) will direct us in reaching the right decision-**His decision!**-in all these matters that we sincerely ask of Him!

* * * *

ADDENDA

Addendum # 1 THE CHURCH'S BOOKLET ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT PLAINLY SAYS THE N. T. CHURCH WAS GOVERNED BY A GROUP OF MEN, RATHER THAN BY ONE MAN!The following important points relative to N. T. *church governance* are clearly stated in the Global Church of God's booklet ("**When Should You Follow Church Government?**"), published in 1995:

The author, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, asks, "Was there in the N.T. Church any example of a human leader acting *asa 'Moses figure'* or a '**Pope Peter**,'" who towered over the other apostles and elders, giving them orders, threatening to 'fire' them? I cannot refer you to any Scripture illustrating this style of 'church government' BECAUSE IT IS NOT THERE!..." (p. 12).

"But you do *not* find him [Peter] giving orders to the other apostles, sending them out on missions, or in any way 'lording it over' them..." (p. 12).

Commenting on the selection of the six deacons ordained by the twelve apostles, mentioned in Acts 6, Dr. Meredith says: "It was a **COLLECTIVE SORT OF LEADERSHIP**. The responsibility for directing the Church was *not* then invested in a **SOLE** individual on earth. The decision was clearly through '**multitude of counsel**' (Prov. 24:6 KJV), and then by 'appointment'-not voting. ALL the apostles listened to this counsel and then decided, together, whom to appoint. Peter was not the Pope! He **NEVER unilaterally** decided ANY of those basic matters in the New Testament Church" (pp. 12-13).

Dr. Meredith continues, "Now notice Acts 8:12-25. Here we find the inspired record of how **the APOSTLES 'sent' Peter and John to Samaria**. No 'Pope Peter, pontiff maximus,' here, either! Having the dominant personality, Peter did take the lead over John in dealing with Simon, but 'they' returned to Jerusalem and evidently BOTH of them preached the Gospel along the way" (p. 13).

Then Dr. Meredith comments on the first ministerial conference held in the N.T. Church, as mentioned in Acts 15: "It is the inspired record of what was undoubtedly the MAJOR Ministerial Conference... of the Apostolic Age. If there were ever a time when Peter would sit in the *chief seat*, give orders to the other apostles, and *totally dominate*, this would have been it!" (p. 13).

"The entire approach of the original *apostles* and *elders* was NOT: 'Who's in charge here? I'd better go along or they may fire me!' Rather, the administrative style was-as Peter himself later wrote, 'All

of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility" (1 Pet. 5:5).

"Notice what happened then. 'They'-evidently **the local Church's CONSENSUS-BUILDING LEADERSHIP**-determined that Paul and Barnabas with *others*, 'should go up to Jerusalem.' Note that **Paul did not unilaterally make this decision!** It was obviously made-*in concert with* the other ministers and leaders of the local church. And so Paul and others were to go up to the apostles (plural) and ELDERS (plural) about this question" (p. 14).

"*No hint* that they were to go and present themselves before 'Pope Peter' and get HIS decision. For, again, there WAS NOT A MOSES in the New Testament Church! **God guided many apostles and elders to work in a brotherly, non-threatening atmosphere, and no single ONE of the apostles or elders towered over the others at that conference**" (p. 14).

"So being SENT on their way by the CHURCH (*not* Paul's own decision)... And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the CHURCH, and the APOSTLES, and the ELDERS' (vv.3-4)" (pp. 14-15).

Speaking of the first Jerusalem Conference, Dr. Meredith says, "**The APOSTLES and ELDERS came together to consider the matter**" (v. 6)" (pp. 14-15). "But notice that Peter did *not* issue some decree, or make the final decision. He merely expounded what God had done and appealed to them to consider this" (p. 15).

"**Finally, the PRESIDING APOSTLE AND PASTOR of the Jerusalem Church of God, JAMES, spoke up. It was fitting that he should summarize and state what was obviously the decision of the conference....** 'Therefore, I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God' (v. 19)" (p. 15).

"Then it pleased the APOSTLES and ELDERS, with the WHOLE CHURCH, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas' (v. 22)" (pp. 15-16). "They [*not* just Peter or James] wrote this letter by them: the APOSTLES, the ELDERS and the BRETHERN, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.... It seemed good to US, being assembled with *ONE ACCORD*, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul' (vv. 23-25)" (p. 16).

"**There is no hint of any AUTHORITARIANISM, highhandedness or threatening behavior on the part of ANY of the apostles.** The inspired account notes that Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James all gave what may have been *major addresses*. All were apparently listened to and received with the same respect. And it was James, not Peter or Paul, who issued the summary conclusion of the matter" (p. 16).

Later, when Paul and Barnabas *disagreed* on whether or not to take Mark with them on their second missionary journey, they parted company. "Then the *contention* became so sharp that they parted from one another' (v. 39). But did Paul ever threaten to *fire* Barnabas over this? Not even a *hint* of such a thought!" (pp. 16-17).

"**And no one ever threatened to fire or disfellowship their fellow ministers except in the cases of plain heresy, directly causing division or moral turpitude**" (p. 17). On another occasion, Dr. Meredith mentions that "Paul openly REBUKED [Peter] to his face! Did Peter pull rank, threaten to fire Paul or any such thing? Never! The obvious conclusion is that Peter humbly *took the rebuke*, learned from it and forgave Paul *if* there was any unnecessary harshness" (p. 17).

Thus we see that, in the New Testament Church of God, neither Peter nor Paul ever sat in an exalted position *above* the other apostles. They all worked together in concert-by CONSENSUS-even though *both* had been given separate areas in which they were responsible for *overseeing* the preaching of Christ's gospel (Gal. 2: 7-9).

Addendum # 2 POWERS OF THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS AND THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE GLOBAL CHURCH OF GOD The following excerpts, taken from the **Bylaws of the Global Church of God** (March 16, 1998), explain some of the important powers given to: 1) The *Council of Elders*, and 2) The *Board of Directors* of the Global Church of God:

SOME OF THE POWERS OF THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS: "To meet *at least* three times annually, and to have *final authority* to establish the *mission, goals and the overall direction of the Work and the Church, including administrative matters, except for the powers specifically given in the Bylaws to the Board and the Presiding Evangelist*. It is intended that the Council also give advice and counsel to the Presiding Evangelist *and* to the Board of the Church" [Art. V, Sec. 1 (a)].

Further, the Council of Elders is "To have **final authority over ALL major or fundamental DOCTRINAL ISSUES**. A consensus of at least *90 percent* of the members of the full Council would be required to change any major or fundamental doctrine. Major, or fundamental, doctrines are those as defined in the Church's official **Statement of Beliefs**, as published and revised from time to time under the direction and with approval of the Council" [Art. V, Sec. 1 (b)].

Sections (c) and (d) empower the Council of Elders to remove the "Presiding Evangelist" or "any other member of the Council of Elders"-if **illegal**, or "gross **immoral** behavior or **spiritual departure** from established doctrine," is practiced.

Section (e) empowers the Council of Elders to choose a successor, or to either accept or reject (by *75 percent* of the members) any successor which the Presiding Evangelist might have nominated, before his death, or prior to any serious incapacity.

Section (f) empowers the Council "To choose a successor Presiding Evangelist by a *75 percent* consensus in the event of the full Council overriding the Presiding Evangelist's nominee or in the absence of a nominee."

SOME OF THE POWERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Section 1 describes the "**General corporate powers** [of the Board]. The Business and affairs of the corporation shall be managed, and all corporate powers shall be exercised, by or under the direction of the Board of Directors" (ARTICLE VIII, Sec. 1).

(b) "**Specific powers**. Without prejudice to these general powers, and subject to the same limitations, the **DIRECTORS shall have the power to:**

(i) "**SELECT and REMOVE all OFFICERS, agents, and EMPLOYEES of the corporation; prescribe any POWERS and DUTIES for them that are consistent with the law, with the articles of incorporation, and with these Bylaws; to fix their COMPENSATION.**"

1. "make appointments to the COUNCIL OF ELDERS."

(c) "**Vacancies-how filled**. The chairman or any member of the Board may nominate a director or directors at any time to fill any vacancy or vacancies. The appointed nominee must be approved by 75 percent of the full board."

(d) "**Term of service for members of the Board**. Except for the chairman, members of the Board shall serve until: (i) resignation, (ii) death, (iii) removal by 75 percent of the full Board, or (iv) removal by the Council of Elders in accordance with Article V hereof."

Section 10 states that "A *majority* of the authorized number of directors [at present, *seven*] shall constitute a QUORUM for the transaction of business."

ARTICLE IX empowers the Board of Directors to "designate one or more committees... to serve at the pleasure of the board." In addition, Section 3 says, "The Council of Elders may, by resolution adopted by two-thirds of the Council Members, form and dissolve a committee, and appoint and remove any singular member of the committee or the entire committee, consisting of at least seven Council Members [out of a total present membership of 13], to serve at the pleasure of the Council. The committee, to the extent provided in the resolution of the Council and permitted under the law, shall have the authority vested in the Council."

ARTICLE X, Section 3 says, "The Board of Directors may appoint, and may authorize the chairman of the Board or the president or another officer to appoint, *SUBORDINATE OFFICERS* that the business of the corporation may require, each of whom shall have the title, hold office for the period,

have the authority, **and perform the duties specified in the Bylaws or determined from time-to-time by the Board of Directors.**"

Section 4 says, "Subject to Article VIII, Section 2 hereof, and subject to the rights, if any, of an **officer under any contract of employment, any officer may be removed, with or without cause, by the Board of Directors, at any regular or special meeting of the Board,** or except in case of an officer chosen by the Board of Directors, by an officer on whom such power of removal may be conferred by the Board of Directors."

ARTICLE XII, Sections 1 and 2 mandate the *keeping of proper books* of the Corporation. Section 3 says, "Every director shall have absolute right at any reasonable time to inspect all books, records and documents of every kind and the physical properties of the corporation and each of its subsidiary corporations. This *inspection by a director* may be made in person or by an agent or attorney, and the right of inspection includes the right to copy and make extracts of documents."

ARTICLE XIV, regarding AMENDMENT of the Bylaws, says, "**These Bylaws may be adopted, amended, or repealed by the BOARD OF DIRECTORS.**"

Addendum # 3 WHY DID GOD'S CHURCH SUFFER SUCH A DEVASTATING LOSS-FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF MR. HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG? Here is an enumeration of some of the *serious damages* which God's Church suffered during recent decades-which damages were due, either wholly or in part, to the fact that the Church had no Council [until March 19, 1981], or, later, only had an *Advisory* Council of Elders, rather than a *fully empowered* Council of Elders to check the errant actions of its corporate officers: 1) The church allowed a high church official to continue holding important church offices in spite of known moral problems which, biblically speaking, many believed disqualified him; 2) The Church authorized the purchase of *two corporate jets* (Did we really need *two*?); 3) It made the decision to sink millions into a secular magazine, named *QUEST*; 4) The Church allowed certain *top men* to function in the Work who, in the view of numerous church officials, sought undue *power* and their own *selfish gain*; 5) Officials of the Church/Work poured many millions of dollars into numerous projects that had little or no relation to its two-fold commission: *preaching of the true Gospel* to all nations, and "feeding of the flock of God." *If* a fully empowered Council of Elders had existed at that time, it is believed that at least some of those millions would *not* have been spent in such a manner!

6) **And last, but not least in importance, a fateful one-man decision was made to hand over all corporate power to a SOLE person, who in the judgment of many was unqualified-either by spiritual maturity or by ecclesiastical education and experience-to manage the spiritual affairs of God's Church, or the business affairs of the large corporate organization (WCG) and all its ancillary branches.** What were the *tragic results* of that catastrophic decision to hand *total control* of the Church and all of its assets over to ONE MAN?

Truly, the resultant *spiritual* and *financial* costs to God's people have been *incalculable!* Within about a decade, a thriving Church went from a total worldwide attendance of approximately 150,000 to about 40,000. Income plummeted from over \$200 million per annum, to approximately \$40 million. Readership of the church's flagship magazine, *The Plain Truth*, shrank from over 8 million copies per month, to a few hundred thousand.

But, most tragic of all, scores of thousands of people became confused, bewildered, hurt and totally disillusioned-resulting in many drifting back into the world! Did Jesus Christ ever ordain that His Church would be run, AUTOCARTICALLY, by ONE MAN? NEVER!

P.S.

The seventh member of the Boards of Directors of the GCG, a woman, obviously is *not* a member of the Council of Elders. Some members of the Council and also of the Board believe the Bible reveals that a woman should *not* sit on the Board, exercising authority over God's ministry. Presently, the GCG Bylaws empower the seven-member Board of Directors which, in turn, *appoints* new members to the Council of Elders. What, if anything, does the Word of God say concerning whether a woman should hold a seat on the Board of Directors? God inspired the Apostle Paul to say, "And I do *not* permit a woman to teach or to have *authority* over a man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim. 2:11; cf. 1 Cor.

14:33-38).

June 11, 1998

Dear Brethren,

Greetings from San Diego! My wife and I recently returned from Toronto, Canada. We had wonderful Pentecost services and a very fine and inspiring "open house" service on the weekly Sabbath, which included 80 new people who had never attended with us before! Most of them have come into contact with Global through our telecast over the VISION network. *Please pray* that many of them will make the decision to start attending Church and eventually become begotten sons and daughters of God.

In this letter, I want to discuss a vital issue with all of you. As all of you know, the subject of Church government is a hot topic among the various branches of the Church of God. Our Council of Elders has thoroughly discussed the matter in recent meetings and now I want to share our conclusions with you. Mr. Raymond McNair, the Vice-Chairman of our Doctrinal Team, has assisted me in drafting this letter.

I want to explain *how* we function as a Church and the specific pattern of Church government that we believe Christ has led us to follow. Some people want us to go to one extreme or the other. But the Council of Elders-*including myself*-has *unanimously* chosen to avoid authoritarian "one-man rule" on the one hand and democracy, politicking and confusion on the other. For *neither* of these extremes follows the New Testament pattern of Church Government. We want to assure you that, with *Christ's form of government firmly established in Global*, the ministry is completely dedicated to continuing to work together in genuine love, unity and brotherhood. By diligently following the biblical form of *hierarchical* government in Global, we fully expect to continue to grow in real unity and togetherness-with the goal of finishing the Work that God has called us all to do.

From the outset, brethren, we informed God's people in Global that the form of government we use would not involve *rule by ONE MAN*. As I explained in our "Church government" booklet, there was no "Moses figure" or some kind of "Pope Peter" who "towered over the other apostles and elders, giving them orders, threatening to 'fire' them.... You do *not* find [Peter] giving orders to the other apostles, sending them out on missions, or in any way 'lording it over' them...." (*When Should You Follow Church Government*, 1993 and 1995, p. 12).

In that booklet, I made it very clear what kind of servant leadership Jesus Christ established in His Church: "It was a *collective sort of leadership*. The responsibility for directing the Church was *NOT* then invested in a *SOLE* individual on earth. The decision was clearly through 'multitude of counsel'.... Peter...*NEVER unilaterally decided ANY of those basic matters* in the New Testament Church" (pp. 12-13). Our booklet also explains Acts 8:12-15, revealing that it was "the apostles [who] 'sent' Peter and John to Samaria"-not a unilateral decision by *either* Peter or John (p. 13).

Brethren, if you will carefully read our booklet on Church government, you will see that it clearly states, "Evidently the local Church's *consensus-building leadership*" at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem in order to participate in the Church's decision concerning whether the Church ought to enforce "circumcision" and the "law of Moses" on Gentile converts (Acts 15:5, 24). It further says, "Paul did not *unilaterally* make this decision! It was obviously made-in a brotherly manner-*in concert with* the other ministers and leaders of the local church" (p. 18).

Our Church government booklet also points out that "God guided *many* apostles and elders to work in a brotherly, non-threatening atmosphere, and *no single ONE* of the apostles towered over the others at that conference" (p. 14). "There is no *hint* of any *authoritarianism, highhandedness or threatening* behavior on the part of *ANY* of the apostles..." (pp. 16-17).

When you closely examine the *New Testament "pattern"* of Church Government, you see the apostles acting as brothers and colleagues. When the need arose to ordain some deacons to serve the widows, here's what happened in the Apostolic Church. "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business'" (Acts 6:2-3). Note that it was not just Peter, but *all* the apostles who directed that this selection process take place. This was according to Christ's promise that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them"

(Matt. 18:18-19). He would guide His ministers in whatever decisions they had to make.

Again, when Philip was used by God to lead quite a number of Samaritans to repentance and baptism, here is what happened: "Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14-15).

Obviously, the apostles acted *as a whole* on many occasions in the early years of the New Testament Church. They were deeply converted, had been trained directly by Jesus Christ, and, "submitting to one another," acted as a Spirit-led "team" in many situations. On the other hand, Peter, John and James, the "Lord's brother," were obviously "pillars" among the apostles (Gal. 2:9).

Again, there was NO "Pope Peter" or "Pope Paul." But they were clearly recognized as the *primary leaders*-the "pillars"- in their respective spheres of operation. And James articulated the *consensus decision* of the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15:19-20).

The New Testament does give us an overall pattern of leadership from the top down in God's Church. So, in the New Testament, we find the general pattern of hierarchical government. The brethren did *not* vote to decide who their ministers would be. Rather, Christ showed by the circumstances and the "fruits" whom He was using to do His Work (Matt. 7:19-20).

But the hierarchy was *not* led by one towering leader such as Moses in the Old Testament. Under the Living Christ's leadership, the Church was directed by the apostles as a whole-among whom were certain "pillars" such as Peter, overseeing the Work to the Israelites, and Paul overseeing the Gospel to the Gentiles. So in the New Testament, there was NOT "one-man rule" by anyone! Remember that Paul rebuked Peter to his face over his refusal to eat with the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-14), yet Paul didn't impose his will on the Apostle Barnabas when they had a disagreement concerning John Mark (Acts 15:36-41).

In our recent Council meetings, we have clarified and *reaffirmed* that the Global Church of God will continue to be led by a tried and tested *group* of Spirit-led men-the Council of Elders. In that spirit, the members of the Council acknowledge me as the Presiding Evangelist of the Global Church of God and have voluntarily chosen to work together with me *within* the parameters established by the Council and the Board, as set forth in the Bylaws. I, in turn, have committed myself to abide by the Bylaws of the Church and the resolutions of the Council in working together in a brotherly way with these men, really *listening* to their counsel, *heeding* their advice and helping us *all* to reach a "consensus decision" concerning all matters pertaining to the Church and the Work. The Presiding Evangelist is expected to lead the discussions, help formulate decisions and is responsible for their implementation. But I do not have authority to *unilaterally* decide any issues that are before the Council or the Board. Rather, after open and hearty discussion in these meetings, the issues must be decided by a consensus!

In fact, let us here give you the exact wording of key sections of the Church Bylaws pertaining to the authority of the Council of Elders:

(a) To meet *at least* three times annually, and to have final authority to establish the mission, goals and the overall direction of the Work and the Church, including administrative matters, except for the powers specifically given in the Bylaws to the Board and the Presiding Evangelist. It is intended that the Council also give advice and counsel to the Presiding Evangelist and to the Board of the Church.

(b) To have final authority over ALL major or fundamental doctrinal issues. A consensus of at least 90% of the members of the full Council would be required to change any major or fundamental doctrine. Major, or fundamental, doctrines are those as defined in the Church's official Statement of Beliefs, as published and revised from time to time under the direction and with approval of the Council.

In addition, the civil government has granted the Global Church of God the authority to operate as a tax-exempt corporation, based upon-among other things-the fact that Global has a functioning Board of Directors. Here are some of the powers of the Directors: "The business and affairs of the corporation shall be managed, and all corporate powers shall be exercised, by or under the direction

of the Board of Directors." The general powers of this Board include the power to "select and remove all officers, agents, and employees of the corporation; prescribe any powers and duties for them that are consistent with the law, with the articles of incorporation, and with these Bylaws; and fix their compensation."

So you see, brethren, it is the Council of Elders and the Board of Directors that make all major decisions for the Church, with the Presiding Evangelist playing a leading role. This ensures that there is *always* "multitude of counsel"-so neither I, nor any future Presiding Evangelist, could become a dictator, who would then be able to lead the Church into apostasy. Mutual respect for the office and leadership of the Presiding Evangelist and all the officers, Council members and directors of the Church will ensure that we seek God's will and thereby avoid becoming a "debating society."

I want to assure you that we have virtually always ended up with a unanimous or near-unanimous consensus on each issue we have discussed since the Global Church began about five and one-half years ago. We have a very dedicated leadership team as well as a zealous and committed membership around the globe. God has granted us unity and a measure of growth. We have been able to do a wonderful Work considering the resources we have been given. Jesus Christ is working with us, "testing" us and preparing us for a GREATER Work in His own time. So we must all "stay the course" and be *loyal* to the Head of this Church, Jesus Christ. And we must all-ministers and brethren alike-have deep, mutual *respect* and *love* for one another.

Brethren, please understand that *any* form of Church government we employ will be criticized by some. But we find that this *brotherly* approach to governing-yet emphasizing the need for *leadership* by those "pillars" Christ has placed within His Church-is the most *biblical* form of Church government, and the most *practical* in today's modern world. For truly converted people, there has to be an element of FAITH that Christ will guide and lead those who are preaching *His* Gospel and doing *His* Work. *These "fruits" are evident in the Global Church of God for those who have eyes to see!* So let us *all* have the right kind of FAITH in the Living Jesus Christ, who is the actual Head of this Church (Eph. 1:22-23). Let us have *confidence* that He will do *His job* in guiding and directing those whom He shows by the "fruits" are really doing His Work.

Now, let us move ahead boldly and joyfully to build on the fine foundation Christ has already laid in the Global Church of God these past five and one-half years. The world out there really NEEDS what we have to offer. Therefore, under the Father's supreme leadership, let us submit to Jesus Christ as we all *work together* to zealously do the Work of preaching Christ's Message to this dying world-and to prepare ourselves for the Kingdom of God!

In Christian love,

Roderick C. Meredith

August 13, 1998

Dear Mr. *****:

Thank you for your letter to me, dated July 17, 1998.

First of all, I would like to thank you for your confidence expressed in the Global Church of God and in me, personally. As I am sure you realize, all of us here at Headquarters strive very diligently to life up to the high calling which the living Head of this Church has given us, both individually and collectively.

You had several questions regarding the most recent "changes" in our Bylaws, which took place in February of this year.

These most recent "changes" are better described as "clarifications." When the Council of Elders was formed in 1995, it was desired that the Council and the Board assume the oversight of doctrinal and major administrative matters, pertaining to the overall goals and mission of the Work. The approach to this kind of government within the Church-rather than an autocratic rule through just one-man without any checks and balances-was clearly communicated to tens of thousands of people through our Church government booklet. Most people who joined Global, and who had read our booklet, clearly understood this approach and agreed with it.

From time to time, we heard allegations from persons outside our fellowship to the effect that we in Global did not really practice what we had preached in our government booklet, and that the booklet did not *really* set forth how Global should, or does, function. And more recently, questions were asked, from outside insurance firms and others, who was the ultimate authority in the Church, and in reviewing the Bylaws, it was felt that the Bylaws contained certain ambiguities in this regard.

To clarify our original intent in this matter, which intent had previously been communicated to the membership, certain provisions within the Bylaws were slightly revised. Subsequent to my letter, explaining those clarifications, we received responses from ministers and members in Global, stating that my letter only confirmed and re-established what they had already known and understood, anyway.

I hope that this answers some of the questions you have had. I understand that Mr. ***** is "upset" about the clarifications in the Bylaws, but I am sorry that he chose to act the way he did, and that he spread his disagreements to others, both publicly from the pulpit, and apparently also in private conversations.

As I am sure you understand, this type of conduct is unbecoming to a minister of Jesus Christ.

In Christ's service

Roderick C. Meredith

August 13, 1998

Dear Mrs. *****:

Thank you for your recent letter to me, in which you inquired regarding my letter to the Membership and the recent "changes" in the bylaws.

These most recent "changes" are better described as "clarifications." When the Council of Elders was formed in 1995, it was desired that the Council and the Board assume the oversight of doctrinal and major administrative matters, pertaining to the overall goals and mission of the Work. The approach to this kind of government within the Church-rather than an autocratic rule through just one man without any checks and balances-was clearly communicated to tens of thousands of people through our Church government booklet. Most people who joined Global, and who had read our booklet, clearly understood this approach and agreed with it.

From time to time, we heard allegations from persons outside our fellowship to the effect that we in Global did not really practice what we had preached in our government booklet, and that the booklet did not *really* set forth how Global should, or does, function. And more recently, questions were asked, from outside insurance firms and others, who was the ultimate authority in the Church, and in reviewing the Bylaws, it was felt that the Bylaws contained certain ambiguities in this regard.

To clarify our original intent in this matter, which intent had previously been communicated to the membership, certain provisions within the Bylaws were slightly revised. Subsequent to my letter, explaining those clarifications, we received responses from ministers and members in Global, stating that my letter only confirmed and re-established what they had already known and understood, anyway.

Only in very limited cases did the letter, as you said, "prompt somewhat of a controversy." It is unfortunate that that "controversy" was prompted, at least in part, through the unethical conduct of one of our local elders, who spread his disagreements with the clarifications in the Bylaws to others, both publicly from the pulpit, as well as in private. I am sure you understand, such conduct is unbecoming to a minister of Jesus Christ.

Let me also assure you that I *do agree* "100%" with the contents of the letter." Mr. McNair, a long-time Evangelist in God's Work, as well as Director of Editorial Operations and Vice-Chairman of our Doctrinal Study Team, assisted me in drafting the letter, as I do believe that in multitude of counsel there is safety. But this does not mean that I did not agree with the contents of the letter; otherwise, I would not have signed the same.

You fear that the Council could tie my hands and force me to hire more ministers, rather than "putting money into preaching the gospel." We have all understood for a long time that Christ has given His Church a two-fold commission, of preaching the gospel *and* of feeding the flock. We must do both, and we pray to God that He will lead us in striking the right balance between those two tasks.

Let me also thank you very much for your confidence expressed in the Church and in me, personally.

In Christ's service

Roderick C. Meredith