



Church of God-21st Century

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You May Be Shocked at God's answer....

Should You Trust “God’s Ministers”?

by Raymond F. McNair

Before we answer the above question, we first need to lay a *foundation* which will enable us to understand the *biblical* answer to this query. Never before have there been so many cunning *deceivers, seducers and apostates!*

How can God's people identify such “evil men and seducers” (2 Tim. 3:13)? Many prophecies reveal that at the end of this age, God's people would become “scattered” by some of the very shepherds whom He ordained to *feed* and *protect* His sheep (Ezek. 34:1-21). Others who helped to scatter His sheep were self-appointed “ministers” who never had God's backing and blessing.

The Great End-time Apostasy

Never before, in the history of God's Church, have *so many* people become *so deceived* in such a comparatively *short time* of less than a decade. How could this unprecedented end-time deception have happened with such *lightning rapidity*? The success of this **horrendous apostasy** was due, at least in part, to *mass defections* in the ministry, but it was also partly due to the power of modern means of *communicating* and *disseminating* information.

At the time of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong's death in January 1986, about **130,000** members of the Worldwide Church of God regularly observed God's weekly and annual Sabbaths, as well as other important laws and commandments of God. During the next few years after Mr. Armstrong's demise—while the Church stayed on track—the number of *commandment keepers* increased to about **150,000**, as faithful members continued to observe God's weekly and annual Sabbaths, along with other laws and statutes of God.

But, under *the new church administration* at Pasadena, faithful adherence to God's Truth and His ways was to be short lived. A *different spirit* and *attitude* quickly gained a foothold in the minds of the Church's leaders as they began repudiating nearly *every major doctrine* that had been taught by God's faithful apostle! Subsequently, many of God's laws and commandments—along with numerous other *biblically based doctrines* of the Church—were quickly *swept aside* in the ensuing **apostasy**. The octopus-like

tentacles of deception immediately began choking the life out of many of the Church's congregations.

False doctrines spread like wildfire through its congregations as many of the biblically based teachings of the Church were swept aside. In their place, a flood of *strange doctrines*—previously held to be “pagan doctrines”—inundated and ravaged most of its congregations. Many thousands of the Church's members became *confused, discouraged, angry, or turned off* under this flood of *unbiblical, paganized doctrines!* Was this the “**Great Apostasy**” which the, nearly 2,000 years ago, the Apostle Paul had foretold would occur at the time of the end (2 Thess. 2:1-12)?

Today, it is doubtful if as many as **30,000** true, commandment-keeping brethren exist in the 300+ newly incorporated “Churches of God”—churches which sprang from the Worldwide Church of God. How could such an **apostasy** have swept away scores of thousands of brethren, turning them back to old pagan doctrines and *practices* which they once believed? We can only properly answer this question if we first consider that, immediately after the death of Mr. Armstrong, *two different categories of “ministers”* became apparent.

Many of God's people would soon learn that they could not *trust* those who called themselves “*ministers of God.*” Fortunately, those who “really knew” their God and His Word (Dan. 11:32), were able to discern *two* distinct *classes* or *categories* of those who professed to be “ministers of God”: **1) faithful ministers, and 2) false, “worthless shepherds.”**

Faithful and True “Ministers of God” We can thank God that He has provided a number of *faithful ministers* who are truly ***converted, Spirit-filled men of God***—ministers of God who serve as genuine “shepherds” of His flock. Their fruits reveal that: **1)** They sincerely hold to the ***true doctrines*** of the Bible, as they were taught (2 Thess. 2:15). **2)** They are deeply interested in and dedicated to **“feeding God's flock.”** **3)** And they diligently endeavor to **protect** God's sheep from the many “wolves” and “deceivers” proliferating among God's people. The Bible had foretold that “*evil men and seducers* [would] wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13).

The Word of God commands His people to highly honour those *faithful ministers* who truly serve Him and His people: **“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour,** especially they who labour in the WORD and DOCTRINE” (1 Tim. 5:17). Therefore, the brethren must be very careful *not to disrespect* those few faithful ministers who continue to diligently *nurture* and *protect* His people. It is a huge mistake to lump the ***faithful ministers of God*** together with the ***false ministers of Satan***—who, as ravenous wolves, *devour* and *destroy* God's sheep. God's Word says genuine *love, respect, and honor* ought to be accorded to those comparatively few *true shepherds* who continue to faithfully hold fast to the *doctrines* and *practices* of the Word of God (1 Tim. 5:17-19).

Unmasking False Ministers

“Worthless Shepherds” Who Profess to be “God’s Ministers”

Literally hundreds of professed “shepherds” of God’s *flock* have *forsaken* many of the *true doctrines* of the Bible, and now preach *strange, heretical*, or “**pagan doctrines**” in place of formerly held *biblical truths* (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Many ministers in this *second category* were never really *converted*—never were true “ministers of God.” These “false shepherds” often rule over the sheep under their care with **rigor** and **harshness!** However, it is evident to the “wise” that those shepherds’ fruits reveal **they care little or nothing for the flock of God!** They are much more concerned with perpetuating their own *power*, and *fleeing God’s flock*, all the while leading the sheep down a path of *heretical teachings* and *apostasy*—to their own *ultimate destruction* (Ezek. 34:1-10)! The fruits of their lives clearly revealed they were *not really* “God’s true servants.” Instead, these *self-deluded men*, who were devoid of God’s Spirit, wallowed in their own “doctrinal swill,” while preaching unsound doctrines and indulging in ungodly, *immoral practices!* Their bad fruits proved that they were *not* in any true sense of the word “God’s true ministers” (Matt. 7:15-23). Rather, they totally lack genuine *fruits* of God’s Holy Spirit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-26); and as a result, it is utterly impossible for them to “fake” the fruits of a true “shepherd.”! **Are such ministers to be trusted? In no way can they be called “true ministers of God.”**

Today, there is an ever-increasing number of *false ministers*—whom the Prophet Zechariah called “**worthless shepherds**”—who profess to be *God’s ministers*, yet have become *blind, lukewarm, proud, spiritually naked*, and utterly *wretched* (Rev. 3:14-22)! Invariably, such ministers either **water down** or **reject** the **fundamental doctrines** of the Bible (Heb. 6:1-6). They often *cast aside* “biblical Truths” which they believe are not all that important, rejecting those truths that may not be “convenient” to teach or practice. These *careless impostors* “**lord it over**” **God’s people** (cf. Matt. 20:20-28), and contrary to Christ’s clear instructions, they show little genuine concern for the welfare of “God’s sheep” (Ezek. 34:1-5). God says, “Woe be to the **WORTHLESS SHEPHERD** that leaveth the flock...” (Zech. 11:17)! Many *former ministers* of the “Churches of God” have forsaken their *ministry*, abandoned their *flocks*, and have taken their hands off the “ministerial plow” (Luke 9:62). Should God’s people have trusted those “ministers”?

Other ministers jumped the track in various other ways. Some of them, as God’s servants, may have once possessed God’s Spirit and faithfully taught His Word. But somewhere along the way, they became distracted by **worldly philosophies**, “cares of this life,” carnal *pleasures* and *lusts*, *eventually being* overthrown spiritually (Matt. 13:18-23)! Even though such professed *ministers of God* may hold on to *some of* the doctrines of the Bible, and still possess a *spark* of God’s Spirit, nonetheless, they are in serious danger of losing that small *spark of life*. Unless such *careless shepherds* truly repent, and “stir up the gift of God,” they stand in mortal danger of *forfeiting their eternal lives*. And, sadly, they may also cause *others* to lose their *salvation* as well (cf. 2

Tim. 1:6-7)!

Jesus Christ Himself Sounded the Alarm!

Jesus Christ repeatedly warns His people to beware of *false ministers*. He is our High Priest, the “**APOSTLE...of our profession**” (Heb. 3:1). Why did Christ repeatedly warn *us*, His true disciples, to be on guard, lest we be deceived by the *false ministers* and *teachings* of this world? He knew very well the power of Satan and his servants to *seduce* God’s people—if they weren’t vigilant.

Early in Christ’s ministry He said, “Beware of *false prophets*, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. **Ye shall know them by their fruits....** Wherefore, *by their fruits* ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:15-20). He also revealed that the *false ministers* would work miracles, or at least claim to, in order to deceive their followers: “Many [professing “ministers”] will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not *prophesied* in thy name? And in thy name have *cast out devils*? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity “(v. 22).

During the closing days of Christ’s ministry, in His Olivet prophecy, He gave numerous warnings against being deceived by those who would profess to be His ministers: “**Take heed that no man deceive you....** For *many* shall come in My name...and shall *deceive many*” (Matt. 24:4-5). Jesus then added, “And *many false prophets* shall rise, and shall *deceive many*” (v. 11). Finally, He also gave this solemn warning: “For there shall arise *false Christs*, and *false prophets*, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall *deceive the very ELECT*” (v. 24). Mark says these “*false Christs* and *false prophets* [work great] signs and wonders, to *seduce*, if it were possible, even the **ELECT**” (13:22).

Paul Warned the Brethren of Satan’s Ministers

The Dynamic Apostle Paul This energetic Apostle repeatedly sounded the alarm. Notice Paul’s warning to the *Ephesian elders*: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. *Take heed* therefore unto *yourselves*, and to all the *flock*, over...which the Holy Spirit hath made you *overseers*, to feed the CHURCH OF GOD, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that **after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.** Therefore *watch*, and remember that [for] three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:27-31). Paul realized some of

those very elders would let their guards down and allow themselves to be used by Satan to *injure* and *savage* God's flock.

Notice Paul's solemn warning to the members of the Church of God at *Corinth*. He warned them to beware of false ministers who would beguile them into accepting false doctrines: "For I am jealous over you with a *godly jealousy*; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a *chaste virgin* to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the *serpent* beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be *corrupted* from the simplicity that is in Christ. **For if he that cometh** [posing as a *minister* of Christ], **preacheth another Jesus...**or if ye receive **another spirit**, which ye have not received, or **another gospel**, ye might well bear with him" (2 Cor. 11:2-4).

Paul feared that the saints at Corinth might be *deceived* by "another *Jesus...another spirit...or another gospel*," and turn away from the true *Jesus*, away from God's *Holy Spirit* and away from the **true gospel** and accept "**another spurious gospel**." If they did so, Paul knew they would surely lose their salvation. Such clever deceivers would make *fair speeches* and put on a good front, but at heart they had *sinister motives*. Paul, therefore, urged the Corinthian saints to be *on guard*, ever being *vigilant* lest they be swept away by another of the Devil's clever deceptions, carried out by Satan's own "ministers": "For such are *false apostles, deceitful workers*, transforming themselves into the *apostles of Christ*. And no marvel; for **Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light**. Therefore, it is no great thing if **HIS MINISTERS** also be transformed as the *ministers of righteousness*; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Paul also gave similar warnings to the saints in *Galatia*, who were forsaking the true "gospel," and were embracing "**another gospel**." Paul says: "I marvel that ye are so soon *removed* from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto **another gospel**: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and **would pervert the gospel of Christ**. But though we, or an *angel* from heaven, preach *any other gospel* unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be **accursed**. As we have said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be **accursed**" (Gal. 1:6-9). Clearly some who professed to be *ministers* of Jesus Christ were preaching a *strange, spurious Gospel*, and Paul said that by so doing, they brought on themselves a "curse" from God!

Later, when the Apostle Paul wrote the evangelist Timothy, he lamented the fact that all in *Asia* had fallen away from the true Gospel of Christ. He told Timothy, "**Hold fast** the form of sound words, which thou has heard of me.... That *good thing* [the Word of God] which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us. This thou knowest, that **all they which are in Asia be turned away from me**; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes" (2 Tim. 1:13-14). And, as we have seen, Paul told Timothy that "in the last days *perilous times* shall come," then warned that "**evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse**, deceiving, and being deceived" (3:1,

13).

This great apostle further warned Timothy to “Preach the word.... **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine;** but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having *itching ears*; And they shall **turn away their ears from the truth**, and shall be turned unto **fables....** But *watch...*do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Tim. 4:2-5). Then Paul lamented the fact that “**Demas hath forsaken me**, having loved this present world...” (v.10). This stalwart apostle sadly witnessed many forsaking *God’s Truth* and turning away unto *fables*. Since so many turned to *apostasy* in his day, why should we be amazed to see that many have apostatized in our time?

Peter and John Also Warned God’s People!

The Apostle Peter Christ’s chosen apostle to those of the “circumcision” gave numerous warnings concerning false ministers. He said: “But there were **false prophets** among the people, even as there shall be **false teachers** among you, who privily shall bring in *damnable heresies*, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the *way of truth* shall be evil spoken of” (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

He then added, “For when *they* [the false ministers] speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure...those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them *liberty*, they themselves are the servants of *corruption....* For, if after they have **escaped the pollution of the world** through the knowledge of the Lord...**they are again entangled therein...**the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the *way of righteousness*, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment...” (2 Pet. 2:18-22). Peter said it was like the *dog* returning to his *vomit*, or like the *sow* returning to her stinking *mire* (vv.18-19, 22).

The Beloved Apostle John Christ’s beloved *Apostle John* gave his readers numerous warnings concerning *false teachers* and their false doctrines: “He that saith, I know Him, and *keepeth not His commandments*, is a *liar*, and the *truth* is not in him” (1 John 2:4). He also said: “Little children it is the last time; and as ye have heard that **antichrist shall come, even now there are MANY ANTICHRISTS....** They went out *from* us, but they were not *of* us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.... Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is **antichrist**, that denieth the Father and the Son” (vv. 18:19, 22).

This Apostle of love also tells God’s people that they must “try” or “test” each and every one, to see if they are of God: “Beloved, **believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God:** because *many false*

prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). John then adds, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of *antichrist*.... and even now already is it in the world” (vv. 2-3). John also says, “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an *antichrist*.... If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 John 7, 10).

John reveals that he, like the Apostle Paul, was having to contend with some who, by their fruits, proved to be *false ministers*: “I wrote unto **the church**: but **DIOTREPHES, who loveth to have the preeminence among them receiveth us not**. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, **neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbideth them that would, and casteth them out of the church**” (3 John 9-10).

“Servants of God” Cannot Always Be Trusted!

Is it possible for a “servant of God” to be *faithful* for a while and later *turn away* from the Truth? It certainly is! In recent years we have seen many of the top leaders in God’s Church fall for Satan’s deceptive teachings, and then go into total *apostasy*. Those who were *seduced* by Satan have included many evangelist rank ministers and pastors, as well as hundreds of elders, deacons and deaconesses. The Bible is replete with many vivid examples of those who at one time served God, then later **apostatized** by turning away from God and His way. God’s people must always be *on guard* since it is even possible for a *faithful servant of God* to fall into error, and then lead some of the brethren into sin, though he may later himself repent and get himself sorted out.

Aaron’s Apostasy God called both *Moses* and his brother *Aaron* and communicated to them His words and His way (Exod. 12:1). When God told Moses that He intended to use him to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, *Moses* immediately made *excuses*, saying he was *not eloquent*. However, God would not let him “off the hook,” but told him that his brother *Aaron* could serve as his spokesman (3:7-12, 4: 1-16);

Even though, in the main, *Aaron* was faithful to God, he let his guard down and did things that greatly displeased God on at least *two occasions*:

1) We are told that “**Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses....** And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them” (Num. 12:1, 9). Since Miriam was the instigator of the criticism, God punished her with “leprosy,” but Aaron also had to suffer by seeing his sister afflicted for “seven days,” before God healed her. Such an act of criticizing the man whom God had chosen, their own brother, greatly displeased God (vv. 2-16). Both of them

must have learned a very valuable lesson—one which all of us would do well to remember.

2) Later Aaron showed weakness of character by going along with the Israelites when they said to him, “**Make us gods to go before us....** And they made *a calf* in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol...” (Acts. 7:40-41). Shortly after God had delivered the Ten Commandments to Israel (Exodus 32:1-14), Aaron acquiesced by making them a “golden calf” so they could worship their pagan gods. Though Aaron weakened and made a calf, when Moses saw what had happened, his anger burned as he asked Aaron, “**What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?**” (v. 21). Aaron gave Moses a flimsy excuse, but neither God nor Moses was amused. In fact, He became very angry at seeing the *Israelites’ apostasy* so soon, after God had thundered His Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai; so He slew in one day “about 3,000 men” (v. 28). Later, Aaron appears to have regained his spiritual balance, and remained faithful to God and His commands during the rest of his life (Psa. 77:20, 99:6; Heb.5:4).

When Aaron’s sons, **Nadab** and **Abihu**, later “*offered strange fire* before the LORD,” a “fire from the LORD devoured them” (Num.10:1-2). As “God’s ministers” at His sanctuary, they knew what they did was wrong; consequently, they had to pay for their *presumptuousness* with their own lives. God always holds “His ministers” responsible to carry out His instructions precisely as He instructs them.

Solomon’s apostasy King Solomon, Israel’s third king, began his reign in *righteousness* (2 Chron. 5, 6 & 7). When Solomon dedicated the Temple, God sent a miraculous fire to show His divine approval (7:1-3). At that time, He told Solomon He would bless him and his people *if* they would obey Him. Nonetheless, he later turned away from God and His way, married many Gentile wives, and built pagan altars for them to use in their worship of false Gods. Thus, ***Solomon’s apostasy*** brought a great *curse* upon himself, his dynasty, and the nation of Israel: “But king Solomon loved many strange women.... And it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that **his wives turned away his heart after other gods:** and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.... And the LORD was *angry* with Solomon because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice...” (1 Kings 11:1-9). So the LORD told Solomon that He would “surely rend the kingdom from [him] and give it unto [his] servant” (v. 11).

King Saul’s Apostasy! Israel’s first king, Saul, started out doing the right thing in God’s sight (1Sam. 9-12), but he later turned away from God and was consequently rejected by Him because of his *apostasy* (chapters 13-15). King Saul had to pay a heavy price as a result of his rebellion against God (1 Sam. 15:1-31, 35)! *He lost his throne!*

Righteous King Josiah’s Disobedience—and tragic Death! The

Bible says King Josiah was a righteous King of Judah. Even though he was, in the main, an upright king, he died *an ignominious death* because of his disobedience to God's command *not* to do battle with Pharaoh. In about 600 B.C. Josiah disobeyed God, went out to fight against Pharaoh, was mortally wounded in battle at Megiddo, and was taken to Jerusalem, where he died of his wounds (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chron. 35:21-24). The Bible also mentions that "**a man of God**"—who worked miracles and accurately predicted the future—was slain by a lion, because the "man of God" knowingly disobeyed God's Word (1 Kings 13:1-32)

New Testament Examples of Apostasy

The Apostle Paul mentions several persons who had previously served in God's ministry, but later forsook *their ministry* for various carnal reasons. Paul lamented, "**Demas has forsaken me**, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; *Crescens* to Galatia, *Titus* unto Dalmatia. Only *Luke* is with me..." (2 Tim. 4:10).

Judas Iscariot's Apostasy Judas Iscariot became covetous of money (He was the "treasurer" John 12:6; 13:29.), all of which led him to *apostatize*, later *betraying* Christ for 30 pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14-15, 20-25, 25-47). Not long after Pentecost in 31 A.D., "Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples [there were] about 120" and told them, "This scripture must needs have been fulfilled...concerning **Judas**, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of *this ministry*. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.... For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate...**and his bishoprick** ["overseer-ship"] **let another take**" (Acts 1:15-20). Judas, one of Christ's chosen disciples, after spending 3 1/2 years with Him, apostatized and turned away from the Truth. As a consequence, he lost everything, including his *ministry* and his own *life!*

Simon Magus' Apostasy The most notorious New Testament example of *apostasy* is found in the 8th chapter of Acts. We are informed that, after the Gospel was preached by Philip to the Samaritans, Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to assist in ministering to those converts (vv. 1-8). However, one "convert" especially stands out—**Simon Magus**. When the Samaritans "believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized.... Then **Simon himself believed** also: and when **he was baptized**, he continued with Philip, and wondered, *beholding the miracles and signs* which were done.... And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostle's hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them *money*, saying, Give me also this power that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit" (vv. 18-19). But Peter rebuked him sharply: "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be

purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for **thy heart is not right** in the sight of God. **Repent** therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee,” said Peter (vv. 20-21).

We are told that Simon “believed” (Philip’s message regarding the “kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ”), was “baptized,” and *marveled* at the miracles which Philip and the apostles were able to perform *in Christ’s name*. [It was this “Simon Magus” (the “Magician”) who subsequently went to *Rome* and was later hailed as a great miracle worker; and, in later years, since his name was “Simon,” he was mistakenly taken by many in Rome to be Christ’s apostle, “Simon Peter.”]

Both the Old and New Testaments give many examples of *servants of God* who *apostatized*, turning away from what they knew to be right, and had to reap costly penalties for their *apostasy*. And, since the death of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong in 1986, **the Church of God has seen many of its ministers—including leading evangelists and pastors—apostatize and begin preaching false doctrines!** This resulted in incalculable confusion, accusations, anger, disillusionment, and grief in the people attending the “Churches of God”!

Why You Cannot Always Trust “God’s ministers”!

God’s Word reveals that we should *never* put our trust in any *man* or in any *church* or human *organization*. We should look solely to *God* and trust only Him and His Word. God’s people must learn to *try* or *test* all who claim to be “ministers of God,” and should **only “follow [those who follow] Christ”** (1 Cor. 11:1). Let us remember, however, that God Himself has ordained that His true Ministers fulfill a vital role in His Church by *nourishing* and *protecting* His sheep (Eph. 4:11-16). His faithful ministers also need to be encouraged and supported in their God-given tasks of diligently caring for God’s flock.

But we must also remember Christ’s words: **“Beware of false prophets**, which come to you in sheep’s clothing [but are in fact] **ravening wolves”** (Matt. 7:15)! Jesus said, **“But beware of men”** (Matt. 10:17). He also said, **“Take heed that no man deceive you”** (24:4). Furthermore, Jesus describes the utter depravity of the “human condition”: “For from *within*, out of the heart of men, proceed **EVIL THOUGHTS, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:** All these *evil things* come from within, and defile the man, said Jesus (Mark 7:18-23; cf. Gal. 5: 19-21).

Let us also remember Paul’s words to the “elders” of the “Church of God”: “For I know [that] ***grievous wolves*** [shall] enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ***Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things***, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). Paul also said that **“evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being**

deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). Likewise, the **Apostle John** sounded the alarm in his epistles, in which he warned God’s people that many *false prophets* and teachers, and *antichrists*, would rise up and lead many astray (I, II & III John).

But someone will yet ask, “**Can’t we trust God’s true ministers?**” No, not in the strict sense of the word! For, as we have seen, the Bible gives numerous examples of “men of God” turning from the Truth—*apostatizing* and leading others astray; and in recent years *many top-rank ministers apostatized*, and led others astray! Furthermore, God’s Word reveals the basic weaknesses in all humans, plagued as we all are, by our own “human nature.”

At the time of Noah’s Flood, God revealed the utter weakness and wretchedness of humans: “And God saw that **the wickedness of man** was great in the earth, and that **every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually....** The earth also was *corrupt* before God, and the earth was filled with *violence*...for all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth” (Gen. 6:5, 11-12).

Jeremiah says, “Thus saith the LORD; **Cursed is the man that trusteth in man**, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD” (Jer. 17:5). He also declares, “**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:** who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins...to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (vv. 9-10). Jeremiah also says, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (10:23).

The Apostle Paul states, “**For we...worship God in the spirit...and have no confidence in the flesh**” (Phil. 3:3). Paul also revealed the utter weakness and depravity of humans, who sometimes have the “will” to obey God but not the innate *strength* to do so (Rom. 7:12-25). Only God can “deliver” sinful humans from this sinful *human nature* that is inherent in all of us (vv. 15-25).

Remember These Important Points!

The Bible reveals that, on many occasions, the “servants of God” fell far short of the mark. Some of them completely *turned away* from God, going into total *apostasy*. Today, many claim to be “God’s ministers” yet are *not* His servants at all, but are, in fact, the “apostles” and “ministers” of Satan the Devil (2 Cor. 11:13-15)! What does God say of these “false prophets”? And how can God’s people *discern* between Satan’s ministers and God’s faithful ministers? God gives us the answer: “**To the LAW and the PROPHETS, if they speak not according to this WORD [the Word of God], it is because there is no light in them**” (Isaiah 8:20)!

Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23 clearly show what God thinks of these

“false pastors,” who have *abused, scattered, and destroyed* His sheep. God thunders: “**Woe** be unto the PASTORS that **destroy** and **scatter** the sheep of My pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the PASTORS that feed My people; **Ye have scattered My flock...**” (23:1-2). God then says, “**I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.** But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings” (Jer. 23:21-22). Since they did not preach God’s Word faithfully, God again declares, “**Woe** be unto the pastors”!

We must learn to put our **trust solely in God**—not in *men!* In fact, we are *not* to even trust in *ourselves!* God again says, “**He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool**” (Prov. 28:26). And God commands, “**Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.** In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the LORD, and depart from evil” (3:5-7)! God’s Word says, “Behold, **O God our SHIELD,** and look upon the face of thine anointed.... For the LORD God is **a sun and a shield:** the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, **blessed is the man that trusteth in thee**” (Psa. 84:9, 11-12).

Should we humans put our trust in any *man, church, or human organization?* Or, should we trust solely in God Almighty, and in His Word? The answer should be obvious! We humans are *weak and fallible.* We often *falter, stumble and fall far short* of God’s perfect standard of right and wrong. But “**God is [always] faithful,**” and He promises that He will never permit us to be tempted or tested beyond our ability to cope with the trial (1 Cor. 10:13). Neither will He ever “lie” to us (Titus 1:2). God solemnly promises, “**I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.** So that we may boldly say, The Lord is My Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:5-6).

Realizing *human weakness* and knowing *God’s perfection,* we should always put our *real trust* in Him and His Word alone. We can only “trust” those who profess to be “God’s ministers” *as* they follow God and His Word (2 Cor. 11:1). When we do that, our *real trust* is in Almighty God, *not* in humans!

Should we trust “God’s ministers”? No, not really! If we have real understanding, **our real trust is solely in God—not in puny human beings, who often go astray!** We must all be *on guard* and “work out [our] own salvation with *fear and trembling*” (Phil. 2:12).

A PERSONAL NOTE. Here is a brief note regarding my varied experiences in the Work of God during the past 55 years. Most of you will have become familiar with my articles in various Church publications (the *Good News, Plain Truth, Tomorrow’s World,* etc), and more recently in articles which were published in other “Church of God” publications. I have served for nearly 50 years as a *writer and editor.*

My appointment to serve on the WCG Doctrinal Teams. Mr. H.W. Armstrong appointed me to serve *under him* over the Headquarters Doctrinal Team in 1974, knowing that I would not introduce “liberal” doctrines into God’s Church. After Mr. Armstrong’s decease, the Pastor General who succeeded Mr. him appointed me to be over the Doctrinal Team in Pasadena; but shortly afterward, my wife and I were sent to the South Pacific to head the Work of God in New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, etc. Since I would not endorse the *strange doctrines* then being seriously considered at our Pasadena Headquarters, my continued presence would have been a big obstacle in the eyes of those who planned to make sweeping doctrinal changes in the WCG.

My ordination as an Evangelist in the WCG. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong ordained me as an Evangelist—over 51 years ago. During those 51 eventful years I served as the pastor of 14 churches in the U.S., Britain and New Zealand, and in 1954-1955, I founded the Chicago Church of God, the first WCG Church east of the Mississippi River. I also served as Director of the Work of God in Britain (1958-1973).

Appointed Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador Colleges in England, and Pasadena, CA. In 1960, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong appointed me Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador College, near London. Later, in 1978, Mr. Armstrong asked me to serve as Deputy Chancellor of Ambassador College in Pasadena, California—in order to help him put Ambassador College *back on track*. I continued serving God’s Work in that position for nearly ten years—until 2 years after Mr. Armstrong’s death in 1986. I was gratified to hear him say, before his decease, that **he was very pleased to see Ambassador College back on track**. I always counted it a great honor and a fantastic privilege to work with God’s end-time Apostle for over 36 years, from the time I entered Ambassador College in 1948, until his death in 1986—approximately 36 years.

I was privileged to conduct many baptismal tours while serving in the Worldwide Church of God. In the summer of 1949, Mr. Armstrong sent Raymond Cole and me on the first student-led, nation-wide baptismal tour, during which time we baptized about 125 brethren. In the following years, I conducted *seven* more baptismal tours in the U.S. and Canada before being sent to London, England in 1958 to take charge of God’s Work in Britain, where I continued to serve the Work of Jesus Christ during the next 15 years. After arriving in London, England, I conducted several baptismal tours in the British Isles, and was later sent to Southern Africa with another minister to baptize a number of people in Northern and Southern Rhodesia, and in South Africa.

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